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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): In an effort to keep on time and get the maximum time possible for the committee to question the witnesses, we will start.

Good morning. This is meeting number 15 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs of the first session of the 42nd Parliament. Today we continue our study of initiatives towards a family-friendly House of Commons.

The witnesses from the House of Commons administration are Marc Bosc, the acting clerk; and Pierre Parent, chief of human resources.

I'll just remind committee members that the witnesses are here to answer all questions about the House of Commons, day care, or the buses. Anything that comes up related to the House of Commons administration should be answered by these two, which is why they are here for two hours. We'll have a lengthy time to cover all of these topics.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): On a point of order, I didn't want to bring this up at Tuesday's meeting because we had a lot of witnesses, and I know we have a bit more time today.

I'll be brief, but I wanted to ask about a series of questions that have gone around. I think most members of the committee have probably seen them by now, but they went around to all sorts of people whom we're inviting here as witnesses. I was curious how the questions were determined, because there has been a lot of discussion in committee about them. Maybe my memory's faulty, but there are some questions here I don't recall our discussing at committee. Certainly, if we did discuss some of them, it may have only been very quickly or tangentially.

I'm not suggesting that the committee needs to approve everything that goes out when we invite witnesses and things like that, but I am a little curious how the questions were derived. I'd like to get some indication of that.

The Chair: That's a very good question. I didn't know they'd gone to the witnesses, actually.

I'll get the clerk to respond to that.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Joann Garbig): Thank you, Chair.

The committee members had had a discussion about how they wanted to approach the study and said that they would like the witnesses to be informed of these items when they were invited to

appear, so I consulted with the analyst who developed a list, and we passed it by the chair before any witnesses were invited.

Mr. Blake Richards: That's fine. I don't mean to sound like I'm questioning you or our analyst. I know you both do a great job. I just was curious as to how these specific questions were chosen, because I know that on some of them we had quite a bit more discussion, but on others I don't recall. Maybe that's just my memory being faulty, but I was just curious how they were developed.

The Chair: I apologize. I don't remember seeing it actually.

Mr. Blake Richards: You don't need to give details.

I ask because, to some degree, these obviously frame the discussion from the witnesses. I'm not suggesting that we need to know every piece of correspondence that goes out to a potential witness, but when we're talking about the broad set of questions, it might be something the committee might want to make sure we have proper direction on.

The Chair: That makes a lot of sense.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): I have another point of order on a different topic.

This just relates to having these witnesses for two hours, just two witnesses as opposed to the half dozen we had at the last meeting.

Are we reserving time to discuss motions at the end of this committee meeting today? If so, I'll be wanting to introduce the motion that I've already circulated related to inviting the Senate advisory board back during the month of May.

The Chair: Yes, certainly, if we have time at the end and people are finished questions.

We have the five things I mentioned at the beginning of the last meeting: your motion, Mr. Christopherson's motions, the conflict of interest guidelines on gifts, the Speaker's emergency motion, and approval of the budget for this study. We'll definitely do any of that we can, depending on the time.

Keep in mind that you have to get in all the topics related to the House of Commons. Make sure you've asked all your questions of these two witnesses.

Thank you for coming. I know you two are very busy with huge responsibilities, and we look forward to short opening comments and then lots of questions.

Mr. Marc Bosc (Acting Clerk, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm obviously pleased to be before the committee this morning to speak to your study on initiatives toward a family-friendly Parliament.

[*Translation*]

I am accompanied by Mr. Pierre Parent, who is the Chief Human Resources Officer. One of our colleagues is also in the audience, the Director General of Parliamentary Precinct Operations, Mr. Benoit Giroux.

[*English*]

We've done our best to follow the work of the committee over the last little while, so we are somewhat familiar with some of the issues that have come up. I must say at the outset that I am pleased to share with you that the House administration under the Speaker's leadership has recently made a number of improvements to facilities and services available to members with young children. There is the creation of a family room, among other things, including parking spaces, and other facilities that have been improved or upgraded. We have made some progress.

As you move forward with your consideration of this study, we remain available to you and poised to act on the recommendations that the House may make. Obviously informally as well, with members who express special needs, we work with them and try our best to accommodate their requirements.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

We are of course at your disposal to answer all of your questions this morning.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Parent, did you have anything to open with?

Mr. Pierre Parent (Chief Human Resources Officer, House of Commons): No, thank you.

The Chair: Okay, we'll start the first round of seven minutes.

Mr. Graham will be followed by Mr. Richards.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Good morning, and thank you.

I have a number of questions. I was expecting to speak to the departments individually and get a little bit more technical, but we'll go with what we've got.

My first question is on—

The Chair: I don't think you should be worried about asking technical questions. You have to ask all your questions here, so ask the very technical ones.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: We'll get the answers later, if need be. That sounds good. Okay.

First of all, day care is a big issue for us. We understand there is a fairly lengthy waiting list to get in the day care and that there are a lot more kids than slots. I'd like you to address the possibility of having the day care much more open and freestyle so that people

could drop off their kids for the day and not be tied into it for the month, or that they could sit for longer hours, until midnight if we sit until midnight, so that there's an opportunity for somebody who has a kid here in Ottawa to actually use the day care.

Mr. Marc Bosc: I'll perhaps start, and Pierre can fill in some blanks on the parameters around which this day care, Children on the Hill, operates on the Hill.

I am a former president of the board of directors of the day care service, having had our two daughters attend. It was started by Madam Sauvé. Really, the issue becomes one of the day care programming and the costs associated with having a service that is more flexible and has longer hours, but with a complete absence of information on the levels of usage. That is the issue.

Pierre can fill in on the parameters that we must govern ourselves by and that the day care must govern itself by. Maybe Pierre can talk about that, and then I'll come back to it, because we think we've found another solution to this situation that is very positive.

Mr. Pierre Parent: Thank you, Marc.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think it's important to add that the day care doesn't operate under the management of the House of Commons. It operates by its own board of directors and own management. We've had in the past, I would say, 18 months several discussions on how we could arrange the day care for members with the help of Children on the Hill. We've looked at these options. For instance, we've looked at the option of having a drop-in at any time, and having the day care hours extended from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. when the House sits.

The issue has always turned on the business model of the day care. Of course, they're not there to lose money, so they would staff the day care accordingly. Then the question would be, if there's less usage than the staffing required, who would actually pay for the difference? That's the kind of balance between the offer of service from the day care, being an independent body, and the level of service especially from a drop-in perspective where the facility should be there and people should be there to accommodate drop-ins, and without knowing exactly the level of usage. That was one of the difficulties.

Also, from their perspective, and I can't necessarily talk on their behalf, but mixing their full-time program and the drop-in program is problematic. I won't necessarily go into the details, but that was problematic from their perspective, so they would see two different operations and two different facilities.

That's why we looked into a third option, which is maybe a nanny service, which would require probably a booking fee. We spoke with different providers and usually what they require is a contract with the employer. In this case there's no employer. Depending on the provider, there would be a booking fee on a specific booking, or a booking fee that would be paid on an annual basis, and then paid by usage.

We're looking at different providers, and in that context the services could be provided here in Centre Block, or be provided in the family room, in the member's office, their home, or even a hotel room. That's much more flexible, and that's where we're looking.

• (1115)

Mr. Marc Bosc: I should add that this avenue is very promising because it speaks to the main issue that members face, and that is flexibility. It's sometimes unpredictable for members what's going to happen in the House and committees. They may not know from day to day, and this service is aimed at in fact allowing members to make those arrangements themselves on very short notice and have that service available for the number of hours or days required. They pay the supplier directly. Once this contract is entered into by the House, with a nominal fee for the service, the members who are availing themselves of it would pay for it directly, and it's a market fee, \$14 or \$15 an hour. It's very reasonable.

I think that's what we're looking at. Of course, this kind of decision is one that's made by the board. There's a board meeting next week.

I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: A minute and a half, David.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Okay. I was going to ask briefly, could we have some kind of a written explanation of how it would work and what it would cost? When would that be available? What kinds of timelines are we looking at?

Mr. Marc Bosc: Just for clarity, what exactly do you mean by "what it would cost"?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: If you're talking about having an off-site nanny program, where's the development of that program at? You're saying it's coming, but how far is it? When are we going to know about it?

Mr. Marc Bosc: I would say it's very close. I have to be careful because the board deliberations are confidential. I'll leave it at that.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I have another quick question that I was going to ask the IT department, but I guess it goes for you. One of the issues that we have as MPs is sharing our calendars with our families. It's a very simple thing. Some of us use Google Calendar. We go off the "reservation" to share our calendars with our families. Can we explore options to fix that problem? Can we explore options of providing spouses with email accounts so they can use a phone giving them access to our calendar, or something like that to permit us to share our calendars?

Mr. Marc Bosc: I was aware this question was likely to come up. I'd already spoken to the chief information officer about this, and he is currently studying the matter. As you know, there are security issues around access to the Parliamentary network. That's the big

stumbling block. He has assured me that he will look into it actively to see if a solution can be found.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: As you heard me reference in my point of order at the beginning of the meeting, there was a series of seven questions that were sent around to all the potential witnesses. You're unique among our witnesses as you're part of our administration here at the House of Commons. Were you sent those questions?

Mr. Marc Bosc: I did receive them.

Mr. Blake Richards: That's obviously because they've been sent to other witnesses and will frame a lot of our discussions with the witnesses we do have here. I wanted to focus on those to some degree.

There is a series of six of them I wanted to ask you about. I have three questions about each of them, and we'll go through them one by one. I'll give you an idea ahead of time as to what I'm looking to get your feedback on.

In each of these areas I want to get a sense of what you think might be the potential unintended consequences of any changes we make in each area. I want to get a sense as to what you think some of the costs might be in the area. Most importantly, I want to get your sense as to what kind of impact changes in each of these areas might have on our constituents.

I'll go through them one by one. Hopefully, we'll have enough time. If not, maybe I can get another round and continue to ask about the the other parts.

