



42nd Parliament, First Session

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

has the honour to present its

ELEVENTH REPORT

Interim Report on Moving Toward a Modern, Efficient, Inclusive
and Family-Friendly Parliament

On February 2, 2016, pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(3)(a)(i) and (iii), the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (“the Committee”) began a study on initiatives to make the House of Commons more family-friendly for its membership, along with members’ staff and those whose work supports Parliament. The study was commenced at the suggestion of the Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, who appeared before the Committee on January 28, 2016, to discuss matters found in his mandate letter from the Prime Minister that the Committee could study. Mr. LeBlanc’s mandate letter contains the following instruction:

Work with Opposition House Leaders to examine ways to make the House of Commons more family-friendly for Members of Parliament.¹

In its approach to this study, the Committee attached importance to reporting back to the House in a timely manner any findings and recommendations that could result in improvements to the inclusivity and work-life balance for members, along with seeking improvements to the predictability, efficiency and modernization of the institution, all while taking into consideration the impact of changes on members’ constituents. The Committee, therefore, considers this report to be an interim report.

The Committee recognizes that the topics and issues examined during this study are important and complex. Not all matters raised by committee members and witnesses over the course of the study could be dealt with in this interim report. It is the Committee’s

1 Website of the Prime Minister of Canada, [Leader of the Government in the House of Commons Mandate Letter](#), November 13, 2016.

intention to revisit a number of topics and issues considered during this study for a more complete examination at a later date.

The Committee is pleased to report as follows:

Witnesses

During the course of its study, the Committee heard from the following witnesses: Mr. François Arsenault, Director of Parliamentary Proceedings, National Assembly of Quebec, Ms. Clare Beckton, Executive Director, Centre for Women in Politics and Public Leadership, Carleton University, Mr. Marc Bosc, Acting Clerk, Canada's House of Commons, Mr. James Catchpole, Serjeant-at-Arms, Australia's House of Representatives, the Hon. Sheila Copps, P.C, Ms. Deborah Deller, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, Mr. David Elder, Clerk of Australia's House of Representatives, Ms. Mélisa Ferreira, Representative, Local 232, United Food and Commercial Workers Union Canada (UFCW), Ms. Regina Flores, member of the Parliamentary Spouses Association, Ms. Anne Foster, Head of Diversity and Inclusion, United Kingdom House of Commons, Mr. Benoit Giroux, Director General, Parliamentary Precinct Operations, Canada's House of Commons, Ms. Tara Hogeterp, Representative, Local 232, UFCW, Ms. Kareen Jabre, Director, Division of Programmes, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Mr. Gary Levy, as an individual, Ms. Grace Lore, Senior Researcher, Equal Voice, Ms. Lisa MacLeod, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario for Nepean—Carleton, Mr. Jim McDonald, Labour Relations Officer, Union of National Employees, Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), Ms. Joanne Mills, Diversity and Inclusion Programme Manager and Nursery Liaison Officer, United Kingdom House of Commons, Ms. Christine Moore, M.P. for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, Mr. David Natzler, Clerk of the United Kingdom's House of Commons, Mr. Pierre Parent, Chief Human Resources Officer, Canada's House of Commons, Ms. Nancy Peckford, Executive Director, Equal Voice, Mr. David Prest, as an individual, Mr. Thomas Shannon, President, Local 232, UFCW, Ms. Nora Spinks, Chief Executive Officer, Vanier Institute of the Family, Mr. Roger Thompson, President, Local 70390, PSAC, Mrs. Michelle Warkentin, member of the Parliamentary Spouses Association, and Mr. David Wilson, Clerk of New Zealand's House of Representatives.

The Committee thanks all of the witnesses for their important contributions and invaluable assistance on this study.

Discussion

The right of the House to establish its own rules and manage its internal affairs is among the most important rights claimed over centuries of parliamentary tradition and possessed by the House of Commons.² The House can set and change its work practices, rules and procedures, along with the resources and benefits provided to members, in order to ensure that these retain as their purpose to enable and support members in carrying out their functions as representatives and legislators.

2 Audrey O'Brien and Marc Bosc, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 2nd ed., Éditions Yvon Blais, Montreal, 2009, p. 119.

The manner in which the House functions has evolved over time. At Confederation, the country adopted a constitution similar in principle to the United Kingdom, along with the traditions and conventions of a Westminster model of parliamentary democracy. Changes made at different times to the mode of operation, work practices and culture of Parliament have allowed the institution to adapt to changing societal norms and expectations. As the democratic centre of the country, it is incumbent upon Parliament to strive, in its membership and as a workplace, to reflect the Canadian population it represents.

