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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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Chair: Ms. Ruby Sahota





## Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Monday, July 6, 2020

• (1100)

[*English*]

**The Chair (Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 27, on July 6, 2020, of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The committee is meeting on its study of parliamentary duties and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pursuant to the motion adopted by the House on May 26, 2020, the committee may continue to sit virtually until Monday, September 21, 2020, to consider matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters.

Certain limitations on virtual committee meetings held until now are now removed. As just mentioned, the committee is now able to consider “other matters” and, in addition to receiving other evidence, the committee may also consider motions as it normally does. As stipulated in the latest order of reference from the House, all motions shall be decided by way of a recorded vote.

Today’s meeting is public, taking place by video conference, and the proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

In order to ensure an orderly meeting, there are a few rules to outline. Interpretation for the video conference will be made available, and I think all of our witnesses here today and the committee members are all regular members of the committee and are familiar with the way interpretation works. Please select at the bottom the language you are speaking. You have the options of English, floor or French, but for interpretation purposes it’s best to select the language that you are speaking.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon and activate your mike. Even though we’ve been doing this for a while, we do forget this from time to time. Also, remember to mute your mike after you’re done speaking.

If a member wishes to speak outside of their designated time and raise a point of order, they can just unmute their mike and say that they have a point of order. If another member wishes to speak to that point of order, they can use the “raise hand” function in the toolbar.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, remember to have your mike on mute. I believe Mark

just stated that he has his headset. I strongly encourage you to use your headsets if you have them, or a mike that you think has the appropriate sound quality.

Should any technical challenges arise, please do your best to let us know, whether it’s with interpretation or whether it’s with your being able to participate. We want to be informed right away so that, if needed, we can suspend to make sure that you can participate. With that being said, please make sure that you are on gallery view in the top right-hand corner. There’s a speaker view option and a gallery view. Gallery view will ensure that you can see everyone.

With that being said, I’d like to welcome all of our witnesses here today. We have Mr. Anthony Rota, Speaker of the House of Commons; Mr. Charles Robert, Clerk of the House of Commons; Mr. Patrice, deputy clerk, administration; Mr. André Gagnon, deputy clerk, procedure; Mr. Philippe Dufresne, law clerk of the House of Commons and parliamentary counsel; and Mr. Stéphan Aubé.

Thank you so much for being with us today. I know that, Mr. Aubé, you are participating remotely and that everyone else is in the room. I believe we have opening statements, which were circulated to us beforehand, from our Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, could you go ahead and start with your opening statement, please?

• (1105)

**Hon. Anthony Rota (Speaker of the House of Commons):** Thank you, Madam Chair. It’s a pleasure to be here this morning. It’s always a pleasure to come back and dig a little bit deeper into some of the things that most influence us these days.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Madam Chair and honourable members of the committee, for your invitation to appear again as this committee continues the second phase of its study of parliamentary duties during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As requested by the committee, work has continued to document a proposed solution for remote and electronic voting. At my request, the Administration has also provided an analysis of in-person voting to respond to an inquiry made by the House Leader of the Official Opposition. The results of this work are contained in the reports submitted to the committee last week.

[English]

The proposed approach for an electronic voting system respects several key principles. It is mobile, allowing members to vote electronically whether or not they are present in the parliamentary precinct. It is fully bilingual and meets the House of Commons' accessibility standards. It includes notifications to alert members through secure channels when a vote is to occur.

The integrity of the voting process is fundamental to the legitimacy of our parliamentary democracy, and it follows that the security of the proposed solution is paramount. Members must be confident that when they cast a vote using the system, it is recorded accurately and securely.

In the proposed solution, members must use House of Commons-managed devices. This is the same requirement as for participation in virtual committee meetings or hybrid sittings of the House. A recommendation from this committee that all members abide by this key requirement would further support achieving the necessary level of security.

The remote voting solution would be integrated with the existing security infrastructure of the House. This would allow us to use technologies already in place at the House to authenticate the identity of each member of Parliament every time he or she accesses the voting system.

Given that very little about the voting process is codified in the Standing Orders, this would not require extensive modifications. The report submitted to this committee contains a draft text of a possible amendment.