The first one is in relation to the House considering shortening or compressing its sitting week, or otherwise altering its sitting calendar. For each of those three themes, could you give us some sense as to what you think the unintended consequences might be, and the costs, and what impact there might be on our constituents?

• (1120)

Mr. Marc Bosc: Unintended consequences are difficult to predict, because that's the nature of them: they're unintended. With regard to reducing the sitting week by one day, there are in the standing orders right now several provisions that provide for fixed numbers of days on certain types of business. For things like private members' business, there's an hour a day. For things like supply proceedings, there are seven days from September to December, seven days from January to March, and eight days from April to June. The proportions of these as a part of the whole calendar year would obviously change. The number of days allotted to a budget debate is a fixed number of days. The number of days allotted to a throne speech debate is a fixed number of days, and so on.

Those are the kinds of things the committee ought to look at as unintended consequences with the compression of the time available to conduct business.

In terms of costs, I see very little impact. The salaries of House employees are paid on a full-time basis yearly. There might be a few savings, but they're negligible. I'd have to do a proper analysis. I wouldn't see a huge impact there one way or the other.

As for an impact on constituents, obviously if members are in the constituency more, there's a positive impact on constituents because they see their member more.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'll jump around a bit with my questions and not necessarily follow the order of the questions listed here. The next one I wanted to ask about in the same regard, that is, in terms of potential unintended consequences or pitfalls, is parental leave for MPs. One of the questions was whether that would be feasible. For each of those same questions....

Mr. Marc Bosc: I'll turn this one over to Pierre.

Mr. Pierre Parent: Parental leave would probably require—and I don't want to speak on behalf of the Law Clerk—modifications to the Parliament of Canada Act where attendance is regulated by section 57. The attendance regulations include illness as a reason for being absent during a sitting day, but they don't necessarily include the reason of giving birth to a child, parental leave, or even taking care of a sick child. These provisions are included in the Parliament of Canada Act, and my pay service is administering these provisions for you as members. These, of course, would require higher change to the legislation.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, have you any sense as to the cost or the impact that would have on constituents if parental leave were to be granted to a member of Parliament?

Mr. Marc Bosc: Again, on that aspect of the question, it would really depend on what the member availing himself or herself of such parental leave chose to do. If the member chose to still carry out duties to a degree, then the impact on constituents would be negligible, because the member's staff would continue to function, and so on.

With regard to costs, members receive an annual salary. There would be no change to that.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, then we'll go to electronic voting or proxy voting, the idea of those two things. What would be the impacts in those areas?

Mr. Marc Bosc: On electronic voting, the House has looked at this in the past. This committee, in a previous incarnation, looked at this on more than one occasion. It really comes down to a decision by the House on how it wants to conduct votes. The House is equipped electronically for that to happen, but in my experience, the whips tend to like to have members present and voting. And I've heard it expressed that members themselves kind of like the atmosphere leading up to a vote. The bells are ringing. There is a more informal atmosphere. They are able to talk to colleagues. It's kind of a place where business can be transacted fairly efficiently on an occasional basis while the House waits to have the formal stand-up vote.

In terms of proxy voting, right away you're into a completely different debate and discussion, and that is the nature of a deliberative assembly. Is it necessary for members to be present here? You will hear from some people—not from me, necessarily—who would say that allowing this kind of thing is the thin edge of the

wedge; so if you'd allow proxy voting, what's next? Are you going to allow the next step? That's the kind of debate you get into.

That said, it does happen elsewhere.

●(1125)

Mr. Blake Richards: Do I still have some time, Mr. Chair?

Thank you, then.

The Chair: We'll go on to Mr. Christopherson.

Just before we do, though, in Sweden they all push their button, but they have to be there, so it takes five minutes for what it takes us two hours; but they have to be there so they can do all their talking with everyone.

Go ahead, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks very much for being present. I indicated earlier that I was going to focus on one area. I will acknowledge right up front that part of it is a pet peeve in terms of my experience here on the Hill, but it does lead to what I think are matters that are far more substantive than my feet getting cold.

It's about what we call the "green bus service". Now even that's changing. It's no longer going to be the green bus, I guess; it's going to be the white bus. Anyway, there have been cutbacks. I've been around here going on 12 years now, and it has been cutback, cutback, and cutback. That's not to say that there aren't times when you can make changes and improvements and when cuts are even warranted, but my experience is that with the expansion of Parliament Hill now spilling over more onto Queen Street and Wellington Street, and with the opening in the last few years of what is now the Valour Building, we're actually going off the Hill.

There was a time—and you can tell I'm getting old—back in the good old days.... But there was a time not that long ago when you got on the green bus and it came very quickly and very efficiently. One bus took you everywhere, because there were only a handful of locations. It's very different now. It's far more widespread. At a time when we have more destinations, the vehicles now have to leave the Parliament Hill precinct and go onto the public streets of Ottawa, particularly along Wellington and Queen, and get all the way around the national monument to get over to One Wellington. At a time when we have an expanded need for the service, there have been more and more cutbacks. Now, I'm not saying that there hasn't been some expansion, but relatively speaking, in my view, there's been a diminishment of the service.

I'll just get this off my chest and then I'll move to what is the more substantive matter. From my perspective, the amount of efficiency and productivity lost by the number of times people have to wait for a bus, and by how many times committee meetings have been delayed, or by staff people having to use them to get around when they're bringing things for the members because something has changed, or the agenda has changed, or you need information.... On the efficiency waste, if you had experts look at it, I have to believe—and I'm no expert—that they would tell you that this is a false economy and that you may be saving on the one budgetary line item that says “transportation on the Hill”, but if you look at the effect on the efficiency and productivity, not to mention just the frustration level....

I'll get to the point: it's cold in Ottawa. I'll say parenthetically to my new colleagues that I'm from Hamilton, and I knew it was cold when I got here and the people from Winnipeg said, “Aw, Dave, it's really cold here.”

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: It is cold in Ottawa. It has bugged me that the ones who are driving around in the limos and staying nice and warm are the ones directing the rest of us poor schmucks who have to stand outside and wait.

Now, all of that is a bit light-hearted, but it has some meaning, as you can tell. However, far more important and germane to those points is this: staff and members who have physical impairments. The buses used to go longer and further. Now, on the parking lot.... It's lucky for us MPs, of course, as we're treated very well here on the Hill. Everything exists to support the members and the work of the House, so my parking spot is fine. I don't need a bus to get to my parking spot unless I'm leaving from here, but some people have a long way to go. If it's not that late at night but into evening, it's dark and cold. If they have a bad knee, a bad leg, a broken leg, arthritis, or whatever impairment, or if they're just getting older and slower when moving around, I don't know how those folks are getting around. Are we paying for cabs? Do they have to arrange for rides? Do they have to change their personal life to have somebody come and get them?

Then there's the fact of.... For instance, last night I attended a meeting here in the Centre Block that started at 7:30 and went until 9. I had to leave a little early. I got lucky and got on the last bus as it was leaving at five or ten minutes after eight, but for everybody else who was at that meeting, staff included, there was no bus.

I know there's more security around. Sometimes it's like an armed camp from what we see. But I have to tell you: walk around the Hill at night and you'll easily see opportunities where members are alone and walking. I'm not even talking about those who are maybe more vulnerable than others, but just about MPs who are walking around in the dark, late at night, and relatively alone. There may be help, but it's a little further away. Wellington's not that far; you can get access. As a safety concern, I'm worried. So for all those reasons....

• (1130)

I accept that most of what I just said, Chair, was a rant, fair enough. But I've been waiting a long time to get somebody in that seat so I can have this rant.

I realize you can't comment on the cuts, and I don't expect you to. You're the embodiment of appropriateness, fair enough. But from a management point of view, you also have a responsibility. It's your staff in many ways as much as it's our staff, and I'd like your thoughts on this.

I'll make it easy for you, Marc. I would like your thoughts on any part of what I've had to say, including being dismissive. I'm prepared to accept that, but these are my feelings about this and I'd like to know what you think.

Mr. Marc Bosc: Well, first I need to know from the chair how much time I have.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: You have about a minute.

Mr. Marc Bosc: Okay, I'll do my best.

I'm a Winnipegger. I know how cold it gets. My way of dealing with that is just to walk. I find walking is way more efficient. I'm not suggesting other people want to do that or should do that. That's just how I deal with it.

Mr. David Christopherson: If you're able-bodied.

Mr. Marc Bosc: That said, there's no doubt that the bus operation is a very complex proposition, for the reasons you've outlined. The precinct has gotten bigger. Committees are meeting in different places. Trust me when I say that, Benoit. I have had numerous conversations about this. It's not an easy puzzle to resolve, particularly given that the decisions around levels of service were made in the context of a general restraint era. All parts of the broader federal government were affected, the House included. We reduced our expenditures by 7%. That was one of the services affected.

That said, we must remember that the buses are there not for the staff, not for the employees, but for members. The reason they're there for members is so that members can get to the committee meetings they're supposed to get to, and to the chamber that they need to get to for votes and whatever other reason. That is the reality.

From a safety angle, I have had a very good conversation with the Director of the Parliamentary Protective Service on that subject. Sometimes trying to plan exceptions for a service like the bus service is not the most efficient way to go. Making individual arrangements, such as having a hotline you can call for an escort or whatever, if you really feel your safety is at risk, may be something to explore.

I know I haven't addressed all the points you've raised, but I've tried to cover as many as I could.

Mr. David Christopherson: I appreciate what you said, fair enough, on the walking thing. Okay, that was part of my rant.

The serious part was about those who aren't able to walk as easily or are temporarily disabled. It makes a difference. Sorry, I find it a little cavalier to say, "Oh, well, just walk. Don't be such a wimp." There are some people who have problems doing that, and they're left in the same jam we are. I haven't heard any explanation there, let alone any kind of sympathy for that.

Mr. Marc Bosc: Well, it's not that I'm not sympathetic; it's just that I don't think we can start giving taxi chits to everybody who needs a ride up to the Hill. There's an economic reality to that. That said, as an employer—I can't speak for members' employees, since I don't know what arrangements are made there—we still have the service around the Hill for our staff to take the bus. For our staff, we do our best to accommodate them as per their requirements.

