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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

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• (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (The Honourable Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): We have a very busy day today. We have witnesses right away for the main estimates; then we have another set of witnesses for our study; and then we'll be studying the plan for the question of privilege at the end.

This is meeting number 17 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, for the first session of the 42nd Parliament. It's being held in public. Our business today is the main estimates, 2016-17, vote 1 under the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer; followed by witnesses for our study on initiatives toward a family-friendly House of Commons; and finally some committee business, primarily on the motion of privilege.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses here. Today we have a good visitor whom we see all the time, Mr. Marc Mayrand, the chief electoral officer, along with Hughes St-Pierre, chief financial and planning officer, integrated services, policy and public affairs; Stéphane Perrault, deputy chief electoral officer of regulatory affairs; Michel Roussel, deputy chief electoral officer of electoral events; and Belaineh Deguefé, the deputy chief electoral officer, integrated services, policy and public affairs.

Thank you all for coming. We can go to your opening remarks.

Mr. Marc Mayrand (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for inviting me to discuss the 2016-17 main estimates for my office.

I am pleased to be here with my officials to meet with committee members for the first time during the 42nd Parliament, and I wish to congratulate all members on their recent election to the House of Commons. I will keep my remarks brief in order for committee members to have time for questions.

Today, the committee is studying and voting on my office's annual appropriation, which is \$29.2 million. This represents the salaries of approximately 339 indeterminate positions. Combined with our statutory authority, which funds all other expenditures under the Canada Elections Act, our 2016-17 main estimates total \$98.5 million.

During this fiscal year, Elections Canada will continue to wrap up the 42nd general election. Two of our major tasks are to audit the financial returns of political entities and issue reimbursements of

election expenses, as well as to complete a series of post-election reports.

The agency is currently processing the financial returns of candidates, while political party returns for the general election are due on June 20. Despite the high number of candidates who registered for the election—more than 1,800 in total—we remain confident that we will be able to complete the audits in accordance with our service standards. This means audits will be completed before August 19 on all returns that are eligible for a reimbursement, that were filed using the electronic financial returns software within the original four-month deadline, and that contain no errors requiring an amendment. The remaining audits will be completed in the 12 months thereafter.

As members are aware, my first report on the conduct of the 42nd general election was tabled by the Speaker of the House and referred to this committee on February 5. This report is a factual and chronological description of key events during the election.

My second report, to be published this summer, will present a more in-depth retrospective of the election. Informed by a number of surveys, studies and post-mortems, it will provide a review of the election experiences of electors and political entities. It will also include the findings from the independent audit of poll worker performance and Elections Canada's response.

The conclusions and lessons learned in the retrospective report will act as a bridge to recommendations for legislative changes. I will be recommending specific changes to improve the administration of the Canada Elections Act in a report early this fall.

• (1105)

[*English*]

While wrapping up the election, we are also developing a new strategic plan to guide the agency forward based on our post-election studies and stakeholder feedback. The plan's core focus is on modernizing the electoral process to make it simpler, more effective, and more convenient and flexible for voters, while also preserving the integrity of the process.

With a majority government in place, as well as a fixed election date of October 21, 2019, there is an opportunity now to bring the electoral process, currently anchored in the 19th century, in line with contemporary Canadian expectations. My office is committed to ensuring that our services better align with those expectations in the 43rd general election. A key focus of the agency's plan is to modernize voting services by introducing technology at advance and election day polls and for voting at returning offices and by mail.

We can carry out some aspects of modernization under the current legal framework, but other aspects may require legislative changes. For example, currently electors can only vote at their designated table within a polling station. To create a more fluid and simpler process, I will be recommending legislative amendments that reorganize the duties and functions of various poll workers, enabling electors to vote at any table in their polling place. I intend to engage the committee as we advance on this initiative.

In moving forward with our plans, we remain mindful that Parliament may undertake a review of the electoral system. We will ensure that any new processes we develop will be able to accommodate any legislative changes that result from such a review. In this light, another important element of our strategic plan is to support parliamentarians with technical advice during this process as required.

I look forward to providing committee members with more detailed information on Elections Canada's plans for electoral services modernization at our informal meeting on May 3.

I want to thank you, again, Mr. Chair, for inviting me to discuss the 2016-17 main estimates for my office. My colleagues and I are happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Just to give you a pre-warning, we may have to reschedule your other presentation again, but we'll talk about that later.

I welcome to the committee Mr. Mark Strahl and Rémi Massé, and two Yukoners sitting at the back.

We'll go, for the first round of questioning, to David Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Is there any proposed spending in the office's main estimates that has been put on hold, or that hinges on potential electoral reform outcomes?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: There is not at this point in time. As I was trying to convey, we are proceeding with our efforts to make proposals for modernizing services at this point, while keeping an eye on potential reforms that may shape up in the future.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: You were talking about changes on election day, little things such as being able to vote at any table. What are the logistical impacts, and are there any negative consequences you can see of that, or how would it work?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Basically it flows from the idea that tasks would be specialized at the poll rather than generalized. Right now our process makes it such that an elector can show up at the poll and face a line up of 20 people ahead of them, while all the other tables

in the gymnasium are free. We want to change that. We need to break that model. We want to allow electors to pick whichever table is free to go to cast their ballot.

Again, the results would be provided by location—by poll site, rather than poll by poll.

● (1110)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Does that increase the risk of people voting twice, or that kind of thing, whereby somebody can go to multiple tables and not be caught?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: No, it would be under supervision as usual. Again, we will be proposing to have electronic scans to monitor electors as they go through the process.

It's a process that's used at municipal elections pretty much across the country, and also in some provinces; notably, New Brunswick has used a similar model for a long time now.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: As we remember, in the last Parliament there was a major change in electoral law called The Fair Elections Act. Can you talk about the impact of it on fund-raising for the election over the last while?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: On fund-raising...?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Well, it changed the rules around fund-raising in relation to Elections Canada, about when an expense is reportable and so forth. Can you talk about the impact of that act, the positives and the negatives that we saw in the election?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: It's a bit early to say. As I'm sure you know, spending limits were adjusted. Contribution amounts were also adjusted slightly to reflect inflation, plus an additional 5%. There were also changes that allow borrowing for candidates' local campaigns, as well as changes regarding an initial contribution of I believe \$5,000 to bring to your campaign.

It's too early for us to have done any analysis. We are just getting the returns as we speak. Within a year I should be able to report on the systemic aspect of the new regime.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: You said you had a number of suggestions coming. When will we be seeing those?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Well, we are to talk at an upcoming meeting on I believe May 3—that may change, if I understood the chair correctly—and we will get into more details then on the specific concepts of modernization. You will also see some of it through the recommendations for legislative changes that will be tabled early in the fall.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Okay.

Now, one of the changes we saw was the removal of the voter identification card as a valid piece of identification. What kind of impact did that have, if any? What did you see?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: We have not completed our analysis at this point in time. We're still in the process of looking into that. If you look at the labour force survey that was conducted by Statistics Canada, you will see that among the reasons for people not voting, it looks like voter ID was a barrier for 170,000 people who claimed that not being able to prove their ID or address was an issue for them, and therefore they did not vote.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: That's 170,000?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes, 172,000, according to that survey.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: That's a pretty big number.

There is currently no federal identification that meets the federal election requirements, is that correct?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Correct. There is no national ID card of any sort that meets the requirements of the Elections Act.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I'll share my time with Ms. Vandenbeld.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP)): You have three minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): I'd like to follow up on the voter education. I know that in the Fair Elections Act there was a lot of discussion about the role of Elections Canada in doing voter education and promoting voting. I know that Elections Canada in past has been very involved in, for instance, voter education programs for youth votes, mock elections, and things like that.

In program expenditures, is there still an amount for this kind of voter education?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: There is still an amount for not voter education but citizen education. Our mandate now is restricted to non-voters, those who are under the voting age. We do work with schools across the country and various groups to reach out to those who are not yet at voting age.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Do you think that inability to do voter education of those who are eligible voters might have had an impact on, for instance, these 175,000 people who didn't have the proper ID, or others who may have tried to vote and not been able to or who maybe not voted?

• (1115)

Mr. Marc Mayrand: I think we need to distinguish that during an election we focus exclusively on the mechanics of voting—where, when, and how to vote or to be a candidate. In that regard, we try to reach out with special means for groups who face barriers, be they youth or aboriginals, for example. For various groups that we have identified, we have special programs to better reach them.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Canada's voter education model was always a model in the world as well. I know that Elections Canada has always been a member of International IDEA, which of course maintains a technological knowledge network called ACE, electoral practitioners around the world. Can you tell me whether or not we have continued to the same extent, or if our participation in these international networks has gone up or down?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: We're still a very active member of IDEA—we're on the steering committee there—as well as with ACE. We are still very involved with those two organizations, and work closely with them from time to time.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Christopherson): Thank you. The time has expired.

There's no more time for further questions in this round.

Mr. Reid, you now have the floor, sir.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): I'd like to return to something you mentioned, Mr. Mayrand, in your response to one of Mr. Graham's questions. You said that a survey had been done that indicated that 172,000 people had some problems with regard to ID. I'm not aware of that. I'm assuming this is...or I'm actually not assuming anything on where it came from, but if it's not a public document now, and you're in possession of it, would you be able to present it to us?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: It is a public document. It was released in February.

Mr. Scott Reid: Was it released by you?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: No, it was StatsCan.

Mr. Scott Reid: Would we find it on their website?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: It is the Labour Force Survey. I will be happy to provide it to all members after the session, no problem.

Mr. Scott Reid: Giving it to the clerk would do the trick... Then she will get it to us.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes, that's no problem.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

I wanted to turn to your report on plans and priorities, page 7. Under the topic of risk analysis, you discuss two things that are of considerable interest to me, as they relate to the electoral reform issue, changes to the voting system. Of course, my party has consistently advocated holding a referendum on this subject. You indicate that you are not currently able to hold a referendum, and that you would require a minimum of six months to do so.

Is it the case that, additionally, legislative changes would be required? I mention this now because my impression, Mr. Mayrand, is that the government is trying to run out the clock so it can say, "Oh, we have this promise; we must change the electoral system, but we are out of time for a referendum." I want to make sure that no impediments that they can throw out are available to them as excuses—suddenly to discover, "Oh, if only we had thought of this".

In addition to the six months that you mention would be required for the administration of a referendum, are there any other impediments that you would face? For example, is there a need to change our referendum legislation, that sort of thing?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: The Referendum Act is outdated. It has not been changed since 1992, which was the last time we had a national referendum. In that regard, it is very much out of sync with the Elections Act, particularly around political financing. For example, unions and corporations could contribute to referendum committees. I think that may come as a shock. There is no limit on contributions by any entities. Again, that may come as a shock, but the legislation still stands.