The method of voting would change so that all recorded divisions requested during virtual or hybrid sittings would be conducted using the electronic system. Members would not need to be in the House, either physically or virtually, for the reading of the motion prior to the division and until the results are announced. However, the voting process itself would continue to be familiar to members.

When a question is dependent on the result of another vote, such as when the House votes on an amendment before voting on the main motion, I would, as Speaker, announce the first result and allot additional time for the subsequent vote, unless unanimous consent were sought to apply the results of the previous recorded division.

As I mentioned at my last appearance, secret-ballot voting introduces an added level of complexity and would not be included in the system's first phase.

• (1110)

[Translation]

In addition to preparing this proposal for electronic voting, the House Administration has conducted an analysis of ways to allow all members to vote in person while respecting public health advice. This work was done, as I mentioned earlier, further to a letter I received on June 11 from the House Leader of the Official Opposition, and committee members have received a copy of this correspondence and the resulting report.

The analysis of alternative in-person voting procedures has been guided by the principles of efficiency, accuracy, integrity and transparency, which align with the current process of standing votes. In developing options, public health guidelines and protocols have been the priority. The analysis also takes into account two major factors: whether it is a single vote or involves a series of votes and whether the vote is immediate or deferred.

[English]

Among the proposals put forward is an adaptation of the Westminster practice of queuing. This method would call for members to form two lines in the courtyard outside the chamber and for the tally to be recorded by table officers. Another method would involve holding the vote in the chamber, with members arriving and departing in several shifts to respect the maximum number of persons allowed in the chamber at any one time. Adaptations of this approach could be done through block or proxy voting, where whips or other members vote for themselves as well as some of their colleagues. The report also outlines how votes could be conducted outside of West Block at a larger location, such as the Sir John A. Macdonald building, which would be convenient to all members.

As I have stated at each of my appearances before this committee, the House administration is committed to providing the best possible support to all members. My team stands ready to prepare a schedule for the implementation of any voting system or procedure the committee chooses and to adapt the approach in response to the committee's feedback.

We would be pleased to answer any questions at this time. Thank you.

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

I believe that's the only statement we have today. We have all of the witnesses for an ample amount of time. I believe we'll be able to get in a few rounds of questions. We can decide as we go. We can go for the whole time and get in all the questions that are desired by all the members here today.

I noticed during the opening statement that we also have Ms. May with us today.

Welcome, Ms. May.

• (1115)

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm sorry; I had some trouble locating the password. However, I was here in time to hear all of the Speaker's statement. If there's room to squeeze me in anywhere, I'd be grateful.

**The Chair:** All right.

We will begin our first round of seven minutes with a Conservative member. I don't have the list in front of me. Who will it be?

Mr. Richards, please go ahead.

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

I have all sorts of questions. I'll get in as many of them as I can.

Perhaps I'll start with a little bit about electronic voting options in regard to this potential for app-based voting. I know that when we were doing our first report back in April and May, the administration was moving ahead with making arrangements for the virtual and hybrid sittings even while we were doing the study. I'm wondering if any work is being done at this time towards building a voting app in parallel to this study that's happening right now.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes, work is being done. The staff is working diligently to accommodate whatever this committee decides. Based on the questions that have come in, the administration, the staff members and IT have been working and looking at what's being done, not only possibly for ours but right across the country and right around the globe as well.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Can you maybe indicate how much money has been spent so far on the app or give an estimate of how much the development of the app will cost in total when it's completed?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'll have to defer to Monsieur Aubé on this one. He controls the IT and it's his department. He would have a better idea than I would.

Monsieur Aubé.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé (Chief Information Officer, Digital Services and Real Property, House of Commons):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Madam Chair.

Thank you for the question, Mr. Richards. Currently, we do have some internal resources through the House of Commons that are assigned to this project. We've been working at this for over six weeks now. These are costs that we would have incurred already. We have not yet incurred additional costs for building this tool box that could be used for a system moving forward, sir.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** So there haven't been any contractors or consultants hired at this point, engaged to assist with the work.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** No, sir. The only partners who have been engaged in this process are CSEC and the House of Commons staff.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** If the committee ends up recommending an app to be used for voting, what would be the estimate in terms of how long it would take before that would be available to be used?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** We believe that, if given the okay very quickly, we could possibly have something for the return of Parliament in September.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Now I'll go back to the Speaker again. With regard to roll call voting, there were suggestions in the communiqué that we received from the Speaker, I believe, that we would have to have an extended presence of a member on camera in order to be able to authenticate their identity. That was my understanding anyway, but correct me if I'm wrong.