I didn't want to sound cavalier, trust me, Mr. Christopherson.

• (1135)

Mr. David Christopherson: I know, but it came across that way.

The Chair: Okay, before we go on to the next witness, just so that committee members know, Benoit Giroux, the director general of Parliamentary precinct operations, is in the back here if you have some questions.

I will say, Mr. Clerk, that I left here at one o'clock in the morning on Wednesday and there were three white buses waiting for me, so I appreciated that. Thank you.

Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Before I get into my line of questioning, I do have one question on this subject as well. I know that when there are committees or the House is sitting, the buses will be running, but what about special committees?

Mr. Marc Bosc: I'll have to turn to Benoit on that one.

Mr. Benoit Giroux (Director General, Parliamentary Precinct Operations, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Bosc.

We would offer services to committees. When there's a committee that is planned, we do have a route for 1 Wellington and we have a route for 131 Queen, and we follow the schedules of the committees.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I do agree with Mr. Christopherson, and I would just echo the concern. Especially as a woman who is often walking on the Hill alone at night, it is of concern. I don't think you'll find that most women MPs will call somebody to have a security guard walk with them all the way to their car. I don't think you'll find us availing ourselves of that very often, but when the buses are there, we'll certainly use them. I'll just put that out there.

The last time you were at the committee, Mr. Bosc, you brought up the idea of the parallel chamber. I'd like to delve into that just a little bit more, from a practical perspective, in terms having a parallel chamber similar to what Westminster Hall does, but also looking at it as a potential option for the Friday sittings. Instead of having a physical parallel chamber, we would have a parallel chamber in name that would happen on Fridays instead of the regular House sitting, which would have different orders of business.

What do you think the practicalities of that might be?

Mr. Marc Bosc: The idea of a parallel chamber is actually not at all complicated from a procedural standpoint, from our perspective. The way the parallel chambers are structured in Australia and Great Britain is that they have a very small quorum. The chambers and houses there have delimited the kinds of business that can be transacted in such a forum. As well, they have gone so far as to say how proceedings flow from that. If a decision must be arrived at, who makes it? Does the parallel chamber make it or does the full chamber make it? Those kinds of issues are all covered in the way those two chambers function.

From our perspective, from a purely logistical standpoint, a parallel chamber could be very simply like a committee. We could have it in the reading room, we could have it in this room, we could have it anywhere. It would be up to the committee, if it wants to go down that road, to delimit the kinds of arrangements that would be required for such a chamber.

We're completely flexible on it. In terms of impacts, we wouldn't need any additional staff, I don't believe. We run 55-plus committee meetings a week. This would be like another committee meeting.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: If it were to occur on Friday, for instance, physically in the House, then would the rules of quorum in the BNA Act, that we have to have a quorum of 20, not apply if we named that a parallel chamber?

Mr. Marc Bosc: Again, the House is sometimes used for various purposes. If it weren't the House sitting that day, it wouldn't be the House sitting, so those concerns wouldn't occur.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Right now we sit for four and a half hours on Fridays. We don't have committees on Fridays. We rarely have votes on Fridays.

If, for instance, we were to have a parallel chamber on Fridays, but let's say it would sit for eight hours, we could get more members on the record. It would also be much more efficient for members who are travelling far, who don't have something to say, and who have to sit in the lobby—they have to be there just in case something happens—instead of being in their constituencies. But more members who do have something to say, who don't have the opportunity during the week, would actually have an extra three and a half hours of time to be able to get on the record.

Is that correct?

• (1140)

Mr. Marc Bosc: That's certainly one way of looking at it, yes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: What impact would that have on the staff, the table officers? Would that have any impact?

Mr. Marc Bosc: We staff the chamber on the basis of shifts. We take turns. Whether the House sits three hours, five hours, or eight hours, it's all of a piece. We supply the necessary personnel to run the chamber.

I don't see a huge impact. There might be if it sat for eight hours on a Friday. That might have an impact on maybe overtime a little bit, but we're used to going with what the chamber decides to do. This week we sat until midnight one night. The staff adapted, and proceedings ran smoothly.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: For instance, for take-note debates, emergency debates, even private members' business, we could have a longer period, for instance, for S. O. 31s. And because we wouldn't have a question period on Friday, we could even take the S. O. 31s off the Monday to Thursday period, put them on Friday, and then add more time for question period.

Those are all options.

Mr. Marc Bosc: If the committee wanted to recommend a complete change to the House's weekly schedule, it could do so. It could move the statements by members to a parallel chamber. It could recommend that, certainly.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: What about notice? You mentioned that there are a number of things that require certain numbers of sitting days. Giving notice usually requires a particular period of sitting days. Would it be very complicated to make adjustments for that in case it's on a Friday?

Mr. Marc Bosc: If, let's say, the House didn't sit on a Friday, what could be done is to have the day count just the same for notice purposes. I know our colleagues in Britain do that.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: On the business of supply, where you have an x number of days per period, would you count Friday as a sitting day for those purposes as well—not have a supply day on a Friday but be able to count it?

Mr. Marc Bosc: Well, no. If the House doesn't sit on Fridays, it doesn't sit on Fridays. It is not a sitting day.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: If there is a parallel chamber...

Mr. Marc Bosc: Again, that would be something for the committee to consider, what counts and what doesn't. Remember, a parallel chamber is not the chamber. It's a different beast, so you have to be careful how you quantify things after that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Reid and Mr. Schmale, go for five minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to make a little statement, which is directed more at our analysts than anybody else. It comes from the exchange between Mr. Christopherson and Mr. Bosc. It's just this: Mr. Christopherson was pointing to the exceptional cases that require the green buses, for people who are not capable of walking around or have some form of a mobility issue.

I just want to suggest that the best way of dealing with that, when it arises, is that we not try to change the rules, not try to change the green bus system, but try to change our intra-party cultures. Each party ought to try to move those individuals to Centre Block so they don't have to travel around very much. Then we ought to work on

making the committees they are members of meet in this building, as opposed to a different building. That would actually resolve the matter for the period between now and when we move to West Block. It will be a different story then, but I suspect it could be accommodated there.

That's what we did with Steven Fletcher, who was, of course, a quadriplegic. He had an office on the first floor of Centre Block. I suggest that this would be our first line of attack, and it could be dealt with immediately, whereas changes to the green bus service would be several years in the making.

Mr. Blake Richards: I think I was next, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Oh, it's you. Okay.

Mr. Blake Richards: What do I have for time?

The Chair: Three minutes and 30 seconds.

Mr. Blake Richards: Hopefully, that will be enough time.

I'll return to where we were in the conversation previously. First of all, I want to go back to the idea of the sitting weeks and changes that might be entailed there. If we were to go to having longer hours on specific days to accommodate the idea that the Liberals want, which is not to be here on Fridays, would overtime costs incurred by staff on the administrative level? What kind of costs would we see in that? If we are talking about longer sitting days, those should incur extra costs for administration staff and these kinds of things. What is your sense of that?

• (1145)

Mr. Marc Bosc: It's hard to know precisely without knowing what those longer hours might look like.

I'll give you an example. Right now we begin the sittings on Mondays at 11 o'clock. If we started at 10 o'clock or 9 o'clock, that would have no impact, because people are here anyway to work a full day. Sitting an extra half-hour or an hour later in the day—minimal impact again. People are here, largely, for shifts that end near the adjournment time anyway, and that can be adjusted. People could be asked to come in a little later and stay a little later. We already do that in the journals branch, for example.

My initial instinctive feeling is that it wouldn't have a huge impact.

Mr. Blake Richards: In terms of the idea of the secondary chamber or the parallel debating chamber, I know you were having a bit of a conversation with one of my colleagues here briefly on that in the previous round. What's your sense as to what the cost of setting up a parallel debating chamber would look like? Obviously a physical facility would have to be provided of some kind, and the staff costs and stuff like that. In that regard what kind of costs would we be looking at there?

Mr. Marc Bosc: Again, I don't believe there's a huge impact financially there. Obviously, we haven't done a full analysis, so there's always that caveat, but if you picture it more as an additional committee, then you immediately get the picture that we can do this very quickly.

As I said earlier, we do 50 to 60 committees a week. This week we have 55, I believe. We're able to do those, and a parallel chamber could resemble a large committee quite easily.

Mr. Blake Richards: Give me kind of a sense as to how you would see that being set up, then. Would we be utilizing one of these committee rooms and we'd have it set up similar to what we have here, where people would speak from their place at the committee table? I'm not certain as to how that looks.

Mr. Marc Bosc: It's hard for me to speculate on that. It would really depend on how the committee would want to structure that. Members might want the set-up a bit like the House is set up, with chairs on either side, with maybe a central podium, or members could rise and speak from their assigned seat.

There are a lot of different possible ways it could be done, from rather informal to rather formal.

The place I referred to is the parallel chamber in Australia, which is in a room not unlike this one, set up for that purpose in a committee style.

Mr. Blake Richards: Maybe we'll thank you there, and hopefully we'll have another chance.

The Chair: In regard to the point on disability that Mr. Reid and Mr. Christopherson made, as I said, you can have the people—and we have, in the past—who have been in their office here and in their committee meetings here. That was allowed under the very first standing order:

The Speaker may alter the application of any Standing or special Order or practice of the House in order to permit the full participation in the proceedings of the House of any Member with a disability.

We'll go on to Ms. Sahota for five minutes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Clerk, and everyone, for being here today.

I'd like to start by saying that we're here in this committee trying to figure out how to make Parliament more efficient, more modern, and more family friendly, and this is not a position that all Liberals have taken. It's a position that for years and years has been talked about, has been discussed, and we're trying to figure out how to come to a solution now.

There are many Conservatives and many NDP members who are also in favour of having constituency days on Friday, and many, many spouses.