Is it possible to conduct a referendum under the current legislation? It is possible. It would be at times awkward, but it is possible. It is feasible. My preference would be to see it amended, updated, but again, it would not be impossible to carry out one. The important thing for us is that we get enough of a heads-up so that we can prepare properly.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right. After that, it would take you six months. Is that your estimation?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: All right. If you don't mind my pursuing this, just to be absolutely clear.... You said six months. Does that mean six months minimum, or does that mean that if we have six months to the day we could handle it?

• (1120)

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Six months is an absolute minimum. Corporate memory is loose now, after more than 25 years. Not many people have run a referendum in our organization, so there is a lot of work to do. We also need to establish a new regulation. I think you saw a version a few years back. It is a substantive effort to be made. We need a new tariff, and we also need to establish recruitment programs for workers.

Mr. Scott Reid: In this case, the regulation will be designed by you, not by us. Is that correct?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: That is correct. We will be tabling the proposed regulation before the House. Normally, this committee will review it and be able to make suggestions for amendments.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right. I am assuming that you are capable of moving in the initial direction without our formal authorization. May I encourage you to try to do as much of that as you can? While this is a contingency that the government has not indicated it favours, they have also been very careful, if you look at the minister's comments, never to actually say it is absolutely, 100% ruled out. I would like to ensure that if they decide to do it—or if they want to pretend that they are willing to do it—they have no option but to actually follow through. I would strongly recommend that any updates required from your end be done so as not to let yourself become the reason why we are not having one, at least on paper.

We have two minutes left, and I wanted to ask you about potential changes to the electoral system. Another concern I've had is that the government will run out the clock to the point where the only changes to the electoral system that are still possible prior to the 2019 election are ones that involve no redistribution, and of course both MMP and STV would require a redistribution.

The question is, how long would it take to engage the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act? I assume an amendment would be required to allow it to happen out of the normal sequence, but how long would the actual process take? Then we can figure out, from

our end, how much time is required to amend the legislation, before that time, in order to allow the 2019 deadline to be met.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: You're correct, it would need legislation for it to happen. Again, it's difficult because I'm not sure what's on the table, but the bare minimum for a standard redistribution is 10 months. That's from the set-up of the commission until they finalize their report for the distribution.

Mr. Scott Reid: There's a period after that, is there not as well?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: There are another seven months after that for implementing. You need to redesign all the maps across each riding and reorganize the poll divisions to reflect the new riding boundaries.

Mr. Scott Reid: Could I ask you to just submit to us some more detailed kinds of timelines, and what the minimums are there? I believe that's the sort of thing that needs to be done in writing. That would be very helpful to us or the committee that is to be set up—the special committee—to guide us in deliberations.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Now we'll go to Mr. Christopherson, and thank you for chairing.

Mr. David Christopherson: That's fine. I was looking forward to recognizing myself and running over here and taking the seat. That would have been a first. After 30 years, you're always looking for firsts.

Thank you so much. It's good to see you all again. I am absolutely thrilled to be here to be part of the review of this with you.

There are a couple of things I just want to clear up. You mentioned in your opening comments two of your major tasks, one of which is auditing the financial returns of political entities and issuing reimbursements of election expenses. Correct me if my memory is wrong, but it seems to me that we still have on the books the rule that federal parties submit to you the expenses for which they expect reimbursement and they don't have to provide a receipt. Is that still the regime?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Correct.

Mr. David Christopherson: Let's be clear. Like everybody else, in my own return, I have to give you the receipts, and I have to give you anything you ask for, but the federal parties, where there is how much money in total—a rough calculation...?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: In terms of reimbursement?

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, to the federal parties.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: It would be over \$60 million.

Mr. David Christopherson: Sixty million dollars goes back to our respective political parties—no receipts required.

Thank you to the previous government for not changing this.

You still can't compel witnesses, too. Remember, we had a problem around that, and you still can't do that. When you're trying to suss out whether things are legitimate or not, you still don't have the power to force someone to testify. Is that correct?

• (1125)

Mr. Marc Mayrand: The commissioner cannot compel witnesses.

Mr. David Christopherson: I use these points deliberately as a segue into my next question.

Chair, I'm going to ask your indulgence to at least allow me to place the question, but I accept and respect the fact that no government member has to answer. I think I'm entitled to at least ask the question, through you. I hope you will allow it.

With that, and I'm not trying to put any colleagues on the spot, is there a government member who can help the rest of us understand what the government's thinking is around the reforms? The government has said that it's going to strike a special legislative committee to deal with this, and yet Monsieur Mayrand comes in after every election. This would now be my fifth time going through this process. And there's going to be a whole host of changes, and I guarantee you, it's a lot of work. Indeed, Chair, we will need to set up a lot of time for this if we're going to be the ones who do it. It's a very complex procedure. It's fun because we all tend to work together to try to find fairness, as opposed to winning an argument, but it's still a lot of work.

My question for the government members is, given that this work is going to come, and my experience tells me that's a very all-inclusive, encompassing process, how does that link up with the government's plan to do a complete revamp of the whole electoral system?

We have two initiatives happening. One clearly comes here, but how does this special committee link into this work, and is it going to link in? We don't want to do the same thing in two different places, I wouldn't think. That wouldn't get us anywhere. Where's it going to go? Is it going to reside with us? However, that doesn't make sense to me from a common-sense point of view. If the government is going to set up a special committee to look at everything, it seems to me that we, as the procedure and House affairs committee, might want to consider handing this off to them, if they're willing to accept it, if they're going to become the experts in this Parliament on this.

I have those those kinds of general questions, Chair. I put them out there, and I respect that the government members are under no obligation to answer, but if they can provide any guidance or enlightenment, that would be helpful.

The Chair: Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): I simply want to thank Mr. Christopherson for his comments, and I know that we're deviating from the main purpose of our witnesses being here today—

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes and no.

Mr. Arnold Chan: The point is well taken. We'll take it under advisement. I'll bring it up your concerns with the Minister of Democratic Institutions. I think they're legitimate.

Mr. David Christopherson: Fair enough. That's fine. I accept that. I appreciate your responding to me.

I also wanted to tie in, with whatever time I have left, to where Mr. Reid was going. It may not be for the same purpose, but I think the process that we're looking for is the same.

Mr. Reid has been clear. They're pushing for the referendum. He was upfront about that. I'm upfront about the fact that we believe big time in proportional representation. We know the government has a favoured model, but they're going to have a bit of a problem because the whole country knows that it would skew the system in their favour, and being fair-minded folks, they wouldn't want to be stuck with that label.

I still think there's hope for proportional representation. I truly do. Is there enough time, though, for us to do a complete revamp?

We'll leave the referendum piece out for now because Mr. Reid has asked some questions on that.

By the way, Chair, a few Parliaments ago there were some of us here who spent the better part of a couple of years going through the Referendum Act and bringing in experts. I'm just saying there's a whole baseline of fairly accurate in-depth information from constitutional experts, and there are Mr. Mayrand's thoughts, and his people's thoughts.

The work is there, Chair, if we end up going down that road, but is there enough time right now for us to revamp the whole system, completely redesign it, and have it ready for the next election?

What we're looking for obviously, and I'm not trying to trap you—I wouldn't dream of trying—is the trigger point. Once we get past a certain point it's not going to be practical. We share the concerns of Mr. Reid.

What would be the time needed to do a complete revamp, such as you've heard some of us talking about, in your best estimation, sir?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Well, I'll put it to the committee that legislation enacting the reform should be there at least 24 months before the election. There are all sorts of hypotheses. I don't know what exactly the reform will be, but if it involves a redistribution exercise, which PR does by definition, this is a significant undertaking. The timelines have already been cut in previous legislation. I don't know that they can be reduced any more. In fact, the commission asked for an extension in the last redistribution exercise.

It's not something that can be compressed easily unless, again, you redesign the whole redistribution process, but that's another—

•(1130)

Mr. David Christopherson: That speaks to the front end, and at the back end, you're saying, "All that work needs to be done. Push the button. You need two years."

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes, once you have the redistribution, you would need six to seven months to implement the new maps, the new districts, and then we would need to get ready for the election. We would need to prepare all the training. We would also need to build the systems that would support this new regime.

Mr. David Christopherson: There may be a major public education component that would have to be built in too.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Of course. Absolutely. We can assume that there would be a need for major public education.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Vandenbeld.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: To follow up on my previous question about voter education, when we look at the regular program expenditures, we're talking about \$29 million in-between elections. That does not include public awareness campaigns to encourage people to vote if they're over the age of 18 and are eligible voters, even though Canada is part of International IDEA, which actually provides best practices to other countries on exactly how to do that very thing.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: That's correct. Elections Canada is, in fact, the only body in the world that I know of that cannot promote democracy within the country.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much for that clarification.

You say you're in the process now of auditing the financial returns of political parties and candidates. However, once that audit is complete, if you find there are potential breaches, the ability to investigate breaches of the Canada Elections Act was moved from the commissioner of Canada elections, which reports through you to Parliament—

Mr. Marc Mayrand: No.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: —or to Parliament directly—

Mr. Marc Mayrand: No.

I'll let you finish.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: No?

Okay, so it was moved from that to the office of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

What impact do you think that is going to have on the ability for enforcement, if there are breaches of the Elections Act?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Again, just to be clear, the commissioner's office was moved from Elections Canada to the DPP office. It is reporting through the DPP and through the Attorney General. It's not an office of Parliament, so it doesn't report directly to Parliament. That's one thing.

The other thing is that in terms of the effectiveness, the commissioner is still independent and has the resources to carry out investigations. I think one of the things he has repeatedly said is

that it would considerably make investigations more effective and more timely if he had the power to compel witnesses, with full respect and due respect for the Charter of Rights, of course, as it exists for the federal bodies that do have the power to compel.

In future recommendations to this Parliament, we will go back and look at some of the offences and some of the mechanisms to ensure compliance. One of the considerations is that there are many, many offences that are technical and do not warrant the full load of a criminal investigation. I think that filing a return late by a month is an offence; I'm not sure it warrants a full-load investigation of that matter.

We're going to come back and propose some alternatives to enforcement mechanisms in due course.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I look forward to those recommendations. Thank you.

I didn't mention that I'm splitting my time with Ginette Petitpas Taylor.

[*Translation*]

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

Good morning, Mr. Mayrand.

Since I am a new parliamentarian, my questions may be very straightforward. I will put them to you.