Second, with the app-based voting, what would be done in order to authenticate a member of Parliament and their identity and ensure that it's not someone else using the MP's device, for example?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Richards, I guess you're referring to the individual voting where you would call on the person's name and the person's face would appear for every vote. Is that the roll call?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Yes.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** For that one, you would have the evidence of the person being there. On the other one, with the app, again there's authentication that happens. There's House-approved equipment that is also being used, so there's encryption. Maybe for those details I might want to pass it back to Mr. Aubé to go into more detail on how that is certified.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Sure. I guess what I'm trying to get at here is that I want to ensure we don't have a scenario where someone is able to have the device. A member could even choose to provide it to somebody and provide the password. How would we actually verify that it's being used by the members themselves?

● (1120)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'll let Mr. Aubé answer that one. There are quite a number of different...but he'll be able to go into more detail on that.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're looking at different things to ensure that we can authenticate the person. For sure, the use of their account on the Hill would be one of the things that would be required to be able to vote. You would need to have access to the personal information for the personal account of the member to participate. As the Speaker said, we will also recommend that a device of the House with a certificate of the House is used to authenticate. We're looking at multiple factors to authenticate that person. We're also looking at electronic signatures as a possible way, and we also have an approach to biometrics that could be used if recommended by this committee.

We're looking at multiple factors to ensure that we can guarantee the identity of that person.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** So none of those would involve actual facial recognition or having the person on camera. I guess there could be potentially a fairly significant cost to the biometrics. Maybe you can explore that a little bit further. I'm just trying to understand how, outside of facial recognition or something of that nature, we would actually determine that the MP hasn't shared the log-in information, etc. with somebody else.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** With the tool kit that we already have at the House, we do have the ability to use different models for electronic signatures. In this application, we would also have the ability to leverage the concept of taking a picture while someone is casting their vote. That is a capability that we would have in our tool kit, which we already have as a piece of infrastructure that we have not used for any other purposes. We have different ways to do electronic signatures at the House within our current infrastructure. As an example, we currently use Entrust as an electronic signature mechanism to ensure that when someone we know is issuing an email or encrypting an email, it's actually that person who sent it. There are different ways we can leverage to do that.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Aubé.

At the beginning, I misspoke when I said seven minutes. That's what happens when you take time off. It's six-minute rounds for everyone. We went over the six minutes, but I wanted to allow Mr. Aubé to finish his thought.

Mr. Turnbull, you're next.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** Thanks, Madam Chair.

Welcome back, everyone. It's great to have you back on PROC. It's always a pleasure to see you.

Mr. Speaker, it's great to hear your opening remarks. I certainly appreciated the comment you made—I read through your opening remarks; thanks for providing them in advance—that “very little about the voting process is codified in the Standing Orders”. I thought that was a really important observation, which I certainly hadn't made before.

I know that your office has provided a table of Standing Orders changes. I think some of them are minor. You indicated in your opening remarks that electronic voting “would not require extensive modifications”. Could you highlight one or two of the key changes that you think would need to be made?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** There are a number of different areas. I could go on for a while, but it's important to note that, for the Standing Orders, there are minor changes that would have to be made—but nothing major—in order to allow an electronic vote to happen. It could go rather smoothly.

Some of the major ones we've already taken care of, such as the presence of members in the House. We've already had a certain amount of virtual presence, and it wouldn't be too hard to adjust that way. The physical setting in the House is the other one. By changing very small areas, we could make it so that members could be physically somewhere else but still present for the purpose of the vote. Tabling presentations is already there. That's been taken care of.

When we look at the whole thing, there's not a lot that has to be changed. It's just a matter of getting some kind of agreement among the members on what they will accept. Then we could proceed from there.

• (1125)

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you for that. It's not really a matter of rule changes holding us back. It's about getting agreement from all parties.