I appreciate and agree that the impact we were talking about on the constituents might be quite good, because my constituents whom I oftentimes hear from think that I'm not working when I'm not there. I hear that concern quite often. They have to wait weeks to get a meeting with me because they want face time with me, not with my staff, because they have a very serious concern in the riding. Because of that, I end up having to meet them. I take time to try to get back on Fridays mostly, just so that I can meet them and keep my constituents happy, or meet them over the weekend along with

attending various events. It leaves very little time for family and children, but that's something that each individual MP takes on.

So, having days in the constituency would make them quite happy, so they wouldn't have to wait weeks to meet with me, but every week they'd know there was a day when they could come and have face time.

I would like to know what your opinion is on the easiest way of doing that, if we were to choose to do that in the end, in your expert opinion. Would it be the parallel chamber? Would it be moving hours around? What is your opinion on that?

● (1150)

Mr. Marc Bosc: Here again, bearing in mind the theme of family friendliness, it should be remembered that all parties run a roster system in the chamber for House duty. The lost hours on a day that the House would choose to not sit could be made up on those other days. This has been the pattern in the past when the hours of sitting of the House have been modified. The parties have chosen to make sure that those hours aren't lost. In fact, in some cases they've been increased.

Sitting later doesn't necessarily mean that all members are affected. It really only means that certain members are affected, and not all the time, because House duty shifts change. Sometimes you might have to work a Thursday afternoon once a month or whatever. That's the kind of arrangement that the whips try to make to accommodate members. So the impact of eliminating a day and reapportioning those hours should be manageable, in my opinion, from an individual member standpoint.

The real key, though, is the issue of predictability, and I spoke about this the last time I was here. What really helps members plan their activities and their lives is knowing when things are going to take place. Having votes at three o'clock, as the House has started doing, is a great amelioration of the uncertainty that members used to face: "There's a vote tonight. Well, no, there's an extension because of a ministerial statement, so it's not going to be at 5:30, but 6:00. Oh, no, it's 6:18 that the bells will start." It was a moveable feast. Members never knew when, plus they had to wait for the time of the bells.

With having the vote right at 3 o'clock, everyone is there. Boom, you do it and it's done. It's eight minutes, nine minutes, and you can get on with the rest of your day.

Now, we haven't been faced with multiple votes yet, and that will challenge that model somewhat. With a parallel chamber, again, it's the same argument there. If you have a parallel chamber, it only affects certain members: the ones who choose to be there. If the quorum is low, like it is in Australia and Great Britain, it's not an issue from the whips' standpoint and the other rules that are put around that.

If you look at it from that prism, thinking of the individual members taking turns where it's required, it becomes manageable.

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

I asked to be included in the speaking order because I wanted to make some of the same points Mr. Bosc just made. The parallel chamber idea originated, as I understand it, in Australia. It may exist elsewhere. I love Australia. I admire Australia. I used to live in Australia. I was once a permanent resident of Australia.

However, the purpose of the parallel chamber, we should be clear, is to allow people to pretend dishonestly that they spoke before the whole House of Commons when they did nothing of the sort. They speak to an empty room that has a special quorum requirement so that virtually nobody has to be present, and which is running at the same time as the House is running. That means that in fact they are talking to nobody, but they could make a claim. I think that's dishonest. I would oppose having a parallel chamber.

We do have a system of S. O. 31s, where you can bring up any issue that is of importance to you. It happens right before QP, when everybody is present, so you are actually saying it when people are paying attention. That is the beauty of our system. If we have a problem that members aren't getting enough chances to appear before their colleagues, then I would suggest expanding the S. O. 31s from 15 minutes to some longer period of time, maybe starting them at 1:45 p.m. instead of 2 p.m., to double the time, or something like that.

On the subject of taking a parallel chamber and having it set up on Friday, you wouldn't need a parallel chamber because the House of Commons would be available. But I can't think of anything more antithetical to being family-friendly: "Now I must stay in the House of Commons on Fridays if I want to address these matters that are of issue to my constituents." I would strongly oppose that too.

There are a whole bunch of ways of doing better than this, but I suggest that we start expanding the number of S. O. 31s if you really believe this is an issue. I didn't have a question; I just wanted to make that statement.

• (1155)

The Chair: Does anyone else from the Conservatives want to speak?

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you very much for all your feedback.

I also wanted to comment on having Fridays off. I think the flexibility we have as members of Parliament is to arrange our schedules so they best serves us, our constituents, our staff, etc. I have a very large riding, about 10,000 square kilometres. It's large compared to some, but if you compare it to the chair's, or Larry's, it's a bit different. But you work your schedule around it. I find that I'm meeting constituents on Saturdays, if I have to, in-between events and those sorts of things. So I think there is a lot of flexibility.

I still question whether you look at what's happening in Alberta. People are losing their jobs in Alberta and our salaries were raised, and now we're looking at taking a day off. I think that's the wrong message to send. We heard comments from the parliamentary spouses and some of them said in their survey responses that having

Fridays off would be a bad thing. The member from the NDP who was speaking also said it was a bad idea.

I agree with Mr. Reid. I think if there are ways to rearrange the schedule and that those are smaller changes that we can make, rather than just overhauling the entire system. We may be working in our ridings Friday, but I think it gives the wrong impression.

Again, that was more of a comment than a question. We went through a lot already.

How much time do I have? I just want to make a few more comments.

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I want to comment about the calendar, which I know you addressed at the beginning. I know your IT people are looking at it, but that is a huge issue. I know there are the secure ID cards whereby people can log in and get access to it, but it's \$100 each, I believe, and we don't want six or seven of them out there, so if there is any way... We use Google Calendar. I know it's not the best option, but it's the best option for getting people to see my calendar.

I think most of what I wanted to ask has been asked already. I do have concerns about cost of some of the changes, but I don't know if you have any additional comments on that.

Mr. Marc Bosc: Yes, just to say that I don't want to leave the committee with the impression that I am in favour or against any of the options being discussed. I'm neutral on all of this. As the House administration and as a procedural team, we will do whatever the House decides it wants to do. That's what we're here for. We have no views one way or another. We're just trying to explain that our flexibility allows us to go wherever the House decides to go.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go on to Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Before I hand over the floor to my colleague, I want to make sure that we're not caught up on the S. O. 31s and what Mr. Reid said about having more S. O. 31s during the week. If we had a parallel chamber on Fridays, it would give us more flexibility to add things like that. We could do other things on Fridays: private members' business, government business, whatever. I think it would give us a lot of flexibility as a Parliament to be able to look at what that schedule would look like, and that would include, if you have the parallel team on Fridays, adding more members' statements, if that's the wish of the committee. So I don't want to get caught up on that one thing, but I do want to pass it on to....

• (1200)

The Chair: Ginette.

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

Just to piggyback on the comments of my colleague, Mr. Schmale, we had the pleasure of having the Parliamentary Spouses Association here this week, and they indicated that they had sent out some surveys. However, we also have to remember that only 12 people responded to those surveys, so perhaps they weren't a great snapshot of everyone's wishes and opinions.

That said, there was one comment that I felt was quite interesting. When the spouses spoke about the travel point system, they indicated that some spouses sometimes don't want to use the privilege of coming to Ottawa to visit their spouse because the expenses are posted. Of course, we want all of our expenses to be transparent; we feel it's very important. But some individuals whose travel costs are much higher feel that perhaps their partner's will be penalized during election time or whatever about spending an awful lot of money. Could you expand on that and see if any other option is available that could avoid that type of situation?

Mr. Marc Bosc: None come to mind, Madam Petitpas Taylor. The reality is that there was a decision by the board to be more transparent on members' expenses. Those are divulged on a quarterly basis, as you know.

I tend to think that even though the numbers get bigger, particularly for members who live far away and whose travel expenses are greater, there is a discernment out in the public that there is an allowance made for members, let's say like Mr. Bagnell, who lives in Yukon. It's going to cost more to get to and from Whitehorse, just as it will cost less for someone who lives in Toronto. I think the public are discerning enough to see that difference.

The trouble with transparency and disclosure is that you either do it or you don't. You can't suddenly say, "Well, for this category we're not going to disclose it" for this or that reason. That's the reality of disclosure, and that it's out there and it's up to the members to explain it if required.

The Chair: Sorry, could I ask a question on that point? I got the sense that the spouse thought that if those travel points were disclosed, but the expenses of the family and the member were all mixed into one batch and not individually identified, it would help that spouse.

Mr. Marc Bosc: Okay. I didn't read that part of the transcript, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Is that possible?

Mr. Marc Bosc: I'll have to look at it. I don't really know the answer to the question.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: That's it.

The Chair: We're going to the three-minute round, for which we have one person. After that, if we can be civil, I'll be more informal and allow anyone who wants to ask questions to have three minutes. We'll be starting that with Mr. Reid.

We'll start with Mr. Christopherson. It's the last round.

Mr. David Christopherson: I thought I heard a qualifier there, that as long as I am civil I get a second crack. You're automatically, by definition, denying me a second round.

The Chair: Yes, that was the intention.

No, just kidding.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

I know I'm not going to be able to say much in three minutes. I assume we're going to go around again, so I won't worry about rushing things.

In no particular order, but on Ginette's last comment, I thought that was a valid point, too. I underscore that. If you recall, I was the House leader of the third party at Queen's Park when we didn't have the point system, but it was pure dollars. The unfairness of it speaks to Mr. Bosc's point. It was there, it was open, and it was transparent, but the politics of it were horrible. That's why we adopted the federal system.

Now we're hearing that there is still an issue, and I think there is merit in that. I gave the example of the difference between Mr. Bagnell and me, or the difference in the distance to Hamilton versus his distance. There is also the question of the number of family members, how old you are, and how many dependants you would have. I think in the element of fairness—I like the idea, and I hope we pursue it—we need to find some way of coupling the total dollars so there is total transparency. The points used are still there, but it's just not that stark differential, like, "Hey, Christopherson, you only spent...and MP Smith over here spent five times as much". As a stand-alone political statement, that's not helpful. That's not the kind of headline you want to see in your local paper. You've done nothing wrong or different from any other colleague, and yet because of our reporting mechanism, you're left in a negative political spot. It seems to me that in terms of fairness, those of us who don't face that should be the ones who are pushing the most. Otherwise it looks rather self-serving.