I was wondering what the biggest challenges were for your organization during the latest election. I am well aware that you will publish another report in a few months, but perhaps you could give me a general overview of the challenges you faced.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: I identified two major risks prior to the election.

The first one had to do with technology, as we made many technological changes during the last election. That risk was managed well, and there were no material consequences on the election. The other risk had to do with potential confusion among voters given the many changes made to the Elections Act and numerous public debates that I feel may have created confusion. I am talking about identification rules, among other things. Generally speaking, I think we managed to use our education and advertising programs to inform the electors, but this remains a challenge. We have a complex identification system where 44 different pieces of identification can be used, as well as combinations thereof. People are often surprised that a passport is not enough to be able to vote in Canada. So there is still some confusion, but things went fairly well, generally speaking. The electors understood the situation.

As I mentioned, according to the preliminary studies—and we have not yet completed our analyses—it is clear that some groups of voters are more affected. I am thinking of young people, among others. The Statistics Canada survey seems to indicate that mostly young people had difficulty meeting the requirements in terms of identification and proof of address. Aboriginals also had problems with that. Therefore, some groups are more affected than the rest of Canadians.

•(1135)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: That was actually my second question.

I was wondering whether the 170,000 individuals who said they were unable to vote belonged to an ethnic group or another particular group. The region where those people live is also a consideration. Have any surveys been done on that?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: No, the survey does not make it possible to identify geographical differences or even groups. The only group that is really identified more reliably is that of young people aged 18 to 24. The survey also indicated that a high proportion of aboriginals were affected, but the number of individuals surveyed creates a fairly significant margin or error. So this should be taken with a grain of salt. According to our empirical evidence, for example, voting is a challenge for aboriginals. They often simply have no address. Those who live on reserves just don't have an address. They often have very few documents that meet the legal identification requirements. So that is still a challenge, and that is why we worked with the AFN and band chiefs from across the country to try to facilitate the application of those rules.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Reid, for a five-minute round.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Mayrand, I was just trying to do some mathematics relating to the timeline for a new voting system, assuming that we're looking at a voting system that involves triggering the redistribution process, which of course means every system other than preferential ballots in single-member districts.

The election is to take place near the end of October 2019. Assuming the writ consumes a month, we go back to September 2019. You mentioned training. How long would training be? You said the time; was it one month?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Most of the training for poll workers happens during the campaign month.

Mr. Scott Reid: Is it during that month? You don't have to add that on, then.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes, but the returning officers will have a significant learning curve to go through, and their key staff also. That kind of training takes place normally in the year—six or seven months prior to the writ's being issued.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right.

We would be looking under STV at ridings that are about four or five times the size—that's typical of STV, four- or five-member ridings—that they are now. If it's MMP, they'd probably be twice the size they are now. That gives a rough idea.

Okay, so we're not sure, but it would be some amount of time. I said about a month. Maybe that's unreasonably short.

For implementation, you indicated it would take six months. I'm going backwards: September, August.... Now we're at February 2019. Seventeen months of design puts it back to, I think, about October—maybe it's November—of 2016. The legislation that we need to set up the new system, including a change to the

redistribution act, I'm assuming would take six months. Thus, we're now back to the end of the spring of 2017.

You can see what I'm trying to do: I'm trying to figure out when we have to have some kind of proposal moving forward to make sure it can actually happen, or else we have only one possible outcome, which is a preferential ballot in a single-member district.

Have I missed anything? Does that cover all the different things that have to be accomplished in order to actually have an STV or an MMP in place for 2019?

•(1140)

Mr. Marc Mayrand: The main aspect for us is getting the legislation in place, which allows us to determine what sort of operating system needs to be built or rearranged, depending on the scope of the changes. After that, you need to develop the whole training and all the instructions and procedures—and I should say, for the returning officers and their staff and for poll workers, but also, I believe, for candidates and campaigns; there will be quite a few changes we need to look at there also.

As it goes on, this would be done in parallel, possibly, with a redistribution taking place. There are some elements, subject to what exactly the reform is, that could be started a little bit before the redistribution is completed.

Mr. Scott Reid: For example, the instructions on how one votes under a list system could be designed. You don't need to know.... That would be an example.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes. In addition, there's also the whole technology aspect. If we move to a system like the one you just described, you need to bring tabulators to the polls; you will need to bring very different technology. In fact, there's very little technology, as we speak, at the poll.

Those machines have to be procured, of course, and they have to be tested, they have to be set up, they have to be verified to make sure they work on polling day and are accurate and reliable. And we need to have contingency plans, if a machine should fail. There are all sorts of minutiae that we need to look at.

Mr. Scott Reid: Just to be clear as to what you're referring to, is that for STV, or is it for MMP? You mentioned the tabulation.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: I would say both. The systems are different, but both would require technology at the polls to compute the results. I'm assuming that Canadians and candidates will want the results as quickly as possible. There are countries in which you'll wait for a few weeks to get the results. I assume that this is not a standard for Canada.

Mr. Scott Reid: In Australia, in their senate elections, for example, you pack yourself a lunch, if you're going in to be a ballot counter.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Exactly. Again, that's another interesting aspect that we would need to look at, subject to the type of reform that takes place.

Australia is a good example: ballots have to be brought back to counting centres. We don't have that in Canada. Ballots are counted at the polls where the vote took place. Again, there's a delay. Just as an example, getting back some ballot boxes from Nunavut took over three weeks this time around. It was not general in that riding, but, again, because of weather and all sorts of circumstances, they were delayed. That's the sort of thing that we, at Elections Canada, need to be concerned about and find the best way to deal with those kinds of issues. That explained a bit the time that's required to assess the best process possible and be ready to implement it.

The Chair: We'll move on to Ms. Sahota, who is sharing with Mr. Chan.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): I just want to get into more detail about the technology that you're talking about. It's very interesting to me. This committee has been talking a lot about modernizing Parliament. We also need to modernize our electoral system, that's for sure. I heard from a lot of people on my campaign who had perhaps come from other countries in the past, and found our system to be very archaic, very old-fashioned. At times I said that perhaps it was due to concerns about voter fraud or whatnot, and they hadn't perfected a system that worked at this point.

What are the systems that you allude to in your report here, and how can these make our system more effective, more modern, and easier for the average voter? Maybe we could perhaps get more people out to the polls if it were simplified.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: We need to expand electronic services across the board—including for candidates, honestly. I don't see any reason in this day and age that a candidate cannot file their campaign return electronically. I think that should be a given, but it's not yet, unfortunately.

In terms of the polls—and we'll have further discussion on these things—we certainly would look to bring what we call “live lists” at the polls. You have the electronic lists available at the polls. That means that someone who is showing up at the poll shows a voter ID card. The card is scanned, their name is struck out of the list immediately, and automatically it's valid across the country, so that person cannot show up somewhere else later during the day. As a result of that, they get their ballot. We could consider entering them into a tabulator, so, again, the results would be instant on election night. Mind you, it doesn't take very long, as we speak, in our current system.

The other thing that we need to look at is automating procedures. If you have voted at an advance poll, you know that electors, when they show up, have to prove their ID, etc. Then their name has to be searched in a big paper document, and they have to enter the name and address and they have to sign. There's no reason in this day and age that it still needs to happen this way. We would be looking at automation. There are good reasons that controls are in place: to

ensure that the vote is reliable. However, but I think there are big opportunities for automation and better service at the polls.

We need to reduced lineups. I think that was an issue at advance polls because more and more Canadians went to vote at advance polls. We need to find ways of alleviating the procedural burden that is in place at advance polls.

● (1145)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What challenges have you faced when trying to implement this new technology? I'm surprised in this last election we didn't update our system.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Well, a simple thing like getting rid of the register of electors at advance polls needs a change to the act. This is the level of prescription that exists in the legislation. It's the act that requires the elector to sign the register at advance polls. Automation there cannot take place without some sorts of amendments.

We also need to be able to reorganize the work at the poll. Currently the model is anchored on a ballot box, and two officers controlling that ballot box at all times. The officer cannot move around, even though it's busier next door, and electors cannot move around. Even though all the other tables are free, they still have to wait for their turn. I think we can reorganize the work differently so that we specialize tasks, which would allow more flexibility for electors to move around, and also more flexibility for officials to go where the bulk of the work is happening during the day. Again, at advance polls, I think the most telling image we have is of people all lined up at a single table. We need to get rid of that image, hopefully for the 43rd election.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: When was the last time the act was amended?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: In 2010 with Bill C-23—

Mr. Hughes St-Pierre (Chief Financial and Planning Officer, Integrated Services, Policy and Public Affairs, Elections Canada): In 2014.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Oh, sorry. Yes, it was 2014.

The act has been repeatedly amended, but without a single focus or prism of modernization in those reviews. It was often in reaction to particular issues that emerged and fixing that issue without taking a step back and saying, “Well, let's rethink the service model here”.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Continuing with that thought about technology in the polling stations, I would submit that in my riding certainly, many of the people who are available to work on elections perhaps haven't had experience with technology. They're perhaps retired, or part-time workers who aren't as fluent in the language of technology. Would we be looking at hiring the same...?

I guess my concern would be this. Would you not need permanent or contract employees for this? I just see that in the attempt to make it more efficient, there could be disastrous results if there were not someone there who could handle the problem.

• (1150)

Mr. Marc Mayrand: I wouldn't minimize the change management aspect in this and the impact on the workforce. We would need to have expert resources to support the technology on the premises. It will be costly the first few times we run this model, but will ease after a while.

There are ways of designing technology that's so user-friendly you don't need to be an expert. Filling in a form electronically can be easier than filling it in on paper, honestly.

But these are fair considerations that we will have in mind as we go forward.

Mr. Mark Strahl: There was another concern I had during the election. You mentioned your work with the AFN. Obviously we all applaud the work to get more people out to the polls no matter where they're from. The AFN took a very aggressive political stance at their highest levels in a kind of "anyone but Conservative" perspective. That was made known by the National Chief, etc.

My question is this. When you are working with an organization, that is a political organization, to increase voter turnout, how do you protect the integrity of Elections Canada from any allegation or perception that it would advantage one political entity over another?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: There are a few things here. We did work with some 50 organizations during this election, including, yes, the AFN. With each of the organizations, all the contractual arrangements required that they be independent and impartial during the election. Yes, their members could have very different political views, like any organization, but the organization itself had no particular leaning.

The other thing is that with those organizations, not necessarily trying.... I don't want to take responsibility for turnout. But they work to make sure that electors, Canadians, whatever their conditions are, have the information they need if they wish to vote. There are certain groups that are less likely to be registered, so we make efforts to help those groups around registration. Some groups face challenges with identification, so we make sure they know what their options are if they show up at the poll.