Numerous considerations must be weighed in contemplating changes to the procedures and practices of the House. Over the course of its study, the Committee has heard that there are certain advantages for members, the House administration and those who work for Parliament, to adopting different ways of conducting parliamentary business and organizing resources. The Committee is mindful, however, that every change has its consequences, intended and unintended.

The discussion below provides a summary of the main family-friendly initiatives that the Committee examined, organized according to four broad themes: predictability, efficiency, modernization and work-life balance. In providing recommendations, the Committee has attempted to strike an appropriate balance between moving forward as a modern workplace setting while ensuring the long-standing conventions and cultures, which are the foundation of a legislature, are not unduly disturbed or undermined.

1. Predictability

Issues, Proposals and Recommendations

In its study, the Committee considered what mechanisms could be put in place to add greater predictability to House proceedings. During his appearance before the Committee on February 2, 2016, Mr. Marc Bosc, the Acting Clerk of the House of Commons, told the Committee the underlying issue of members' work-life balance was time and its scarcity, which placed an importance on predictability of scheduling.³

Timing of deferred recorded divisions: Currently, recorded divisions can, if demanded, be deferred to a later time pursuant to various provisions in the Standing Orders. Recorded divisions are usually deferred to the late afternoon (for example, the expiry of time provided for Government Orders), they require members to return to the House, and can prolong the sitting day. At the start of the 42nd Parliament, following discussions between House Leaders, an informal practice began whereby deferred recorded divisions were scheduled, insofar as possible, for the time immediately following Oral Questions ("Question Period"). Numerous witnesses told the Committee that this informal arrangement represented an appreciable improvement to the predictability of the scheduling of House business and the efficiency of holding votes. The Committee encourages House Leaders to continue this practice whenever possible. The Committee is not of the view, however, that this practice ought to be formalized in the Standing Orders,

3 Parliament of Canada, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, [Evidence](#), Meeting 5, 42nd Parliament, First Session, February 2, 2016.

as this would remove the flexibility that currently exists when scheduling recorded divisions.

The Committee recommends:

- 1. That House Leaders continue, whenever possible, the informal practice of holding deferred recorded divisions immediately following Question Period. The Committee commits to undertaking a more complete study of this matter during its review of the Standing Orders as provided for by Standing Orders 51(2) and/or 108(3)(a)(iii).**

Further, the Committee heard that votes should not, if possible, be scheduled for after Question Period on Thursdays, as these votes can disrupt the travel arrangements of the members who have the furthest commutes to their constituencies.

The Committee recommends:

- 2. That House Leaders, whenever possible, refrain from holding recorded divisions any later on Thursdays than immediately following Question Period. The Committee commits to undertaking a more complete study of this matter during its review of the Standing Orders as provided for by Standing Order 51(2) and/or 108(3)(a)(iii).**

The House calendar. Under Standing Order 28(2)(b), the Speaker must table the House calendar for the upcoming year by September 30 of each year, following discussions with the House Leaders. The Committee considers the early preparation of the House calendar to be beneficial to both the work and family life of members, as it allowed them to plan ahead earlier. On May 13, 2016, the Chair of the Committee sent a letter to House Leaders encouraging them to make an early start toward establishing the House calendar for 2017.

The Committee recommends:

- 3. That the Speaker table the House calendar each year prior to the House's summer adjournment.**

Further, the Committee was told that having two non-sitting weeks coincide with school breaks in as many provinces and territories as possible allowed families time together, and that in preparing the House calendar, House Leaders ought to avoid scheduling, as a much as possible, too many consecutive sitting weeks, in particular five-week sitting blocks, as these long sitting periods were not conducive to productive parliamentary work. The Committee would like House Leaders to take these views into account when preparing the House calendar.

2. Efficiency

Issues, Proposals and Recommendations

Members are elected to sit in the House of Commons to serve as representatives of their constituents. In carrying out their parliamentary functions, the majority of members generally split time between the parliamentary precinct in Ottawa and their constituency. Due to the size of the country, members endure long commutes back to their constituency; by one estimate, the average commute for a member who lives outside of the Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal corridor was a round trip of twelve hours.⁴ As part of its study, the Committee examined how the House conducts its business in order to find efficiencies that would allow members more time to work in their constituencies, and spend more time with family.