As one of those who benefits from this, I'm willing to keep on pushing for the same reasons I did 20 years ago at Queen's Park—fair's fair, and there seems to be an element of unfairness. It's going to take some work and imagination. We have to maintain the transparency. Nobody should interpret this as a desire to hide anything, but we're trying to find a way... Just like the move from raw dollars to the point system was meant to introduce an element of fairness, there is another element here that's not quite fair.

We may be limited by the transparency and disclosure, but surely creative people can find a way where we don't lose that, but enhance the fairness just as we did at Queen's Park when we looked around, saw the federal system, and said, "Hey, there's a way to go. Let's do it by five times in one month you went back and forth to your riding, stacked up against somebody else and how many times they went", and not by how much money they spent.

I hope we continue to pursue that.

Before I lose the floor, I'm going to jump out of my order. I want to apologize, Mr. Bosc. I shouldn't have said what I said to you, and I regretted it as soon as it was out of my lips. I think it comes from the Attawapiskat issue where there was a thought that, "Well, why don't you just move?" When you said, "Why don't you just walk", I took it the same way, and I know you don't mean that.

By the way, I want to say to all your staff that my issues are not with the way you've managed it. My issues are political ones in terms of the money that's allocated. I know you can't address that, so I was asking my question in a way where I was hoping you could make my case from a practical operational point of view, and then I would go back and do the political stuff and do all that kind of stuff.

I do apologize, sir. I know that you and all of you care greatly about the staff, and I retract what I said and apologize. I feel bad.

● (1205)

Mr. Marc Bosc: No offence taken. In fact, just to be clear, I wasn't suggesting that anyone other than me should walk. That's how I get my exercise. I deliberately park far away and get my walk every morning, because otherwise—

Mr. David Christopherson: Fair enough.

Mr. Marc Bosc: —I'm a prisoner here all day and get no exercise.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'll probably end here. It's probably close to my three minutes. We're going to have more rounds, Chair, so I'll await the opportunity to get into my other issues. Thanks.

The Chair: The changes that you've already made, you mentioned right at the very beginning, I hope you've sent that to every MP, because I don't remember actually receiving it.

Mr. Christopherson, you and the clerk—who is not here—might want to follow up to get more specific about suggested models, to deal with that good point you raised. But I'll leave that with you, and we'll go to Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: My purpose in asking for the microphone again was to continue the debate with Ms. Vandenberg.

Regarding the idea of having a parallel chamber sitting on Friday, I repeat the thought that if the House isn't sitting, if we change to a four-day week, which the Liberals really seem to want to do, then you'd effectively have the House free, and you could just have the House deal with all of this business. I'm not recommending this. I'm just observing that you wouldn't need the parallel chamber. The parallel chamber is to allow something else to be happening at the same time the House is sitting, in the same way that we can be in this committee right now while the House is just around the corner sitting and dealing with some other items of business. So there would simply be no need for that.

Again, the purpose of the parallel chamber, as I said, is to engage in a dishonest exercise of pretending you spoke to an actual audience when you did not actually speak to your colleagues, which I just disapprove of on principle.

Finally, on dealing with issues like private members' business in a parallel chamber, well, you can't deal with anything that involves actual debate or votes in a parallel chamber. You can only do it in the House, because only in the House are we not going to find ourselves engaged in House business somewhere else while that item is

coming up. Only statements can be made in a parallel chamber, in the empty room to a non-audience. Nothing else can happen there.

Finally, if you did put all private members' business on Fridays, whether in the House itself by changing the Standing Orders, or in a parallel chamber, you'd wind up creating a situation in which members who wanted to deal with that would have to stay on Fridays, including any members who wanted to address those items. Private members' business is the most subject, thanks to trades, to change from one day to the next, meaning that we'd have fewer predictable schedules, and it would be that much more difficult for anyone to get out of the House on Fridays. That is true whether or not we go to the four-day week that the Liberals want so much, or whether we stick with the five-day week.

That's all I wanted to say on that.

● (1210)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Just very briefly, Chair, I want to come back to the points.

I have a very large riding. It's almost the size of the state of Vermont, which gives you a sense. My constituency offices are 135 kilometres apart. I run out of points well before the year is up. For bringing family back and forth, we're lucky we can go by car; my riding is not very far from here. But I just put the idea on the table of having a point attached to the member and the spouse and dependants. The cost is declared, but one point gets you and your family to Ottawa.

I'd like to have the elimination of the distinction between special and regular points explored as an option. In my riding, I run out of one category and still have lots left in the other category, because every day of my life is a point. That's the reality of a 20,000-kilometre riding.

I have just one more quick note on the parallel chamber, which I think is a fascinating idea. To the analyst, perhaps we could consider recommending further study of this in the eventual report, as opposed to it being something we can resolve here. I think it's a big enough issue that it could require its own study to really deal with it.

The Chair: Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: On the comments of Mr. Reid on Fridays, I think that what happens right now is that on those days you could have dilatory motions. The quorum of 20 applies anytime the House is sitting, because that's in the BNA Act. Just a few weeks ago, at 2:10 there was an adjournment motion and everybody had to run into the House and have a vote. What happens as a result is, for instance, that I'll have to spend four and a half hours sitting in the lobby or at my seat even though it may not be a debate that I'm planning on weighing in on, and I could spend those four and a half hours in my constituency meeting with constituents.

I think what we're talking about is efficiency. If we were to talk about adding those hours for government business, and everything Mr. Reid talked about, to the other days of the week, you add those four and a half hours, but then in addition, so that we can be more efficient, we could have a parallel chamber on those Fridays—if the chamber is empty, why not have a parallel chamber?. Then people who do want to get on the record can get on the record.

I can just say that there may be a debate happening that I'm interested in when I'm in committee, but when I'm in the chamber, it might be something that's less relevant to my constituents. We have technology. It's not the old days when you had to be physically present or read *Hansard* afterwards. On one topic I was very interested in, I went to my office and looked at ParlVu, the video, of other statements that members made when I wasn't in the chamber. I was then able to go and engage those members about that. Because we have technology, we can watch happens in the chamber even when we're not in the chamber, and I think more opportunities to get on the record and speak to Canadians—not just to each other, but speak to Canadians—would be very useful.

But I do have a question and a clarification for Mr. Bosc.

Mr. Reid indicated that on Fridays, if there were a parallel chamber, we would not be able to do anything other than members' statements, S. O. 31s. Is that the case? Or could it be that we would choose to do government business, but just not have votes, where people could get on the record?

Mr. Marc Bosc: That isn't what I understood Mr. Reid to say. I thought he was merely referring to the general practice in the other jurisdictions of having the parallel chamber be a place for speeches to be made. I think that's what he was meaning to say. That's my understanding, anyway.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: What kinds of debates occur in Westminster Hall and in Australia in that chamber?

Mr. Marc Bosc: There are a variety of things that are possible to be debated. The key thing, though, is not the nature of the debate so much as the fact that those two chambers have decided to not give that chamber any decision making power. The decision rests with the main chamber. That's really the key point there. Of course, the low quorum speaks to what Mr. Reid was saying, and that is that attendance, therefore, is not what it is in the House.

•(1215)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: So the difference is really the quorum.

Mr. Marc Bosc: Yes, it's a quorum of three, one per party.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Christopherson, you have more....

Mr. David Christopherson: Oh, don't I always see to? Thank you.

Fridays—I don't know why the government is continuing to natter on about this. The official opposition has made it clear that it's not interested in taking Fridays off, as far as I know. The third party has made it clear that we're not interested in taking Fridays off. I don't know why the government is going on about it. It should be a non-starter.

Regarding the second chamber, I'm like Mr. Graham; I find it a fascinating subject. It tweaked my interest the second I heard it. I didn't know it existed. But I suspect both of us are parliamentary wonks, and we really like the machinery of Parliament and how it works. I have to say that Mr. Reid's comments had some resonance with me too. I'd still be interested in pursuing it more, as an interest.

I'm not sure it's going to end up being anything practical. Therefore, as a precursor to that discussion, I'd want to get an initial report back to see how much time we want to dedicate to it. I'm not sure, based on what Mr. Reid is saying, where the practicality is. But I still continue to find it a fascinating adjustment to the way the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy works. So that's that.

Back to the parking, back to the bus, I want to thank Madame Vandenberg for commenting. You can only assume you're speaking for someone else so far, and then someone else has to speak. So I'm glad to hear that, because it's an issue.

I want to finish my thought, because I don't think I finished my thought on that meeting last night. My point was that I got out in time to catch one of the last buses. It was here at Centre Block. It was just after 8:00 p.m. and my office is, of course, down in the Justice Building. But it's more to the fact that everybody else who was in the room, regardless of what their next move was, had to get to the parameters of the parliamentary precinct on foot.

Again, if they were able-bodied and bundled up for the weather, fine. But if not, or if there were any other concerns—security, etc., because it was dark—they were just kind of left out in the cold. It seems to me that if there's real...

I grant you, it was not committee business. It wasn't House. It was caucus business. We were doing briefings on a matter. We had staff and members there. Nonetheless, it was legitimate parliamentary business. It was here in Centre Block. In fact, it was just in room 112 downstairs, and it was just last night. It's a perfect example of when people, members and staff who work here, were working until 9 o'clock at night, which is not unusual, as everyone knows, yet there was no availability.

Again, when I was talking about the efficiencies, I didn't mention the fact that it used to be fairly easy to get from one committee meeting to the next—number one, because they weren't so far apart physically, because of the locations that both Mr. Bosc and I have mentioned; but also, because of the regularity of the buses. I could pretty much assume that, if I had to talk to Mr. Chan about something, I had time to run over, have a brief chat with him to finish off something in this meeting, grab my staffer, and head out the door; and I knew I needed to wait only a couple of minutes and I could get on a bus and get to the next meeting, even if it was way over on Wellington Street or on Queen Street. That falls apart when I get to the part where I'm running out the door and waiting for a bus for 10 of the 15 minutes that I have to get from one committee to the next. I still find that unresolved.