The AFN was basically maintaining a call centre to chiefs across the country, informing them of the tools available to inform their people about how, where, and when to vote.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I have one final question. In your remarks you mentioned that we could "bring the electoral process, currently anchored in the 19th century, in line with contemporary Canadian expectations." I guess my question is, how do you make the determination as to what contemporary Canadian expectations are?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: In our next report, I think you will see what Canadians have been telling us about the electoral process.

We already can see that Canadians increasingly want to move when and where they are ready. We've seen over the last few decades a significant increase of voter turnout at advance polls. This was

initially set up as an exception, and now it's becoming increasingly the norm. This time around, 25% of all Canadian voters showed up at advance polls. That's telling us something. I cannot keep the same system at advance polls, which is billed as an exception, when an increasing bulk of electors want to use that option. Similarly, we had a 117% increase in voting by mail—in this day and age, yes. This is a channel that Canadians want to use, so I have to make sure that the channel works effectively in that regard. Canadians are increasingly upset—I mentioned it a few times now already—when they show up at the gymnasium and have to wait in line while all the other tables are free. Again, it adds up very quickly. We estimate that serving an electorate at an advance poll takes roughly 10 to 15 minutes. If you have 10 people ahead of you, and you're the eleventh, imagine the time it takes. If you see three or four tables that are free, why can't you go to them? If I show up at any store—Walmart in this country—I'll go to the checkout that is available. Why can I not do that? That's my experience as a citizen, as a consumer; I can go where I can get the fastest service.

Those expectations will be articulated better by Canadians themselves through the various studies that we've carried out in the last several months. You will be able to see them and all the background documentation there sometime in June, I hope.

• (1155)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you.

The Chair: We're running short of time.

Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Let me simply thank you, Mr. Mayrand, and your staff for your professionalism.

I really have no substantive questions with respect to the main estimates.

I want to get back to some of the issues that Mr. Reid was raising. I share a lot of his concerns, frankly, with respect to my party and our government's aggressive timetable for potential electoral reform, in particular, our commitment to ending the first-past-the-post system by 2019. It gets back to the beginning of your earlier comments about the strategic planning process for your organization, and whether you have modelled out all of the potential scenarios and can give this committee a sense of the potential estimated costs, depending ultimately on what Parliament decides with respect to an electoral reform model that will be advanced. You've given us a sense of some of the timelines but also the necessary resources, particularly in terms of sufficient fiscal appropriation, to deal with all of these potential scenarios. Are you already thinking about that within your organization, within your strategic planning process, to deal with that? I suspect that we're talking about some potentially significant sums of money.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes, especially the investment in technology that's likely to be needed to support any system reform. We are in the very early stages of our strategic plan. It hasn't been cast out fully yet. We have a sense of where we want to go, but we want to engage this committee and other political parties on our direction in modernizing services. As we progress, we will be costing those initiatives.

As for the reform itself, at this point in time I don't have enough information to be able to cost anything.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Would it be potentially useful to have any or some of the technological reforms that you're discussing, for example, tested in a by-election context? It would be a more prescribed test case. Are there any recommendations that you could make to this committee in terms of considerations that we could test?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: This is something we hope to be able to discuss a bit with you on May 3. One thing we would like to do, and traditionally have always done, is test new systems before we distribute them across a general election. We would be testing, either in a laboratory or during a by-election, the systems, the procedures, the training—everything—to make sure that it's as smooth as possible on election day. If we have reservations as a result of a test, we would not proceed during a general election. We would not put the election at risk, that's for sure.

The short answer is yes, we will be planning tests as we progress. In some cases, I may even need to come to this committee for formal approval, because whenever the tests involve changes to the act, I would need the approval of this committee—and the Senate, in fact—before proceeding with what we call a “pilot”. We would, then, bring a business case and a good description of what the test is about and what it's trying to measure.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I think it would be very useful to committee members—and frankly to both Houses of Parliament an opportunity—to have a sense of particularly the issues you want to prescribe, so that we can give you the necessary authority in advance.

We certainly on the government side would be amenable to recommendations that you see, particularly as a result of any deficiencies in the most recent general election, could be addressed. We would be very amenable to recommendations coming from your office.

• (1200)

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson, if you can—

Mr. David Christopherson: I see the clock. I will keep this brief.

How obscene it is, though, that changes to our electoral system have to be approved by the place where they knock on one door once for life.

Speaking to the vote, the actual estimates—the reason you're here—does the \$29.2 million you're seeking support for in vote 1 in the main estimates speak to your operational budget? Is that correct—it's not your election budget?

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe you are actually one of the few entities in government with access to unlimited money during

the course of an election. If you need to spend it, you're accountable for it, but you have the authority to spend it. Do I have it right, sir?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: You're correct, and it's both during an election and in preparation for an election, even before the writ is issued.

The \$29.2 million is strictly for salaries of indeterminate staff at Elections Canada. All other expenses of Elections Canada are statutory or are authorized by legislation.

Mr. David Christopherson: The last thing I'll say, Mr. Chair, is that I am really looking forward to finally getting a chance to unravel the damage done by the “Unfair Elections Act”, and we're going to have some great discussions around voter identification cards going forward—trust me.

The Chair: We'll go to the vote now.

CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$29,212,735

(Vote 1 agreed to)

The Chair: Shall I report the vote on the main estimates, less the amount granted in interim supply, to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mayrand, for the great job you do during elections. It's unbiased and very professional. We certainly appreciate it, and I think Canadians appreciate it. We have confidence that it's done very professionally and that their vote counts that way.

Thank you very much.

We'll let you know when we may have rescheduled your next meeting to. We're discussing that later today, actually.

We'll break for a couple of minutes.

If the new witnesses could come to the table, that would be great.

• (1200)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1205)

The Chair: We're ready to start.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, I'm just wondering whether this meeting is being televised or not? It doesn't say it on the agenda, so I wanted to clarify that.

The Chair: No, it's not.

Mr. Scott Reid: Let me just ask that at the end of this meeting we discuss the idea of televising these meetings any time we have the ability to do so. We're frequently in the room where broadcasting takes place, and it makes sense.

The Chair: I'd like to welcome our witnesses for our study to make Parliament more efficient, more inclusive of everyone representing Canada, and more family-friendly and friendly to the employees and the MPs, so that it's best for everyone's family and people who have inclusivity challenges. Hopefully you'll be helping us with that.

Our witnesses today, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), for our study of initiatives toward a family-friendly House are Thomas Shannon, president of Local 232 of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union of Canada, and Mélisa Ferreira and Tara Hogeterp, representatives of Local 232. Then, from the Public Service Alliance of Canada we have Roger Thompson, president of Local 70390 and, for moral support, Jim McDonald, labour relations officer from the Union of National Employees.

We'll start with opening statements and after that we'll have rounds of seven minutes of questioning, which includes both the questions and the answers. We'll get as much in as we can.

Let us start with Mr. Shannon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Shannon (President, Local 232, United Food and Commercial Workers Union Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for this invitation. I am happy to be appearing before you today on behalf of the union that represents all the workers of the New Democratic Party here, on Parliament Hill, and in ridings.

[*English*]

We have a collective agreement with the NDP caucus that provides fair pay and flexible working hours.

I have with me today two mothers who have worked on the Hill and in the constituency for parliamentarians, and so from their experience they should be able to inform the committee's study of initiatives towards a family-friendly House of Commons.

[*Translation*]

I will now yield the floor to Tara Hogeterp.

[*English*]

Ms. Tara Hogeterp (Representative, Local 232, United Food and Commercial Workers Union Canada): Hi. My name is Tara Hogeterp. I've worked on the Hill since 2003, and in that time I've had two children. I was very grateful to have the ability to take a full year of maternity leave and be able to return to the Hill and continue my career.

Finding child care in Ottawa can be very challenging, and I appreciated having the ability to request additional leave without pay to coincide with the availability of a child care space. Both of my children attended day cares off the Hill and the Children on the Hill Day Care. The Hill day care does not accommodate children under 18 months, and therefore alternative child care is needed, if and when a spot becomes available, for your child.

Most day cares and after school programs in the Ottawa area have set pickup and drop-off times. Having working hours that allow me to drop off and pick up my child at the end of the day is crucial.

My colleague, Mélisa, will now share her experience.

•(1210)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mélisa Ferreira (Representative, Local 232, United Food and Commercial Workers Union Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have been working on the Hill since 2011. From 2011 to 2015, I worked in a constituency office and, in this new Parliament, I have been working in Ottawa. My husband also works at the House of Commons. In 2013, we had twins. I went on maternity leave for a year, and then I returned to work at an MP's constituency office.

A flexible schedule is a must in my case, since the daycare my children attend closes very early, at 4:30 p.m. On the other hand, committee activities often wrap up very late. For example, the member I work for sat on the Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying. The committee's schedule was very condensed, and meetings were held in the evening.

Parents who are both working on the Hill face major challenges. As young children are often sick, we have to miss work. The fact that we are protected by a collective agreement greatly contributes to our peace of mind. We know that we are not at risk of losing our job because we have to miss work regularly.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

President Thompson.

Mr. Roger Thompson (President, Local 70390, Public Service Alliance of Canada): Good afternoon. We thank you for having us here.

I'm the local president of the UNE-PSAC, representative of all UNE-PSAC members employed by the House of Commons and at parliamentary protective services, the PPS group, which includes approximately 450 employees in total.

We represent House of Commons employees under four separate bargaining units: the operations sector, which includes material handling, maintenance and trades, transportation, messenger services, printing and mailing services, and food services; postal services; reporting and text processing; and the scanners department.

I'm accompanied today by Jim McDonald, a UNE labour relations officer who is assigned to assist and represent all UNE members employed by the House of Commons, as well as the scanners who are employed by parliamentary protective services.

The Chair: Are there any other opening statements?

Okay, we'll go into questioning, starting with Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: My question is for Ms. Ferreira and Ms. Hogeterp.

I'm a former political staffer myself. I've heard from a number of staff that when they have kids, one of the things that is most important is predictability. For instance, we've been talking here in this committee about a compressed work week and potentially not having members sit on Fridays.

I have heard some of the staff saying that it would allow them a day of the week where they know that the member is not going to be dragging them to meetings, or running in the door urgently because there's a media request or something. They could then plan doctor's appointments for their kids, or the things that they need to do, on those Fridays. This would give more flexibility for parents who are on the Hill.

Has that been your experience? What would you think about that model?