Eliminating a sitting day/compressing the sitting week. Currently, Canada's House of Commons sits five days a week over 26 sitting weeks, for a total of around 130 to 135 sitting days per year. By comparison, the United Kingdom's House of Commons sits about 150 days over 34 sitting weeks per year, and on only 13 designated Fridays; Australia's House of Representatives sits for about 70 days over 18 to 20 sitting weeks, and does not sit on Fridays; and New Zealand's House of Representatives sits about 90 days over 30 sitting weeks, and does not sit on Mondays or Fridays.

The Committee heard numerous viewpoints regarding the prospect of eliminating the House's Friday sittings. Some were in favour of the proposal provided the rest of the sitting week could be extended in order to accomplish the parliamentary business conducted on Friday. Others were against eliminating Friday sittings as it would reduce the ability of the opposition to hold the government to account, the extended sittings would encroach on family time in the evenings during the rest of the week, and a reduction in the hours the House sat each year could place seasonal certified indeterminate employees working for the House at risk of losing their status as employees. The Committee also heard from Mr. Bosc that adding hours to a sitting day and/or eliminating a sitting day would cause little impact on the operation or costs for the House, that the House Administration would support and put in place any decision the House made, and that it was difficult to predict what unintended consequences eliminating Friday sittings could have.⁵

Given the lack of consensus the Committee has heard regarding whether the potential benefits of eliminating Friday sittings outweigh the potential drawbacks, the Committee does not intend to propose a recommendation regarding this matter.

Establishing a parallel or alternate debating chamber. Parallel or alternate debating chambers were established in both Australia's House of Representatives, in 1994, where the parallel chamber is known as the Federation Chamber, and in the United Kingdom's

4 Parliament of Canada, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, [Evidence](#), Meeting 16, 42nd Parliament, First Session, April 19, 2016.

5 Parliament of Canada, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, [Evidence](#), Meeting 15, 42nd Parliament, First Session, April 14, 2016.

House of Commons, during the 1999-2000 parliamentary session, where the parallel chamber is known as Westminster Hall. The key features shared by both of these parallel chambers are that they permit certain parliamentary business to be transacted outside of the main chamber, thus relieving the pressure on time in the main chamber; they do not possess decision-making power; they have a low quorum; and they are more informal in their physical setting, allowing for greater interplay in debate.

The Committee heard from Mr. Bosc that implementing a parallel chamber would not be complicated procedurally; logistically, a parallel chamber could be set up in a similar manner as a parliamentary committee; it would likely have a limited cost to the House and limited impact on the work and salaries of parliamentary staff; and that the House Administration would support and implement a decision by the House to establish a parallel chamber.⁶

At this time, the Committee does not have any recommendations to make regarding implementing a parallel debating chamber for the House; it may revisit this topic in a future study.

3. Modernization

Issues, Proposals and Recommendations

As part of its study, the Committee considered how Parliament, as a workplace, could modernize its practices, resources and facilities in order to better support the parliamentary work of its membership, both current and future, and be more responsive to the increasingly diverse and changing expectations of members. In looking at modernizing certain practices of the House, the Committee covered several topics.

Child care services for members: A childcare facility within close proximity of Centre Block, open to parliamentarians, Parliament Hill employees and certain employees whose work supports Parliament, has been made available to members since 1982. Called Children on the Hill, the non-profit day care centre offers 34 spots. Issues that were brought to the attention of the Committee about Children on the Hill included whether the entry age for children ought to be lowered (presently, children must be aged 18 months to five years old), whether the hours ought to be made more flexible (the day care's hours of operation are Monday to Friday from 7:45 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; in July and August, the closing time is 5:30 p.m.), and whether a "drop-in" option ought to be offered (the day care only currently offers full-time spots).

The Committee was told by Mr. Pierre Parent, Chief Human Resources Officer of the House of Commons, that House Administration had studied various options regarding offering later hours and a drop-in service for the day care on the parliamentary precinct; these options were found to be problematic and costly due to the uncertainty of usage.⁷

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

The Committee recommends:

- 4. That House Administration proceed with providing flexible child care services, to be made available during the hours when needed by members, to attend to a member's child care needs, at the member's own personal hourly cost. The Committee will review and evaluate at a later date the suitability of whatever services are established.**

Allowing spouses and members' staff to access members' House-issued personal electronic calendars: Currently, information and updates entered into a member's House-issued personal electronic calendar do not synchronize with a calendar that a member's family and/or staff can access. Members' calendars are updated constantly and their staff and family are not adequately kept abreast of these changes. The Committee was told by Mr. Bosc that calendar security considerations were the reason for this issue, and that the House's Chief Information Officer was currently studying the matter to find a solution.⁸

The Committee heard significant support for the ability to synchronize members' work calendars with their personal work calendars.