I'm just a little out of order. I apologize. I made some very quick notes.

I just wanted to mention this, too. Mr. Reid had mentioned about moving a member to Centre Block, and used one of our former colleagues as an example. That is all fair enough, all to the point, but that doesn't speak to somebody who is temporarily disabled—for example, who breaks a leg. I have a knee from an old judo injury that every now and then flares up, and I have a heck of a time getting around. But it's a minor thing. It's only around for maybe a week or two, and then it clears up. We're not going to move me to Centre Block.

I find that fine when we have a permanent situation, but doesn't work on a temporary basis. With a disability, whether it's permanent or temporary, when it's affecting you, it's real. I wanted to say that.

I wasn't clear, Mr. Bosc, on the staff. I hope I'm not opening a can of worms. Or if I am, I'm going to make sure I stay on top of it, to keep it fixed. Staff are on the buses, as they should be. My staffer, Tyler, gets on the bus all the time. I know that there's House of Commons staff too; I see them early in the morning coming from the parking lots.

• (1220)

I think about those very folks in the morning, who have the bus service there; the concept of the employer, Parliament, providing that service is there, but it's not there at the other end of the day, if they happen to have to stay late. That still leaves me with a bit of a question.

May we have your thoughts on that?

Mr. Marc Bosc: I'll try to address most of the points you've raised. I think Benoit has something you will find interesting.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay, great.

Mr. Benoit Giroux: You mentioned special events. We would accommodate a request to provide the service, if there were special caucus meetings or something like that. We've done it. We get requests from the whip's office, usually. We would coordinate with the whip's office and we would provide such types of services for official parliamentary business.

Mr. David Christopherson: May I respond to that, Chair?

Thank you very much. This is what we want. I appreciate it very much, but here's the thing: sometimes it's not a formal meeting of

caucus. It's not unusual for me in my capacity and for our caucus to have to meet with our House leader and whip. Many times it's in that same timeframe. After everything is done, we'll all gather in the House leader's office, and we're there until 8:30 or nine o'clock. We have staff—I don't go very far without Tyler—and there are support staff.

I don't know whether you would call that special enough to call up a bus. Even I am asking whether you would call up a bus and a driver for five or six people. Yet those five or six people are doing legitimate parliamentary work, they're here in Centre Block, it's late at night, and they don't have access to the bus. If they're a support staffer whose car is parked far away, they have to walk even further than I do, because I'm an MP and I get a privileged spot.

It's not so much about me in that case. There's this element of unfairness in terms of the infrastructure. I know it costs money, but the service used to be there and the principle of making sure that you could move people, whether they're members or staff. Let's not differentiate; they're people on the Hill moving around.

Now we have a bigger area, committee meetings are further apart, the service is less frequent, and it's cut off earlier than it used to be.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm still left unsatisfied, I have to tell you, with this whole thing. I realize that at the end of the day it's a political question. If Parliament says to you, we want more fulsome service and here are the bucks to pay for it, you'd be glad to design us the most efficient system, I have no doubt. We have to work together here. Give us the good rationale for it, shore up a couple of things, and then we can fight it on the other side.

To be fair, I think this government is open-minded in a whole host of areas in which before, the doors were slammed shut, locked, bolted, and all but welded closed. I want to take advantage of this, so that we're not just hitting some of the bright, shiny things around here, but some of the infrastructure stuff that has been damaged by too much austerity, in my opinion. This would be one of those areas.

The Chair: Thank you, David.

Mr. David Christopherson: Again, I don't know whether to give this some life; I haven't heard too much from colleagues as to whether they support me. If there's not too much more—

The Chair: Thank you. That's it.

Mr. David Christopherson: Am I at seven minutes, really?

The Chair: Your three-minute round is at eight minutes and 45 seconds at the moment.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: I already did the three-minute round. I thought we were in the seven-minute round.

The Chair: Does Benoit have anything?

Mr. David Christopherson: That's okay. We're going to be here for over half an hour. I have lots of time.

The Chair: Does anyone want to comment before we go to the list?

Mr. Marc Bosc: I'll just say, very briefly, we've heard you, Mr. Christopherson.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Marc Bosc: The issue of finding the right balance between costs, personnel, and service levels is always a difficult thing. Obviously, in your opinion we're not in the right place. We've understood that, we've heard it, and we'll take it away with us.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Chair, with your indulgence, I'll make one last statement, then I'll back off this, because it may end it, actually.

What I want to know is whether there's any support around the table for some of this. If there is, then maybe we should ask for a report, something so that it doesn't go away, something to give us a focus. I'm at the point now that I've had my opportunity to have my say and my rant, and I don't feel that I've been shut down. If I'm the only one who really sees this as a *cause célèbre*, I'm quite prepared to back off, believing I've done my bit, and I'm prepared to leave it at that, Chair.

• (1225)

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

We're at 10 minutes for your three-minute round now. Most of the members are on the list, so they can comment on your question.

Mr. Scott Reid: Am I on the list?

The Chair: Yes, you are. We have Mr. Chan, Mr. Reid, Mr. Graham, Ms. Sahota, and Ms. Taylor. We're at Mr. Chan now.

Mr. Scott Reid: Forgive me, Mr. Chair, could you just tell me what the list is, the order of the list?

The Chair: I just read it: Mr. Chan, Mr. Reid, Mr. Graham, Ms. Sahota, and Ms. Taylor—and Ms. Vandenberg.

Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): For the record, let me to simply thank you, Mr. Bosc, and your entire House administration team for your professionalism, and for the fact that you've made it very clear and have demonstrated time and again that you and your entire team work ultimately to serve the members and whatever decisions the House makes. You carry it out with tremendous professionalism. I simply want to put that on the record.

I want to briefly address some of the points by Mr. Reid, and then I want to get back to a very specific question. I might wander past by a couple of minutes, but I haven't spoken yet.

Mr. Reid, I want to get back to first principles. The point the government made in the campaign with respect to making the House more family friendly is more a function of trying to make this place a more attractive place for all Canadians to feel they can fully participate and become members of the House of Commons. What we're trying to do is to find that sweet spot where we remove as much as possible the structural barriers to participation.

I'm going to say on the record—and I know Ms. Vandenberg shares this particular view—that there is not unanimity in the Liberal

caucus on the elimination of Friday sittings. I think some of the members who have been here longer than I have, those who have served as staff, understand that the practical reality is that when we signed up and became members of Parliament and we have the privilege to do the work that we do, it is a 24-7 kind of job. No matter whether you have a four-day House sitting week or five-day House sitting week, we're going to be working a lot, no matter what.

What we're trying to do is to find an opportunity where we can have full participation and recognize the incredible impact this job has, particularly for those of us who have families. You and I share that particular reality. I simply wanted to address that.

That gets me to my substantive question that I wanted to raise with the clerk and his team. I'm ultimately concerned about its impact in terms of its interplay with the Standing Orders. I wanted your thoughts, perhaps—and we haven't raised this yet—on changing the concept of sessional days to perhaps.... I note in some of the papers the analysts had prepared that over time, the time for debate has been reduced in the House through changes to the Standing Orders.

I've observed, frankly, that a lot of members now, in the standard 20-minute allocation of time, split their time to 10 minutes. What's your thought on further reducing time for debate and changing from the concept of sessional days to maybe sessional hours, and how would that have an interplay with respect to the Standing Orders so that we could perhaps get through the business of government and the business of private members perhaps a little more efficiently?

The Chair: Mr. Bosc.

Mr. Marc Bosc: I recall the exchange we had, Mr. Chan, on debating time. I think I made the point that yes, you could reduce the duration of speeches, but there was a point where you reached a point where it became absurd if you were going to conserve the questions and comments period after speeches. Right now, many, many members split their time and make 10-minute speeches, leaving five minutes for questions and comments. It's a bit hard to imagine a two-minute question and comment period or a one-minute question and comment period. I would just put that out there. I don't think it's an impediment to reducing speaking times. You could have five-minute speeches and five minutes of questions and comments if you wanted. Right now, we have a two-to-one formula for questions and comments. It doesn't have to be that. It could be anything that the committee decides it ought to be.

On days versus hours, there again, that is certainly a possible way of looking at the time of the House. However, I would say that you have to be careful with hours, simply because of the existence of procedural mechanisms that are available and that could come and disrupt that. The perfect example is when something is time-allocated, let's say, and a day is allocated to that final day of debate, say at second reading of a bill. As long as the day starts, it counts, even if it's only two minutes long, whereas if you've allocated four hours to it and a clever opposition decides to do other things leading up to that time, then you won't get it that day. That's the challenge. I'm not saying that it's not insurmountable, but that's the kind of thing you have to consider when looking at that.

• (1230)

Mr. Arnold Chan: Thank you.

The Chair: Are you finished?

Mr. Reid.

Oh, yes.

Mr. Marc Bosc: One thing I did forget to mention earlier on, on the question of proxy voting, was to bring up something that has fallen into disuse and might be of interest to the committee, and that is the practice of pairing. I think it exists in the Standing Orders. It has been there a very long time—Standing Order 44.1—and it is a way to have members' names appear in the *Journals* as being paired, if they were absent for legitimate reasons essentially. It's a way of getting around this idea of members' names not appearing anywhere if they can't come and vote.

I just put that out there.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, I just want to determine if the speakers list is going to have the effect, with the number of people still on it, of eating up the remainder of our time. Obviously I want to get to the motion that I distributed on Monday, inviting the members of the independent advisory board for Senate appointments, the so-called independent advisory board for Senate appointments, to appear before our committee before the end of May. I just wanted to find out whether, when you add up the time there, we're going to have a chance to get to this, or we're not.

The Chair: Well, we have four people who are supposed to take three minutes. It looks like they're not taking as much time as Mr. Christopherson took. It looks like we'll have time at the moment.

Mr. Scott Reid: All right, maybe you could add me to the bottom of that list in case that doesn't happen. I appreciate that.