Ms. Tara Hogeterp: I still have to pay for day care on a Friday, so I'm going to be at work on a Friday. It doesn't make that much difference. I tend to put those types of appointments during break weeks, and I have not found any difficulty with that kind of schedule.

The other option during the week is usually Wednesday mornings when there's a caucus meeting, because all the MPs in all parties are kind of off. So there's that opportunity as well. I wouldn't say having that Friday would make a huge difference to my situation, because quite often my MP isn't here on a Friday anyway, if she doesn't have duty, so it tends to be a quieter day already.

•(1215)

[Translation]

Ms. Mélisa Ferreira: As Tara was saying, we also have to consider our colleagues in the ridings who work on Fridays, in the evenings and on the weekends. The option of having Fridays off may slightly lighten the workload, but when MPs are in Ottawa, the pace is always fast and the hours are long. I cannot comment on this. However, I try to schedule my appointments during break weeks or after the MP leaves on Friday afternoons.

[English]

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: When I look at the political staff on the Hill, I often see that many of them are young and many of them are single. There are not that many who have families.

In my own experience I've seen a number of political staff who, as soon as they started families, actually left the work on the Hill and went to work in other fields where they had more predictable hours.

Do you think there's a form of self-selection amongst people who choose to work in this field, where people who do have young families are choosing not to because of the hours? Are there ways we might be able to alleviate that, to make it easier, so that people with young families would be more inclined to work on the Hill?

[Translation]

Ms. Mélisa Ferreira: I think this varies from one individual to the next.

Some people realize that it is difficult to balance work and family. I am lucky to have family members in the region, and my parents pick up the slack. My husband, who also works at the House of Commons, has flexibility that I don't have with my MP. Our schedule is actually planned out weeks in advance in terms of who is picking up the children and at what time, who is booking appointments, and so on.

It really depends on the person. I think it is possible to raise a young family while working in Parliament. We can be parliamentary assistants, MPs or legislative assistants on the Hill, but that requires a great deal of organization.

[English]

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: As you know, other parties' staff are not unionized. Do you think that has made a difference? Would it be more difficult? The bulk of the staff on the Hill is not represented by a union.

Mr. Thomas Shannon: Well, I think what is different about us—you're right—we are the only ones who are unionized. What that means is we have a collective agreement that we signed with the NDP caucus. It outlines flexible working hours and how much time you can take off.

It is a clear document that allows young mothers and young fathers to be able to look at it and say, "Okay, these are the hours that I must do. This is how I can be accommodated." They can sit down with the NDP caucus to make sure that young families...because we do have quite a few young families. We have young staff and I know both the other parties have young staff.

I think it makes a difference in that there is clarity, and you can plan for the future knowing that you're not going to lose your job over the fact that your child is sick. Things can be planned out. The big difference is the clear rules that we have outlined in negotiations with management.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: The experience that you have, both of you, may not be indicative for a lot of the people who are working on the Hill.

I'd actually like to put the same question to Mr. McDonald and Mr. Thompson about the staff who are not political staff, the staff you represent, and whether or not you think that eliminating Friday sittings, for instance, would have an impact on the staff?

Mr. Roger Thompson: Yes, we do, actually, because we have individuals in our collective agreement who are called SCI, which means seasonal certified indeterminate employees. Now, these employees are persons when they start off, and must work at least 700 hours in a calendar year to achieve employee status and qualify as an SCI, and get all the benefits.

We feel that if the sitting hours are cut down, it could be possible that an SCI employee could not achieve their threshold of 700 hours in two consecutive years. Then they would no longer be an SCI, and they would lose their status and all their benefits.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: If we were looking at a compressed work week, where we would still sit the same number of hours but then have more time also to be in our constituencies, that would not necessarily have an impact, because the number of hours of Parliament sitting would actually remain the same. It would just be compressed from Monday to Thursday.

Mr. Jim McDonald (Labour Relations Officer, Union of National Employees, Public Service Alliance of Canada): One of the things that's going to come up with a compressed work week is that your going to elongate the days, I presume. Then people are going to work longer days, which is going to impact both their family life and their work life. They'll be required to work an additional three or four hours every day in order to make up the day that's been compressed.

I now work a compressed week, but it can be very difficult for people with child care. Most child-care facilities operate during daylight hours only, and most of them want the children cleared out by five, or at the latest by six o'clock in the afternoon. If you're a younger family with younger kids who are in day care, that's where we would end up going.

The other issue, of course, is the additional cost to the employer through the collective agreement, because of overtime, shift premiums, and so on.

•(1220)

The Chair: Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to sit in on this committee today for this discussion.

Perhaps I have a unique perspective. I was the child of a member of Parliament. I have worked both on Parliament Hill, and in a constituency office on staff prior to my election here, so I understand, I think, where you're coming from.

I would submit to you that—and I'll get your comments on this in a minute—for staff, a compressed work week is actually the worst of all possible options. As an Ottawa-based staffer, from Monday to Thursday you are expected to be supporting your member from earlier in the morning until later at night, thus robbing you of time with your family. Then on Friday you don't get to go home. You are here to work. You are in fact extending your hours. Most members of Parliament that I know will be going home to their ridings but will still expect support from their staff.

I would submit that this is bad for staff and also for the members of Parliament who have their families here, those who have made the difficult choice to relocate their families to Ottawa. Currently, with the arrangements that our House leaders have been making, the whips have votes after question period. Last night was the first time, I think, that we've had multiple votes in the evening.

Many members have been able, with that predictability, to get home to have dinner with their families or make those arrangements that you talked about.

Perhaps I could just get your comments on your expectations. Have you spoken to your employers? In the case of the NDP staff, does your collective agreement allow for...? Maybe you could walk me through how you could possibly meet all of the requirements without a significant increase in your own personal hours.

Ms. Tara Hogeterp: I would agree that having a compressed work week would be detrimental to family time. My kids are dropped off at school, and I can drop them off as early as 8 a.m., but I have to pick them up by 5:30 at the absolute latest. I think I will get penalized at \$20 per 10 minutes if I'm late to pick them up. I don't have the luxury not to pick them up. Having a compressed work week would give me less family time, and I would imagine—

Mr. Mark Strahl: —and cost you more money.

Ms. Tara Hogeterp: —and cost me more money.

I would say that for families with young children, especially school-aged children, the critical time for families is between pickup and bedtime, that 5 to 7 period.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Absolutely.

Ms. Tara Hogeterp: That is the time when you find out what they've done for the day; it's the time when you have dinner together and that connection, and get them to bed.

It can be the most trying time, but it's also the most important time of your day. I would hate anyone, staff or MP, to lose out on those hours.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you. I understand. Certainly it's been a few years now, but when I was on staff, the maternity leave top-up that members who took maternity and paternity leave or staff members received was basically 92% of their wage. A Canadian receiving EI without any benefit package receives, I believe, 55%.

Is that the case? Do you have a top-up even further with your union, or is that 92% what you receive?

Ms. Mélisa Ferreira: It's with the House of Commons. It's 93%.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Okay, it's 93%.

I would argue, contrary to what Ms. Vandenberg said, that the House of Commons actually encourages young families with that sort of support. That's something that most Canadians don't have. I know that many of my colleagues as members and many staff colleagues as well have continued working, with that generous maternity support.

•(1225)

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I want to turn to Mr. Thompson, to clarify this concerning your SCI workers, just to be clear.

It's been my understanding, having worked here and now being elected here, that there are salaried members of the House of Commons staff who are here every day, regardless of whether the House sits or not. However, there are many services that are not offered when the House of Commons is not sitting, and therefore.... For instance, the parliamentary restaurant is closed when the House is not sitting. With a compressed work week, the people in that service would not get more money, because they would not be working more hours. They would in fact take a pay cut and perhaps lose their SCI status. Am I correct in that.

Mr. Roger Thompson: Yes, that could possibly happen. As Jim said, if you're working later hours, it doesn't mean that the employees will be making more hours. When the House is sitting, this is when these employees work—and not just in food services; there are also employees in transportation. When the members are not here, the buses are not running, and these SCI employees are not at work. Therefore, if this happens too much within a calendar year, and especially two consecutive calendar years, they lose all this.

I would say that the sitting hours would have to remain the same.

Mr. Mark Strahl: From what you're telling me—the same as for the members' staff—essentially this would result likely in less pay for some people, or certainly no more. There would be a loss of benefits, loss of pay, and additional child care costs as well for many of your members.

Mr. Roger Thompson: Exactly.

Another thing you have to understand about the SCI employees is that most of them, especially in food services, have two jobs. When the House is not here, they have a second job that they rely on outside, so that they can make their money. Some of them have houses and rent to pay or mortgages to pay. When the House is here, they're working their seven hours a day. When the House is not in session, it's down to five hours, or possibly 5.5 hours; therefore, they have another job.

If somebody were to compress the workload and these employees had to work longer throughout the day, how would they pick up their kids? And if they have that second job, which they rely on, they would lose that job. Therefore, when the House is not in session, what other job do they get?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, I don't know when I'll be back, but I would submit that cancelling a Friday, as the witnesses have said, will be detrimental to staff. It will cost staff more money and in fact will not result in a better work-family balance for either members or staff; in fact, it would make it worse.

One has to wonder what is really behind this motivation to cancel Fridays. I would submit that it is a 20% reduction in accountability. It is not looking to make life better for a work-family balance, because all of us know that when we go home on a Friday it is not to spend time with our families: we are expected to be working, as our staff are expected to be working.

This proposal, this trial balloon that's being floated, would actually make life worse for families, and not better.

The Chair: Mr. Graham, go ahead.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you.

The Chair: I am sorry. It's Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: I appreciate your watching out for my interests. Maybe I will elect you as my union steward. That is a compliment. It's okay.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: David, when I met my wife, she was a union rep, so don't worry.

Mr. David Christopherson: You have the three-piece suit. You could be a union boss.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is fantastic. Tom, I never thought I would see the day when you move from over there, assisting me to do what I am doing, and now you are right here as a witness. You just never know, eh?

I want to address my comments to you, as a modern-day union boss, although you sure don't look like the caricatures they paint of union bosses, I have to tell you. You have to get a little more....

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: I am on TV here, so you get too comfortable in this role.

Seriously, I want to use my seven minutes my way. I want to ask a broader question. This is an opportunity to talk about unions, quality of life, and how it fits in. I have two things to raise.

In your words, Tom.... I say Tom because I work with him all the time, and it would be silly for us to be calling each other "Mr."

Here we are, in 2016. A lot of people believe, first of all, that unions have no place at all in modern society. Yes, they were fine back in the Depression and after the war, but not now, in a modern circumstance, and certainly not in an office setting, let alone the kind of work that some of your members do.