The Committee recommends:

- 5. That the House of Commons Information Services find a practical and effective way to provide both read and write access to members' calendars by the members' staff, their spouses and/or immediate family on mobile devices.**

Absentee voting: The Committee studied how procedures in place in other jurisdictions, such as proxy voting and electronic voting, could allow members to be absent from the Chamber, for a restricted set of reasons, but still have their vote counted. Presently, the only way a member of Canada's House of Commons can have his or her vote recorded is for that member to be present in the Chamber, have heard the motion read, and be in his or her assigned seat. The Committee notes that since 1996, New Zealand's House of Representatives has had in place procedures to allow for proxy voting, and that since 2008, Australia's House of Representatives has permitted members who are nursing infants to cast proxy votes.

The Committee has no recommendations to make at this time regarding the implementation of proxy voting or electronic voting; it may revisit this topic in further study.

Decorum in the House of Commons: A topic that arose with relative frequency during the Committee's study was the tone and language of debate used by members during parliamentary proceedings. Some viewed the practice of disrupting or heckling a speaker as not being conducive to a respectful workplace. Some viewed heckling as a product of members engaging in vigorous debate and that it formed part of the culture of

8 Ibid.

Parliament provided the disruption was meant to be satirical and not meant to create a hostile environment.

The Committee remains concerned that excessive heckling creates an environment that is not as inclusive, respectful or modern as one that the House ought to aspire to foster. The Committee is also concerned that a parliamentary culture lacking in decorum can act as an inhibitor to Canadians considering standing for public office and/or in retaining those members who have gained election. The Committee notes that the number of women elected during the 42nd federal general election represented a record proportion of female members of Parliament; however, it has been estimated that at the current rate of female participation it will take 90 years to achieve gender parity in the House.⁹

The Committee has no recommendations to make at this time regarding decorum in the House. It does note, however, that a purpose of this study was to identify and remove barriers to attracting and retaining a broader spectrum of Canadians as members of Parliament. The Committee, as such, may revisit this topic in further study.

The House of Commons bus service: During its study, some members of the Committee expressed concerns with certain elements of the House of Commons bus service. One such concern was the lack of the frequency of buses. This had time and security implications for all members, but especially for those who were temporarily or permanently disabled or were unable to walk far distances, and for members seeking to safely depart Parliament Hill at night or in winter. Mr. Bosc indicated to the Committee during his appearance on April 14, 2016 that the matter was complex and that the House had sought to balance cost versus service for members but would, in response to the members' comments, make appropriate adjustments.¹⁰ The Committee appreciates Mr. Bosc's and the House Administration's response and action on this matter. In the Committee's view, the operation of the House bus service is of sufficient importance that the Board of Internal Economy ought to give it a full examination.

The Committee recommends:

- 6. That the Board of Internal Economy fully examine the House of Commons bus service, in consultation with its ridership, on an on-going basis. This examination should consider the frequency, schedule and availability of buses, with a view of ensuring timeliness of service and security of its users when the House is sitting, but as importantly, during the periods when the House is not sitting.**

Miscellaneous infrastructure issues: The Committee notes that a number of improvements to House of Commons facilities made available to members were recently

9 Parliament of Canada, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, [Evidence](#), Meeting 16, 42nd Parliament, First Session, April 19, 2016.

10 Parliament of Canada, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, [Evidence](#), Meeting 15, 42nd Parliament, First Session, April 14, 2016.

implemented as a result of discussions held between, among others, Ms. Christine Moore, M.P. for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet, M.P. for Hochelaga, the Speaker of the House of Commons and officials from the House of Commons Administration. As an example, a room has recently been opened for parents caring for young children in Centre Block, equipped with appropriate amenities. The Committee thanks those who participated in the successful collaboration that led to these changes.

The Committee considers it important that these positive changes be maintained going forward and implemented at West Block, following the closure of Centre Block for renovations in 2018.