I should know this but I don't. I have the parliamentarians' bible sitting in front of me, and seeing as one of the authors of the parliamentary bible is right here with me, is it right that for all dilatory motions, once someone calls for one, there's a bell for 30 minutes, there's no debate, and then you must have at least 20 members present to deal with that in order to cause the division to occur? Is that correct?

Mr. Marc Bosc: That's correct, if you're having a recorded division, yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: You need 20, okay. That confirms what I was going to say in answer to Ms. Vandenberg's earlier comment about needing the people present. You only need to have 20 people present on a Friday to cause a dilatory motion to go to a recorded vote. That's all you need. If you have something that's coming up, an item of government business on a Friday that you're worried about, and you want to pursue it but you think that dilatory motions could be a problem, you can seek unanimous consent of the House and discuss that in the Tuesday meeting of the House leaders about not allowing dilatory motions on Friday. That would resolve that problem. And then dilatory motions can be legitimate. It's not illegitimate to have these things.

I don't see a situation in which this is going to cause more than one-ninth of a 180-member caucus to have to be here on Fridays. Being here one Friday in nine doesn't seem like a terrible burden to face. It's a little tougher for us in the opposition, but we're willing to do it, and so are the NDP. I don't think that's a good reason not to sit on Fridays.

That's all I wanted to say.

Mr. Marc Bosc: Mr. Chairman, as a point of clarification, the The 20 really refers to the necessary number of voting members for the decision of the House to be valid. All that's required to force a recorded division is five members, and parties want to win votes, so they're going to have members present to win those votes. I think that's what I would add to that answer.

• (1235)

Mr. Scott Reid: In that case, I'm sorry for my incorrect statement. You pointed that we need even fewer people to force a recorded vote. The 20, essentially, is the quorum requirement.

Mr. Marc Bosc: Correct.

Mr. Scott Reid: You only need 20 people there. If there aren't 20 people there, it's just that the business wasn't that important. One of the dilatory motions is that the House do now adjourn, and if they have nothing important to discuss, let's take that Friday off or end the House at that time. We are always seeing the clock in order to pretend that we left at the normal adjournment time when we actually got up and left several hours earlier, anyway. Everybody's experienced that.

You can see what I'm getting at. The only time we'd ever have the House continue to sit is when, frankly, one of the parties felt strongly enough about it that they were prepared to be there and engage in a dilatory motion. All of our parties got millions of votes. If one of the parties, just one, feels it's important enough to do that, then why on earth shouldn't we be sitting on Friday? It means that at least one of our three recognized parties thinks that the matter before the House is more important than a day off.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I wouldn't call it a day off, so there you go.

Mr. Reid, don't worry. I'll be brief. I am not a big fan of dragging it out, as you saw with my very rushed filibuster one time.

Mr. Scott Reid: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I was going to say that from my experience as a staffer sitting next to Tyler, when I learned that he is the more expendable of the pair between him and David, there are a number of things that we used to have that I kind of miss. One thing, Clerk, is the one-stop shop. It would be very useful. It doesn't really fall in the category of this study, but I would really like to see the one-stop shop come back. If I need basic office supplies, why should I wait three days to get them? If I need a pen, why can't I go downstairs and get a pen? That's the way it was.

Tying back to what we were talking about before, here is another idea about after-hours, or members' access members to get back to the parking lot, for example. In particular circumstances at night, members perhaps could have the opportunity to use the Mounties to get down the hill. It would provide the protection that they would request in certain circumstances. The vehicles are already there. There are no major logistical problems with that. It's an idea to put out there, nothing more than that.

There is one other thing, on the Standing Orders. We haven't talked much about them today. Standing Order 14 is about strangers in the House. Perhaps it could get a subsection specifically exempting the care of infants. It's food for thought.

I also wanted to come back to the calendar thing we started the meeting with. Right now calendar-sharing between staff is difficult enough. My staff cannot view and edit my calendar on their phones, which I think is very frustrating.

If you want to take the logical step of enabling families to see our calendars, I would like the whole office to have a properly integrated calendar so we are not stuck, as we are now, using Google calendars. You are talking about security issues as one of the concerns. We are already circumventing the security issues because of the limitations. Yes, you can make it secure, but if nobody uses it, it's pretty useless. I'll put that out there.

Mr. Marc Bosc: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, go ahead.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'd like to start by thanking Mr. Christopherson for his comments about this government coming from a place of being open-minded. I assure you the reasons I keep bringing up the Friday sittings, and making them constituency days, are coming from a place of trying to be open-minded.

Mr. David Christopherson: It's to your credit.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

You are the one who gave us that compliment, and so I'd like to thank you for it.

I'd like to talk about perception versus reality a little bit, because I feel there is a lot of politics being played and some closed-mindedness on the side of the opposition as to the Friday sittings.

I'd like to know how many ministers, not just in this Parliament but in the last Parliament and in the previous Parliament, are actually there on Fridays. What does question period look like? How many

members are actually present on Fridays? What are the hours like on a Friday?

I don't want us to be closed-minded to this, and I am not saying I'm completely for one thing or another. We've just heard my colleague Arnold Chan say that even the Liberals.... We are just trying to figure it out. There are people who are for it or against it. They are trying to see what's best to make Parliament more family-friendly.

I have to say, for myself, before knowing that you could probably trade off House duty and all that, it was a very difficult decision for me to make when running for a member of Parliament, for this position, because I have a young family. I used to play a very prominent role in the child care, so we had to switch things around at least for the first year or two of my child's life. I got in the game, in the race, got out of it, and then got back in after a year. It was a struggle.

I don't want there to be a deterrent factor for other people with young families who might want to participate and become members of Parliament. After all, we do need a diverse Parliament. We need to make sure that their voices are heard.

That is why I would really like to focus on this idea of perception versus reality. How much are we actually gaining by these Friday sittings? Would we be losing anything by not having the sittings, by switching the hours around but still having the same number of sitting hours, depending on how we change things? How much would we gain in our ridings, and how much might our constituents gain from our being there?

Could you shed some more light on what the reality of our Fridays looks like right now?

● (1240)

Mr. Marc Bosc: There is a well-established rule that we don't comment on the presence or absence of members. That said, it is no secret that attendance on Fridays is lower, for the same reasons I mentioned earlier. All parties have roster systems. They try to manage the requirements for their members to be present as efficiently as they can and allow as many of their members as possible to go back to the constituency, either on Thursday evening or early on Friday. Then they try to manage it in a similar way on the other end, on Mondays.

I have no views on whether or not it's a good idea not to sit on Fridays. It's neither here, nor there to the House administration. We will adapt to whatever the House decides.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'm sure you would agree that the status quo is always easy to maintain, but it takes some mindfulness and some courage to change things and to modernize Parliament. That's what we are trying to get to.

The Chair: Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I would like to echo something that has been said on a few occasions today. It's not about taking Fridays off and not wanting to serve; it's about being more efficient with our time as members of Parliament, not just here in Ottawa but also in our ridings.

We're starting a 10-week rotation, let's say, and for me to be able to meet a constituent, the next appointment that's available is in early July. To me, that's just not acceptable.

Going in on Saturday mornings is an option, but we try to have that work/life balance.

My question is specifically for the staff. If members of Parliament worked in their constituencies on Fridays as opposed to being on the Hill, would it create efficiencies for the staff of the House of Commons by our not being here?

Mr. Marc Bosc: As I said earlier, the vast majority of House of Commons personnel are indeterminate employees. They are full-time employees. There are a small number of sessional employees, so there may be an impact there, but I would suggest that it's minimal.

Pierre, would you agree?

Mr. Pierre Parent: I would agree with Marc, because the bulk of our staff are full-time permanent employees. We do have a very small portion of our staff who are sessional, who are tied to the actual activities of the House.

The same applies to summer. There are some activities that continue in the summer, whether it's in finance, legal services, or information services. This is the bulk of our workforce.

The Fridays would not necessarily create extra savings or significant savings for the administration.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: But for the staff, would it allow them some time to catch up on the work that needs to get done? Sometimes when we're here we can see that we can create an awful lot of extra work.

Mr. Marc Bosc: Perhaps in some offices, but we're used to the parliamentary cycle and we manage with that. I don't think it would have a huge impact.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Far be it from me to agree with Mr. Christopherson twice in one day, but I do want to say that he had called on those members who aren't affected by travel points to talk about this issue. I live 15 minutes from here. The furthest reach of my constituency is, at a maximum, a forty-minute drive from here, and I don't have children or caregiving responsibilities.

I would like to echo that I think it's only fair that those who have to use more points because they have larger families or travel greater distances not be perceived as spending more money—the only caveat being that if we're going to say how many trips they took, we should also indicate if it was economy class or business class, and whether they took the most efficient, direct, and economical route. We don't want people to think that since we're not putting down the amounts, they can just go business class every single time.

Now back to the issue of the parallel chamber on Fridays. I think that if we were to sit half an hour early and half an hour late, Monday

through Thursday, we would make up the 4.5 hours we sit on Fridays for all the business we do in the House right now.

Here's what happened to me just this past week. We have four days of debate on the budget. On the very first day, I asked to be put on the list. There were 80 members who had already asked to speak on the budget during those four days, so a lot of members don't get to speak on the things that are really important to them.

I hear what Mr. Reid is saying about Fridays being just for members' statements. I think we should allow it for members' statements—and for any bill that is before the House, perhaps members could give a twenty-minute speech on that subject on Fridays. We could even do it longer. We could have six hours on a Friday.

We'd be adding more time, but being much more efficient in terms of when we're here and when we're away, so that when we are here we are doing the things that we know matter to our constituents, and we don't have to be here just sitting in the lobby if there are other things we could be doing.

Can you comment on whether that would work, for instance on a Friday.

•(1245)

Mr. Marc Bosc: Again as I've said before, the committee has the full flexibility to recommend any kind of structure it wants to recommend. I'm reminded a little bit of something that Dr. Koester, a previous clerk of the House, said to me one time, and it's from an old version of Erskine May, where in the preface there are two quotes. One is from an old clerk from the 1600s who grumbled during a procedural wrangle that “the old way was the best, and when we went out of it, we found rubs and stops as men usually did in unbeaten ways”. And then the alternative view from a different clerk in the 1820s was, “What does that signify about precedence? The House can do what it wants.”