Could you just take a moment of my time and talk about why the union is still relevant to your members? You are a young man. Why do you care? Why are you involved? How can a union contract, given the kind of work you...? How do you do that? Explain to people how you would take work that normally doesn't fit the usual description of unions, in the old industrial-fashion way we look at it, and comment on that.

I make no bones about it, Mr. Chair. I am hoping there are staff for all the other parties on the Hill who are listening and might say, "You know what? Talk about a quality-of-life improvement. I should be thinking about this union." That is just part of my being full-disclosure in as sunny a way as I can.

It's over to you, Tom, if you don't mind.

• (1230)

Mr. Thomas Shannon: Thank you very much for that, David—Mr. Christopherson.

You mentioned that unions are no longer relevant, and we hear that from certain people. In the 1800s they said that. I wasn't there, but there was an article in the 1800s that asked whether unions had served their purpose; were they done? I don't think they ever end, because the idea is that management is in charge and is trying to get things done, and we need to make sure that we come together as unionized staff to make sure we are protected and that we, first of all, do the most for our members and make sure we take care of the work we're to do in the House of Commons, because we need to be healthy and we need to be well paid and taken care of.

Moving on to your question about whether we're the same as the old industrial unions, the thing is, it's the same idea. We negotiate a contract with the NDP caucus—you might be familiar with them. We sit down and we say, here is how much is in the budget. What can we do to make sure that we are paid well so that we have retention?

Generally, in the unionized environment here the New Democratic Party staff are paid more, because we are able to negotiate collectively, rather than one on one. Obviously we know that with unions there is a wide disparity.

That keeps people in their jobs, because as they maintain seniority, they get more experience, become better as staff. I know there are actually former staff in front of me right now, and they know what it is: when you first start, you're learning the ropes, you're figuring it out, and then after five years, you have it right; you're doing a great job. Pay should be in connection with the amount of time you spend working.

But it's not just pay; it's also flexible working hours. Now, in this environment—and this is just a little outside the family-friendly theme—we have an overtime policy. When we need to work late—it happens a lot that you will be asking your staff to work late—what we do is take any time that is more than the regular work week, and we're able to use it for vacation time, for time off with our families.

Saying that, though, it is tough for young mothers or young fathers to take the actual overtime off, for the reasons they already gave in response to questions from the Liberals and Conservatives. However, it at least allows flexibility such that if you need to leave early, there's a connection with how much time you spend.

The last point is that when we're talking about the Labour Code and parliamentary privilege, MPs can more or less do... I won't say what they want with their staff, but there's an opening that they can just... Abuse is very easy to do.

Most of you would be good bosses, but if you're not, you can just fire the boss right away.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Thomas Shannon: I'm sorry; you can fire the employee right away.

•(1235)

Mr. David Christopherson: You're speaking to the wrong people here.

Mr. Thomas Shannon: You can't fire the boss. We can't fire the members of Parliament; however, you can just fire the employee, no questions asked.

We actually have a procedure we go through to ask, “Was it fair? What can we do to improve the relationship?”, because the ultimate goal in our sense—in the sense for all the staff here—is to move your party forward, your country forward, and to try to get things done for the people you represent. That way, there is a protection: we go through a process, whether it's harassment or there's a grievance. We make sure that nobody on the staff is ill-treated, because there is a process in place.

I guess that's the long-winded outline of the difference between our employees and the employees right now of other political parties.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'll leave it at that, other than to give you an opportunity.... We talked about the Fridays. There are a few things that have been floating around today.

I'll just afford you an opportunity to comment on any of the suggestions you have heard, either formally or informally, that you like or don't like. It's just an opportunity for you to speak your mind on the other pieces of what we're talking about here.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mélisa Ferreira: I agree with Tara and the member. A compressed work week would result in employees with young families having to work longer hours over four days and sacrificing time spent with their family. I think it would be more difficult if Fridays were eliminated, if I may say so. In my humble opinion, that's not the right thing to do.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you. I'm getting my time back.

Mr. David Christopherson: And I'll die defending your right to have it; how's that?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: There are at least five former staffers around this table today, so I think it's very important for us to get on the record the impact of the parliamentary lifestyle on staff. I was a staffer here for—

Mr. David Christopherson: I was too. I was a constituency assistant.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: So there are at least six of us, then, but Mark isn't normally here.

I had a daughter while I was working as a staffer here, and then I ran a nomination campaign with a newborn. It was a bit of a challenge.

I know that this is outside of your normal duties. I really appreciate you guys coming to speak to us. I know it's probably not the most fun experience.

I've been here a lot. The one time I haven't been here is during elections. What's it like—this is especially to Mr. Thompson—during an election? What kind of impacts do elections have on the staff, the morale, the work that goes on here—especially longer ones, such as the 78-day one we just had?

Mr. Roger Thompson: Do you mean the impacts of the election work-wise?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: No. We all leave, so how does it look around here? How does it impact your jobs, if you're union members? What goes on here?

Mr. Roger Thompson: Basically, where you guys are sitting today, this is what my department does every day: we set this up for you guys.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Well, thank you.

Mr. Roger Thompson: You're very welcome.

In our department, we're mostly full-time employees, so we are very busy during elections. But if you're looking at the SCIs in some of these other departments that we talked about, the seasonal certified employees, you're correct that the work drops. The cafeterias are closed; the FPF, the facility the food comes from or the production facility, is shut down, and only minimum staff, probably, is working there, and maybe minimum staff in the kitchens or one or two cafeterias.

So the workload for these individuals drops. In some departments, like the one I work for, transportation, the full-time employees are busy. We're busy with the moves and all the elections and that. But when it comes to these SCI individuals, it dramatically drops. As I said, five or five-and-a-half hours is what they're given.

In our collective agreement, when you become an SCI individual, there is a seniority clause. The seniority for these individuals is based on job title. If an individual has seniority, then that individual will be working. An individual with less seniority cannot work more hours than somebody who has more seniority; therefore, if the facilities are closed, you only have a minimum number of employees who are working, so it's a big drop-off. It drops dramatically for these individuals.

• (1240)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: If many a lot of the services are designed around us, the members, would it be helpful for staff if, for example, as you mentioned, the cafeterias were open year-round, instead of just when we're here? Would that make a big difference to you? I'm curious to hear.

Mr. Roger Thompson: If you would like my personal opinion—

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: That's what I'm asking for.

Mr. Roger Thompson: —I've never understood why they were closed, because everybody needs to eat. I never understood why we—I'm sorry, I don't mean to say this—only cater to the MPs for these things and why they shut down.

Look at Christmas time; there are employees at all of the satellite sites on the Hill, employees who work at 131 or 181 Queen Street. When the MPs are not around, these employees need to eat, and when the cafeterias are closed.... There may be one or two cafeterias

that stay open, and therefore for the employees, there are not enough of them open.

To be honest, yes, they could, but I'm not in management, so I don't....

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: No, that's a fair comment. I appreciate it.

Here is another question, again on House of Commons administration, effectively. At least two of you have kids; I don't know whether the rest of you have. When you had young children on the Hill, did you try to use the House of Commons' own day care? What kind of process was it? Why did you or didn't you?

Ms. Tara Hogeterp: I had both my kids at the Parliament Hill day care. I actually sat on the board of the day care, so I have a little bit of knowledge about the Hill day care.

With my first child, I did not realize that I needed to put her on a waiting list when I was pregnant, so she did not get to go to the Children on the Hill Day Care until a year later. I had to find alternative care until we were able to get a spot.

Once she had a spot, her sibling, my son, was automatically put on the list and given priority, so he was able to get a spot. However, at the Hill day care, they don't have the facilities to have children under 18 months. My maternity leave was only one year, so there was a six-month gap before I could potentially get a spot. For those six months, I had to take two months unpaid, and then I found a nanny for four months. My daughter still was going while my younger child was with a nanny full-time, so we ended up paying double.

I know that if you get a spot and your spot becomes available but your child isn't 18 months yet, you are required to pay to hold your spot, or else you lose it and it will go to someone else.

It's very much "in demand" day care, and it's a lovely place, and I loved having my children there. It was so wonderful to be able to drop them off at work, and my kids still talk about "remember when I saw you on...?"—and he's, what, six and she's eight. So they still remember. My kids could pronounce the word "parliament" way before most kids could pronounce the word "boat".

Coming here and seeing them on the Hill, it's really quite an honour to have that chance, and the day care is wonderful, but they don't have the capacity to take on more children because of the limited space. Also, for the day care to run, they need outdoor space. They're really limited.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: We have a nice, big front lawn over there.

Ms. Tara Hogeterp: Yes, yes; however, there's a question of privacy for the children, though they literally get tugged around, and they are trained to say "no pictures" to the tourists. It's quite cute.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Fair enough; I understand.

Going beyond what you're able to accomplish on the board—going beyond that mandate—how would you see improvements to the day care. What kinds of improvements would you like to see? And what direction should it be heading in, in your view?

Ms. Tara Hogeterp: I'm not here representing the day care, so this would be just my opinion, but I would love to have that day care able to take on MPs' needs and staff's needs by having it accessible at 12 months rather than 18 months. That would be ideal, because that six-month gap can be quite challenging for a family.

I remember that wait list being a real challenge, so we need to make sure that MPs know, when they become MPs, that if they're thinking about having children or once they have children, they need to get their names on that waiting list right away.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: That's fair.

The Chair: Thank you. That's your time.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: That answers that question.

The Chair: Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the conversation we're having today with former staff. I am one of the five, I believe, is the number we finalized on, former staffers both on the Hill and in the riding. It's good to hear the opinions coming from other staffers.

I just want to confirm—my memory is short on this—whether the day care here on the Hill is run by a private company or Hill staff.

• (1245)

Ms. Tara Hogeterp: Neither; it's a non-profit. It has a board of directors who run the day care.

I think it's at the pleasure of the Speaker that it exists. It was a long, hard-fought process by staffers—not necessarily political staffers, but people who worked on the Hill—who lobbied to have this day care created in, I believe, the eighties. I am pretty sure it was the eighties.

There are some resources provided by the House, basically to allow for the space, but everything is run by the fees collected from the parents.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I've got that.

Well, I think what we're experiencing with the day care is something that most Canadians are dealing with. When I went to register my son, I did it before he was born, and there was a waiting list. We checked out...I can't remember how many, but only one that we could identify that actually took a child under 18 months, which is quite troublesome when you're trying to scramble to get everything organized.

Is it the ratio that's the issue in terms of getting a provider in to look after children less than 18 months old? Is the instructor-to-child ratio the issue?