Along the same lines, the Committee recommends to the Board of Internal Economy that a one-time gender-sensitive safety audit be conducted based on the best practices from the Inter-Parliamentary Union,¹¹ including but not limited to:

- Lighting in the parking lots of the parliamentary precinct ought to be evaluated for safety and security risks, and improved, where it is found inadequate;
- Patrols of the grounds of the parliamentary precincts by the Parliamentary Protective Service ought to be increased following the adjournment of late sittings of the House and/or its committees;
- The use of the service whereby the Parliamentary Protective Service escorts members who so request an escort ought to be promoted among members and all Parliament Hill staff;
- The number of panic buttons stationed outdoors on the parliamentary precinct ought to be evaluated and increased as required; and
- The number of gender neutral toilets and change tables on the parliamentary precinct ought to be increased, where necessary.

The Committee may revisit this topic in order to consider related issues and make recommendations in further study.

4. Work-life balance

Issues, Proposals and Recommendations

There are few jobs with longer hours and greater stress than that of a member of a legislature. Numerous tasks and multiple roles at the legislature and in constituencies compete for a member's time. Members also frequently are called upon to travel abroad, whether with a parliamentary committee or as part of an official delegation. Meanwhile, members face high expectations on the part of the public to be constantly working on its behalf, and as such, they also deal with increasing public scrutiny.

11 Vicky Edgecombe, *Gender Sensitive Safety Audit of the Premises of Parliament and of Constituency Offices as well as Other Measures that Create a Safe and Secure Environment for Women (and Men)*, prepared for Ms. Anita Vandbenbeld, M.P. for Ottawa West—Nepean by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, June 2016.

Such circumstances can have adverse effects on a member's work-life balance, especially those with spouses and families. Members can be apart from their homes and families for long stretches of time.

During its study, the Committee examined mechanisms that could alleviate some of the job-related challenges faced by members. The Committee did hear, though, that changes to the work structure of a Parliament that would result in the improvement of the work-life balance for all members can be difficult to achieve, in that each member has his or her approach to balancing work and family time.

Absences from the Chamber: Currently, the employment of members of Parliament in tenure of office is not included in uninsurable employment.¹² As such, members do not pay into the federal Employment Insurance program and are consequently excluded from receiving any of the benefits of that program. Further, a deduction from the annual sessional allowance of members resulting from absences is set out in section 57(1) of the *Parliament of Canada Act*.¹³ Members who are absent from the House for more than 21 sitting days per session have their pay cut by \$120 a day. Under the *Parliament of Canada Act*, a member's absence caused by attending to public or official business, or due to illness, does not count towards the 21 sitting day limit per session.

The Committee is interested in providing flexibility to members who are in the late stages of pregnancy, new mothers or parents, or who serve as primary caregivers. The Committee, however, does not have any recommendations regarding this matter at this time; it intends to revisit this topic in further study.

*Travel point system:*¹⁴ The House of Commons reimburses each member for up to 64 return trips in a year between Ottawa and his or her constituency. Each return trip is referred to as a point. Members may choose to use all of the 64 travel points themselves or allocate all or some to a "designated traveller" for trips between Ottawa and the member's constituency. A member may only select one designated traveller; the Board of Internal Economy prescribes rules as to who may be selected. In addition, a member's dependant may utilize some of the member's travel points, and only a quarter point is deducted for each trip taken by a member's dependant who is under the age of six.

In recent years, in accordance with public expectations, the Board of Internal Economy has increased the depth and breadth of disclosure of expenses claimed by members in carrying out their parliamentary functions, including members' travel expenses. The Committee has heard that an unintended consequence of greater disclosure and accountability on the part of members in respect of travel has been that their family members have felt reluctant, if not discouraged, from making use of a travel point to visit a spouse or parent. The Committee considers it important for families to gain a better understanding of the work, and its accompanying pressures, that members must

12 This information was provided by the House of Commons Pay and Benefits Section.

13 *Parliament of Canada Act* (R.S.C., 1985, c. P-1)

14 Parliament of Canada Website, Member's Allowances and Services Manual, [Travel](#).

manage as part of their job in Ottawa. Reuniting couples and/or families may also act to alleviate some of these pressures.

The Committee would appreciate if the Board of Internal Economy could examine possible approaches to amending the current system with a view to encouraging members' spouses and children to make use of travel points to visit their spouse or parent. The Committee suggests the Board consider blending the points allotted to designated travellers with those allotted to dependants. The Board might also consider creating a "family travel point" that could be utilized by a member's whole family, regardless of its size.

The Committee recommends:

7. That the Board of Internal Economy examine amending the travel point system with regard to members' families.

Lastly, in further study the Committee intends to review the issues covered in this interim report to take into consideration their impact on members' staff and those whose work supports Parliament.

A copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings ([Meetings Nos. 5, 7, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26 and 27](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

LARRY BAGNELL
Chair