So what the committee needs to remember is that precedents come from somewhere, and new ways of doing things come from somewhere. The committee is entirely free to recommend whatever it wants in that regard. I really have no views on what the best way forward is, but you should know that the House will adapt to whatever the committee recommends.

The Chair: Go ahead, David.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I'll just very briefly respond to one comment on the shortest and most efficient route: we should be careful of that. In my riding, the shortest route goes through the Papineau-Labelle nature reserve on single-lane unimproved roads.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I meant flights.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Okay, be very specific on that, so I don't get stuck having to go through the reserve. Thank you.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I meant flights.

The Chair: Okay.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for a very long but very helpful session. You answered a lot of questions that committee members had in a lot of areas and gave us the ramifications of the recommendations that we might make ultimately. I know that you've always been very helpful. Between meetings, if we need clarification, we know you're always there, and we really appreciate your giving us this much time.

You are excused.

Mr. Marc Bosc: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: As I said at the beginning of the meeting, we have five items of business that we can deal with. We have Mr. Reid's motion and Mr. Christopherson's motion. We have to approve a budget for these hearings to pay for our witnesses coming, and there's the guideline from the Ethics Commissioner on gifts for members, which I hope you've all read. There's also the emergency motion drafted by the clerk or the Speaker, which seems to make quite common sense and is a very short item. So we have to decide which item of those to do and to start with.

Go ahead, Mr. Reid.

• (1250)

Mr. Scott Reid: If I could, I would like to go with the motion I proposed first. I don't think this is controversial, but I could be proved wrong. So perhaps I'll move it now.

The motion is:

That the Chairperson and federal members of the Independent Advisory Board for Senate Appointments be invited to appear before the Committee before the end of May 2016, to answer all questions relating to:

their mandate and responsibilities,

the Report of the Independent Advisory Board for Senate Appointments Transitional Process (January - March 2016) that was submitted to the Prime Minister on March 31, 2016,

expenses incurred during the period of the report, and
anticipated future expenses.

Mr. Chair, I'll be very brief in summarizing the rationale for this. In the past, there was resistance to inviting the members of the advisory board. Yes, it was from the Liberals. The arguments presented against doing so included the fact that they would be submitting a report and that we ought to wait for that and ought not to put them in a position of having to report to us prior to doing their report to the Prime Minister. That's no longer an issue. We now have that report.

We also have some other information. We have information that their costs were a good deal higher than I would have thought would be reasonable, although it may be that they are reasonable and I'm just not seeing what the reasons are. But you can project that, if it costs this much to appoint seven, it's going to cost about three times as much to appoint the remaining 22 vacancies, and obviously that is a concern. Thus there's a desire to find out more.

As well, there is one oddity. The advisory board indicated that it had misplaced the list of organizations it contacted. I'm having some trouble, in the age of endless electronic copies of things, understanding how that could have occurred. The advisory board thought it was important enough that it wanted to present this information, but was unable to get a complete list. So getting that from it as well would be part of what we'd want to hear, or I would certainly want to hear.

Anyway the proposal is to get the advisory board here before the end of May, and I'm reluctant to raise this issue if we wind up having another meeting where we've got six witnesses and I'd be crowding them out through discussion of this motion. So that's why I raised it today, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Does anyone want to speak to the motion?

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'll chime in quickly, to the extent that I'm not going to oppose it. We'll support it.

But you know, for us in the NDP, in the context of our position, this is all just polishing the deck chairs on the Titanic before the darned thing goes down. We're not all that interested in perfecting an overall system that makes appointments in a democracy the reality. However, it is the reality, and if anyone wants to continue poking around in this area, we'll be supportive, but always in the context that none of this should be happening. It's a wart on the body politic of Canada that we have this thing, and all its various permutations of appointing people doesn't change the fact that it's an appointment process.

Also, I remind the government that it's not 2015 now, but 2016, and the idea of an appointed upper House is still the antithesis of anything anyone would remotely call a democracy.

In that context, we'll support it, but we won't be leading the band.

The Chair: Thank you.

Will there be any further discussion before we have a vote?

The motion has just been read.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'd like a recorded vote, please.

The Chair: Recorded vote, Madam Clerk.

The Clerk: On the motion of Mr. Reid.

(Motion negated: nays 5; yeas 4)

• (1255)

Mr. David Christopherson: That's not a very sunny way to be.

The Chair: I wonder if we could quickly go to the budget for our hearings, which I think the clerk happens to have.

The budget proposed, which is just being handed around, is a standard amount of \$15,500 basically to pay for the travel and electronics for our witnesses.

Is there any discussion before we vote on approving or not approving the budget?

I'll give you a minute to look at it.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'll move that.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Has everyone read the very brief proposed change to the Standing Orders by the Speaker so that he can handle emergency hours?

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes.

I took that to our former speaker Andrew Scheer, who of course is now the opposition House leader. I asked him to look it over, because the events that occurred actually occurred while he was Speaker. I gave my copy to him, and asked him to take a look at it and get back to me so that I could bring back comments to the chair.

It's my fault. I meant to bring them today and I forgot. I'll try to have them for Tuesday, if that's acceptable.

The Chair: Okay, that's a good idea.

Mr. David Christopherson: On this?

The Chair: Yes.

Can we wait until Tuesday now?

Mr. David Christopherson: Absolutely.

The Chair: Has everyone read the guidelines that we asked the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to provide for us, so that it's clear to members of the House when they can accept gifts? She doesn't like it, but it's our prerogative. At the moment, under our authority we have to approve those and report them to the House.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Do you mean the forms?

The Chair: No, not the forms, but the guideline we emailed to you about 10 days ago. It was further clarification.

We, as a committee, asked for further clarification as to what was an acceptable gift. She did what we asked and wrote out this document, which is a few pages long and which we emailed to you all.

Mr. David Christopherson: Sorry, Chair, I confess I have not seen it.

The Chair: We'll also defer on that.

Mr. Blake Richards: I had a chance to look at it briefly. I haven't had a chance to go through it in detail, but I suggest from my brief look at it that the guidelines are still somewhat less than clear in my mind. I would encourage everyone to spend some time to look through it and see for themselves, but we may have to have some further discussion on it.

The Chair: I want to remind people, too, about members getting information from the clerk. You are the ones who have given her instructions as to where it should go. I noticed that a recent email from her went to virtually all of our general emails that our staff receive. If you want these to go to your personal email address, make sure that clerk knows this. I have mine go to my personal email

address and to my staff, but it's up to you. Make make sure that each of you talks to the clerk to clarify where your emails are going.

We'll defer our discussion on the conflict of interest guidelines on gifts.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: I appreciate that. I do have a wrinkle in my email system too, which may lead emails going to an account that doesn't regularly come before me. I did noticed that others had maybe not seen the email either, so I feel a little better, thanks.

I have been on this issue for quite some time and in different iterations. Mr. Richards is absolutely right, it is still not clear. I would suggest that we get out in front of this and invite her back in.

She's always had a suggestion that she didn't much like them, and I hope I'm not putting words in her mouth. Mr. Reid's been around the mulberry bush on this from the inception, I believe, so he knows more about it than probably anybody in Parliament. She had claimed that if we really want to make things simple, then we should just have a dollar amount where any gifts below that amount are considered okay and nobody would question these, and above that amount, there should be a reporting mechanism. I think she had suggested \$35.

I would defer to Mr. Reid's expertise in this area, but it seems to me that from a common sense approach—and I guess this speaks to where Mr. Richards was too—we still have conflicting interpretations that leave it unclear. There's still no ability to look at it at a quick blush and understand what it is. For the life of me, I don't know why it evades us. We should be able to find a way that's nice and crystal clear, and yet we don't have it and it's so important.

I'm suggesting that maybe we ought to jump out in front, say yes that we're going to deal with it on the agenda, and invite her to come in and have that discussion and keep chasing this thing until we finally get it clear.

Those are my thoughts.

Thank you.

•(1300)

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: On this, I have some sympathy for her because she's struggling with the fact that the rules themselves were not brilliantly drafted. They do create situations where two parts of the rules can be seen to some degree as one being more permissive than the other. This is true with gifts. As long as that's the case, she appears to be adopting the view that she will take the more restrictive of the interpretations, which I suppose I'd probably do if I were her too.

Having said that, it seems to me that the best way of resolving it is ultimately to change the rules to remove those restrictions. My own recommendation would be that we chat with each other—and we can do it offline if we're worried it will take up too much committee time—and see if there's a developing consensus. It would be to see if we can find a way of adjusting the wording of that part of the ethics code so there is greater precision.

I think that's the only solution.

The Chair: Okay, it's understood that we need a much more detailed time on this.

Our time's up, but there are two things I need to mention. Could people get back to the clerk or me by the end of the week on particular names of witnesses we've recommended. We don't yet have the names. On the question of political staff, we have one from the NDP, but the Liberals and the Conservatives have not provided any. If there's someone on your political staff that you think wants to be a witness, could you get back to the clerk by the end of this week?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Kevin Bosch.

The Chair: Well, we don't want the names right now.

Also, on House of Commons staff, if there's someone else who need to be consulted, please talk to the clerk or me about that.

Mr. David Christopherson: I was a little surprised that somebody came up and asked me, "Do you know who the different

unions are that represent the various works on the Hill here?" I was thinking that surely somebody has a registry of the unions. I was struck by that. I don't know why it's difficult. I'm missing a piece here: it should be straightforward. Go to HR, give us the names of the unions that represent workers on the Hill here, and we will extend an invitation to their representatives.

On the previous point, if I could offer up assistance to my colleagues among the Liberal and the Conservative caucuses, I would point out that it's a lot easier once your staff are organized and have their own representatives. I'd be glad to provide folks that could come in and help you with that process.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're adjourned.

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