Ms. Tara Hogeterp: There is an issue with the ratio and also the physical space, because children under 18 months require additional nap time, and there are also other requirements of the Ontario ministry for those children: there are requirements for change tables and certain elements. There's not enough space at the day care to

accommodate that second, or essentially a third group, which would be the under-18 months.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I'm assuming it's an “if you build it, they will come” sort of thing. I'm assuming that if it were started up, if we're able to move on this and this happens, there would be, from the conversations we've had in previous meetings, a lot of interest in changing that requirement and that kind of roadblock for many people.

Ms. Tara Hogeterp: I assume there wouldn't be any difficulty filling the spaces.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: That's what I'm hearing.

Ms. Tara Hogeterp: The day care tries to maintain bilingualism, so they have a French program and an English program. The difficulty, I remember, when I was there was sometimes making sure that we had enough French kids to fill the French spots and English kids to fill the English spots, but that's just a balance that needs to be met.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Perfect.

Just to pick up where Mr. Strahl left off concerning the compressed work week, for MPs it probably doesn't make much difference, but for staff, I'm assuming... I'm just thinking as a former staffer, or as now an MP hiring staff, how I would sell that to my staff: “You're going to be here early in the morning, you're probably going to work 12 hours a day from Monday to Thursday, and then Friday you're playing catch-up, and then we start all over again on Monday.” Mr. Strahl has touched on this a bit. I'm just seeking more of your thoughts.

I don't know how it would work in an office environment, if you're dealing with managing your budget but also managing staff life. It would be quite difficult, I think, in a compressed work week.

The Chair: You have one minute.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mélisa Ferreira: No, it's not easy, and I think this measure would be more convenient for the members than the employees. The members are already here. They already work 12 hours a day, while the employees have a schedule that ranges between 7 hours and 18 hours, if I may say so. Basically, I think it's really a measure that would favour the MPs rather than the employees. It would result in more overtime and more time spent in Parliament from Monday to Thursday than is currently being spent, and that would affect families. As Tara was saying earlier, the crucial time period is from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., before the children go to bed, and that would be time we would not be spending with our family.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Vandenbeld.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

I would like to get a clarification from Mr. Thompson and Mr. McDonald.

How many of the staff working on the Hill are seasonal certified indeterminate and how many are actually full-time regular employees?

Mr. Roger Thompson: We have approximately 102 SCI employees.

• (1250)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: How many other staff are there, roughly, on the Hill in total?

Mr. Jim McDonald: There is a total of 450 in the bargaining units that we represent, and 102 of those are seasonal certified.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Okay, so it's less than a quarter, or 20%. I just wanted to get a sense of how many people are impacted, because the experience of others might be quite different with respect to a compressed work week. Also, it sounds as if there are things we can do here on the Hill that will make it not so MP-centric—for instance, if we look at the staff who are here even during the constituency weeks who could possibly alleviate some of those problems.

I also want to go back to the political staff. Having worked on the Hill both in caucus research but also as a ministerial staffer, what I found was that the work day, during the days we are sitting, revolves very much around the member or the minister. For instance, ministerial staff will spend much of their morning preparing for question period. There is a lot of work that comes around that. We have staff here sitting behind us who, when we're here and we're in committee, have to be with us. They are following us around all day, but things such as correspondence and briefing notes and all those sorts of things pile up.

From my experience, had there been a weekday to be able to catch up, when you were not immediately having to respond to the member and could catch up on those things.... I often worked weekends, and I've talked to a number of the staff who are sitting right behind me, and I think a lot of staff come in on weekends to avoid.... You must have time to catch up.

So wouldn't it possibly make it easier, for the staff who are coming in on the weekends, if there were a day when the member was not here? Then they would catch up and wouldn't have to work on the weekend.

[Translation]

Ms. Mélisa Ferreira: In my opinion, the time for us to catch up is when the House is not sitting.

I start my workday very early in the morning and I pick up my children from daycare at 4:30 p.m. Once they go to bed, at 8 p.m., I go back to work on the computer to prepare notes for the next day from home. Telework may be something you could consider. Your committee could think about a way to improve the conditions surrounding this way of working.

Currently, the software that enables us to have access to our data through Outlook Web Access is not the most effective way to operate, if I may say so.

[English]

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Okay.

I'm sharing my time with Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Very briefly, speaking to Mr. Schmale's point about national day care, he may recall that we were on the cusp of a national day care program when his party took power and cancelled it, in exchange for a modest taxable monthly cheque that would have covered around 50 minutes per month of Ms. Hogeterp's school. So yes, it's a national day care problem, but it's one we should have, could have, and would have quite a while ago solved, had it not been for the frankly bizarre policy direction of the previous government.

That said, I was wanting to ask all of my colleagues here, have you seen many of your colleagues simply give up and leave the Hill because of the lifestyle we have to live here?

Ms. Tara Hogeterp: No.

Just in the office I work in, there was almost a running joke that the chair we sat in caused women to get pregnant, because I got pregnant, then my colleague got pregnant, someone covering my maternity leave got pregnant—it was literally an office of pregnancy after pregnancy after pregnancy. All of those people still work on the Hill, except one who is now working in Alberta for a minister.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: It's in the same type of job?

Ms. Tara Hogeterp: It's the same type of job, and we've all stayed. I know that most of my colleagues with children are staying because, with the support of our collective agreement, we have been able to maintain working hours and support our MPs with little trouble.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Okay.

And to that point, Mr. Shannon, are there any NDP staffers who are not unionized? I guess there are management layers, and so forth. In all my time on the Hill, I've never worked a week as short as the thirty-seven and a half hours that the government calls full-time. I think that's slightly understated, for the time we work.

How does it work, within the current budget context, for unionized political office to get all the work done that needs to be done? I'm curious to have your insight on that.

Mr. Thomas Shannon: It is thirty-seven and a half full-time hours; that's what it is. However, in political jobs, people who are MPs now and people who were staff before know that there is a lot of work to get done. What usually happens is that many people here work longer. When they choose to do that because of whatever is going on, that time is given back to them at a later date. The idea is that there's a one-to-one ratio.

If you're working longer, which does happen....

You can't do that every day; otherwise you're going to destroy your life. The idea is that we're trying to make a work-life balance. You work what you can and you work your hours. If you work longer, then you can take that in times when it's less busy, which is during weeks that the House doesn't sit or in the summer, in general. That's the idea: to hold the balance and get as much done as possible within the time that we have at our workplaces, and on this earth as well.

• (1255)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Okay. And to the point about—

The Chair: No, I'm sorry.

I'll just give the witnesses, if you have any closing remarks you'd like to make that you didn't get a chance to make, a chance before we finish off here

Mr. Jim McDonald: I want to say that maybe I am more representative of the older type of union representative in both appearance and mannerisms, and how I've worked. I've been in the labour relations business for 35 years, and my career is almost split in half, with 17 years on the management side of the relationship and the other 17 or 18 years on the side of the union. There is still a need for unions for many reasons, but the more modern reason is that many new things are coming up. Mental health issues now are a big thing for us and for our members, and the cost-reduction exercises by employers trying to reduce the number of employees and the cost of an operation, and all of the associated things. The loss of benefits for the SCIs is a huge thing for us. How do you work for two years and get a decent income and full benefits, and then miss your SCI status by 20, 30, or 50 hours, and have to lose all that for a two-year period until you can re-establish yourself as an SCI employee again? It's an extremely difficult business.

I'm not sure if you're aware that the House, in various dispute resolution processes, has said on record that anybody who works prior to becoming an SCI is not even an employee, by definition. They're a person that happens to work here, and their benefits are restricted to the minimum standards of the employment standards relationships. Quite frankly, you don't keep those people around. There's no way you want to build a reliable workforce that's going to stick around for a long time and put them on that roller coaster ride. The House of Commons, in my experience since I've been involved with PSAC, has always operated in its own little bubble, if you excuse the expression. It doesn't operate like a normal employer situation, or a normal employer environment, for people who need that stability. If you're an SCI right now, try going to get a mortgage when you can't guarantee that your hours for next year are going to be the same as this year, or that you won't lose your status all together. I believe there have been situations where hours of work have been manipulated to prevent people from reaching that plateau, so they don't have to pay the benefits. There are different motivations, but I still think there's a really strong need for a union. I'm a believer in the union and what it has done for society, but unfortunately some people now are still continuing on as it was. I think we'd be in a sad state of affairs if there weren't unions around to prevent employees from being exploited.

The Chair: Thank you all for coming. We really appreciate it. You have given us a good view for our study. If you missed anything, feel free to write to the clerk and add it in writing.

I ask the committee's indulgence, but we're at 1 o'clock. Perhaps we could stay a few minutes to address a couple of things on our next meeting, which is related mostly to the question of privilege and exactly how we're going to spend that next meeting. We have to change when we will hear again from Elections Canada more than likely, which is presently scheduled for next Tuesday—or at least we'd have to change part of the meeting we've scheduled them for.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: On a related issue, I want to advise colleagues that we're now starting to get into some of the areas where our lack of definition about being in camera could play out. I want to update everyone that Mr. Chan and I are continuing discussions and are hoping to have back here.... We're down to one clause that we're trying to find language for. If we can come to a meeting of the minds on that, Chair, I would ask that you allow us to put that motion up front. If we do have agreement, assuming everybody else is onside with it, it shouldn't take that long. I only mention it now as a matter of the order of our business. If we can tuck that in near the beginning and get it in place, then as we get into dicier issues, we will understand the rules that we're going to follow, particularly when we're in camera. I will leave that with you, sir.

• (1300)

The Chair: Scott, did you happen to talk to Mr. Scheer?

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, I did, albeit we're changing topics now. He said that he had some practical concerns. What he wants to do, I think—and I'm not misrepresenting him, or telling tales out of school—is to make some changes to the way the proposed standing order is written. I don't know if he intends to present it to us, or if he wants to consult with the current Speaker privately. I don't know that, but at least this gives you an update. Just to let you know, I don't think he would take it amiss if, for example, you were to approach him directly and ask him what's up.

The Chair: Okay. We'll leave that for now.

Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I know that we did switch topics, but I want to go back to Mr. Christopherson's point.

First of all, I thank him for the courtesy of allowing me the opportunity to have that conversation. Again, I will also defer, to some degree, to the Conservative members of this committee. Once we have that appropriate language, if we can come to a consensus and can get unanimity, we could dispose of it fairly quickly.

The Chair: Before we go back to the question of privilege, I have another thing to mention: the Australian clerk and serjeant-at-arms together are available for around six o'clock in the evening. We'd have to see what days are good for them. In the first week back, do any members know what day might be good for them on that rough time frame at that time of day, I think, around five, six, or seven o'clock?

Mr. David Christopherson: What's this on, Chair?

The Chair: It's on the family-friendly initiative, with the Australian legislature.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay. I got it.

The Chair: They're 15 hours ahead of us, so....

Mr. Reid, is that...?

Mr. Scott Reid: No, sorry. Someone just told me that Prince passed away, so I got distracted by that.

The Chair: We're just looking to see if there happens to be a day that committee members are available to talk to the Australian legislators somewhere around five, six, seven o'clock during the week back. They're available, but they're 15 hours ahead of us.

Mr. Scott Reid: Is the idea to have them come to the committee or to meet with them informally?

The Chair: No, they'd be on the phone. It would be a video conference, because they're 15 hours ahead.

Mr. Scott Reid: I used to live there and I remember that intimately, believe me. I did some conference calls while I was there, and they involved getting up at two in the morning.

The Chair: This is a good time in the morning for them.

Mr. Scott Reid: What time are you suggesting?

The Chair: Six o'clock at night, or before or after that, which is 9 a.m. for them the following day.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's six p.m. for us, and which day would it be?

The Chair: Well, that's what we're trying to find out. If there happens to be a day....

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Wednesday the 4th would be good for me. It's up to you guys.

The Chair: Wednesday the 4th?

We don't know if he's available, but we'll....

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Wednesdays are generally better for me than Mondays.

The Chair: We need at least three of us. We don't need to have the whole committee.

Mr. Scott Reid: Could I suggest Tuesday? We had plans for all of us to have dinner that evening at 7 o'clock, so we've already cleared our agendas for that. Why not have our meeting before then as an actual meeting and then have an informal meeting where we all retire upstairs to the restaurant?

The Chair: What does that sound like to people? Tuesday the 3rd?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I can do that.

The Chair: Tuesday the 3rd.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I was simply going to say that for me, because of my chemotherapy, Mondays are the only day that is kind of difficult, because I'm in Toronto getting infused.

The Chair: Yes, I would imagine that every day would be difficult.

Mr. David Christopherson: I won't be able to be there. I'll actually be a little late for the dinner.

An hon. member: You're at committee, right?

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, I'm chairing an internal committee.

Mr. Scott Reid: Since Mr. Christopherson has a problem not with the day but with the time, the staff here are capable of doing it later.

We could have the dinner first and maybe bump it a little earlier, and then have the actual formal meeting afterwards.

That way, David, we could accommodate your schedule.

• (1305)

Mr. David Christopherson: Either way, I'd be quite comfortable if I wasn't one of the ones who took that.... I can follow up on the committee Hansard.

Mr. Scott Reid: Well, we should have a New Democrat here.

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, it's either me or nothing right now, I'm afraid. I'm willing to change that—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: —but I think I might need an election first. I kind of liked it back up there, to tell you the truth.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm not for that myself, you understand. I would have voted for you had I not been voting for me.

Anyway, that's what I suggest. Maybe we could meet and schedule it at, say, 8 p.m. as a possibility, because we're having dinner anyway.

An hon. member: Yes.

The Chair: Will we try that?

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes. I can also work at getting someone to represent me.

An hon. member: Send Tyler, your legislative assistant.

Mr. David Christopherson: He would make me look bad.

The Chair: How long do you want to go? I guess an hour is our normal time with a witness. We usually have an hour for two or three witnesses, so that would be all we need for the one.

We'll try for 8 o'clock on the Tuesday. If they're not available, we'll try for before our dinner, and you could get someone else, David

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay.

The Chair: If they're not available at all, we'll revisit it by either email or whatever.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Chair, will that be a formal meeting?

The Chair: Yes, in theory.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I'm available from 8:30 p.m. I'm hesitant to say that I'd be there for 8 o'clock.

The Chair: You can come late. You won't be first on the speakers list.

Now we'll go back to the point of privilege. I think we should at least start that discussion, at least for the first hour, in our next meeting. Are there any proposals?

Mr. David Christopherson: Can I ask a question through you to the clerk?

I can't recall, but is it an absolute must-do when a matter of privilege is sent to us that it go to the top of our list, or is it just by tradition that normally we do that?

The Chair: Sometimes it does. Once it took a couple of months. Often it comes early, but there's no—

Mr. David Christopherson: I was only asking because my experience is that these things are usually treated as a matter of priority out of consideration for the individuals, and out of respect that it's been sent to us by the Speaker. I would be in favour of treating it as a priority and getting at least that first hour in, so we can get a sense of timing for what's fair and provides justice to everyone involved.

The Chair: If we set aside the first hour for that, to plan that, then we could see what the elections people thought of having one hour instead of two.

Mr. David Christopherson: I don't like that at all.

The Chair: You don't like that?

Mr. David Christopherson: We're agreed on two hours, Mr. Chair, in my opinion.

The Chair: We'll fill it with other witnesses then.

For that first hour...sorry, Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan: It is the opposition party's motion. Do you have a particular proposal you want to suggest in the first hour for what you would like to do?

Mr. Scott Reid: No, we don't at present. I'll have to get back to you on that.

I don't necessarily think we're talking.... Questions of privilege are typically dealt with as being urgent, but they need not be time consuming, if you follow the distinction. What we need to figure out is whether we can deal with this in a manner that simply gets it dealt with in a single meeting or if we need more than that. That seems like a reasonable starting point.

I don't know if you were in the House when it came up. You saw that this is not a matter that's highly contentious. I'm inclined to think it can be dealt with quickly. That's the only observation I can make.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I'm amenable to that. I wanted to get a sense of whether there a particular process or outcome from the direction coming from the House, given that is was your opposition house leader's motion.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right. It would be reasonable to have him here, I suppose.

That's the obvious thought. He is also an ex-speaker, so he has lots of procedural matters and that. Could I get back to you guys?

• (1310)

Mr. Arnold Chan: Sure. My thought on that is to get the law clerk to give us some guidance on what's happened in the past where a similar order has come from the House to this committee, so that at least we have a foundation of what to expect.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's a good point. It's obviously going to add to the amount of time we take.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I'm not looking to spend a lot of time on this. Maybe we could do this informally, but I think a bit of guidance would be helpful in what was the practical outcome of the process.

Mr. Scott Reid: You know what, that's not a bad way to start this, maybe getting a primer for all of us, because we'll have more questions of privilege. Having the law clerk to guide us through what we do, how we deal with this, how it's been dealt with in the past, and some best practices....

Mr. Arnold Chan: Even if it's just a submission of a quick paper, so we have some sense of what.... I have a few anecdotal ones, more from dealing with the Ontario legislative experience, of similar prima facie cases of breach of members' privileges pursuant to this, where something was leaked.

The Chair: What I'm hearing is that for the first hour of our first Tuesday back, we would have the law clerk, and that would hopefully guide a short process as to what we do following that. For the second hour, we'll get some witnesses in. Maybe we'll tentatively leave another hour open on the Thursday, depending on where the law clerk leads us, and use the second hour on the Thursday for other witnesses.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: We can get Elections Canada back the following week.

The Chair: Yes, okay.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Chair, I think that's a good idea.

We're starting out, and we know we're on a four-year voyage. Starting out with the law clerk makes all the sense in the world. It would be nice if we could do a secondary piece of work rather than just listen to the law clerk. Even if we set aside to try to scope out how much time we need, we could agree to hear from the law clerk and attempt to put a path forward, so this thing doesn't get ahead of itself.

The Chair: Let's have him for 45 minutes, or so, and then spend 15 minutes defining the rest of the study.

Mr. David Christopherson: We can have the macro from the provincial law clerk, and then we can do the micro in the remaining 15.

The Chair: I think we have a bit of agreement here that we're not going to spend a lot of time on this particular point.

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, that's what we think at this point.

The Chair: Yes.

The week we were going to have Elections Canada is the week before the May constituency week. We have an hour on main estimates on May 17, which we might be able to move to the first week back. In the second meeting that week, the last day before the constituency week, we are giving, at least for part of that meeting, drafting instructions on the interim report. We'll try to juggle all that, I guess.

One last thing before we....

Yes, Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Just as a suggestion to the rest of the committee members, maybe we could use the steering committee. I apologize, because now my timing is a little bit more sporadic, but that might be a way we can figure this out as opposed to using committee time. Maybe we could schedule a more regularized steering committee process, maybe at least once a month.

I'm sorry; if you could work it around my unfortunate—

Mr. David Christopherson: No, no, that's fine. There's that, but also, as I was going to say, we can go only so far before we need a work plan in front of us where we can actually see the dates and move them all around.

I think a steering committee would be well in order, Mr. Chair, and it would solve a lot of your problems.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Maybe we could go really long on that Tuesday night, treat part of it as a steering committee, and then schedule it going forward so that we have some regularity.

Mr. David Christopherson: Steering committee or appetizers.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Exactly.

The Chair: We have the next little while scheduled.

Mr. Reid, you wanted to bring up a point about television before we leave.

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes. Thank you for reminding me.

I was just going to say that seeing as we're frequently meeting in a room that's televised—

•(1315)

The Chair: That could be televised.

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, that's right. It has the potential to be televised.

I think as a matter of practice, when we're having hearings on something that's not of a purely administrative nature, when we're dealing with witnesses on any topic—the family-friendly stuff, the chief electoral officer, or whomever—I think we just should have the practice of being televised. It doesn't involve any extra work for us.

I used to do this as a practice with the human rights subcommittee when I was chairing it. We'd frequently meet in this room. It was astonishing how often people would say, "I saw you in Parliament." And I'd say, "You couldn't have." What they meant was that they saw me chairing one of those meetings. I got a much broader viewership than I frankly would have anticipated, for what's that worth.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: I didn't realize we weren't being televised. I have to tell you that I just assumed we were, because why we wouldn't be is beyond me. We're in the room. It's the chief electoral officer. It's one of the most important issues the public would want to watch us addressing.

Like the public accounts committee, it seems to me that if we're in a room like this and doing public hearings of any sort, we should use the camera system as a matter of course, and only by exception not do so. This really should have been televised. There's absolutely no reason why not, other than our own oversight to make it happen.

Mr. Chair, in future, maybe we could ask the clerk to help us remember to do that when we're doing actual hearings and there's a clear public interest. We're in a room that already has the infrastructure.

The Chair: David.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I have no objection. If we're in here anyway, and we're talking about something interesting with witnesses, then by all means have the cameras on.

An hon. member: I thought we were being televised.

The Chair: Okay. Subject to availability, we'll do that.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: We're done?

The meeting is adjourned.

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