We heard recent reports in the news about the coronavirus mutating. I've been reading a little bit about viruses and I'm no health expert, but all viruses, apparently, mutate as they copy and regenerate themselves. There's no evidence at the moment that the second strain of the coronavirus would be more deadly, but there is some evidence accumulating that it would spread more quickly. Interestingly enough, I think we're all thinking about the fall. We're thinking about, potentially, a second wave.

I noticed one of your comments was about the principles that you used to evaluate some of the physical options that were provided. One of the them was efficiency. To me, when I think of a long queue, as they've done in the U.K., that's not overly efficient in my view. It's not necessarily the best option for reducing the risk to people's health and the spread of the virus. Would you agree that the best option in the case of a second wave is likely to be a virtual option?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** The decision of what is best will have to be made by the House and, hopefully, by this committee as a rec-

ommendation. The things that we have to take into consideration when putting it together.... Sure, efficiency is very important. When you have a queuing system, yes, three hours would not be uncommon for a vote. I'm sure that with time, as things get better, it would probably shorten a bit, but that would be probably a first thing to consider.

Of course you want accuracy, which could be covered in both systems, as well as transparency—seeing that the person shows up and gets to vote so that they can be confirmed, or electronically, as Mr. Aubé mentioned earlier, making sure that the authentication shows that this person is actually voting, so that everything comes together.

The first thing that is mentioned when you go to the list of priorities is safety, making sure that our members of Parliament are not exposed to the virus or any danger. That's something that has to be paramount in all decisions made. If people are brought to one place, yes, there is a concern, but if that is what the House decides, then we'll have to work around it and to the best of our ability minimize that danger.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Aubé, I welcome you back as well. I always have questions for you, because security comes up when we talk about electronic voting.

Is it not true that all of the House-managed devices, the iPhones that we all get, have facial recognition built into them? Could we not use the biometrics as part of the security for electronic voting?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Yes, the newer devices do. There are still some members who have older devices, but all the newer devices that are being provided to the members of Parliament have built-in biometrics. That could be leveraged as part of our solution, if it were chosen by the committee.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Okay, great, thank you for that.

I know that—

**The Chair:** I think that's all the time we have, unfortunately.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** If I may, Madam Chair, just for a moment, I just want to correct a statement I made. The queue would be about 40 to 60 minutes per vote, not three to four hours. The shifting would be three hours per vote, so I just wanted to make that clear. My apologies.

**The Chair:** Thank you. You almost gave me a heart attack there. I was thinking, “Oh my goodness.” That is still long.

Madame Normandin, please go ahead for six minutes.

• (1130)

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Once again, I'd like to thank the witnesses for taking the time to appear before us and answer our many questions.

I'll start with a topic that's been less discussed. We've spent a lot of time on the issue of recorded votes, but a little less time on yes or no votes, when we are in the House and the Speaker has to decide which side wins.

Have you given more thought to this and how it could be done in a completely virtual or hybrid way?

Are there any thoughts on this?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes. This is entirely possible, and it depends on what happens with the Speaker. It can be done electronically, for instance with hands raised electronically, or members could even be asked to respond orally yes or no.

It might be a little more difficult because we aren't in the House. I'm pretty sure there would be a way to do it and that we could very easily adapt.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Okay.

Similarly, if, as a result of a yes or no vote, five members were to rise in the House, there would also be a way to do that. Is that correct?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes, absolutely.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Great.

Could you talk to us about the possibility of limiting the period during which votes can be held? Ms. Blaney and others raised it. Canada has several time zones, which can make the situation a little more difficult, considering that some members may be far away, and it may not necessarily be a suitable time slot to vote.

Do you think it can be done easily? In other words, could we decide to vote only at certain times, for instance?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** To ensure that everyone has an opportunity to vote, we will set a fairly long period of time. The estimate I heard was 30 minutes, to give everyone a chance to vote. Members will also have the chance to vote during the bells.

That said, when the vote is held in Ottawa, we vote in Ottawa. So that's the answer. If there were periods of two or three hours, it would start to drag on a bit too much. From what I've seen so far, it would be 30 minutes during the sitting.

As you know, in Parliament, voting periods sometimes take place from 10:00 a.m. until midnight or 2:00 a.m. You never know. During those hours, there might be times when voting would be a little more difficult for someone in another part of the country, where the time is different. That decision should be made by this committee, in light of what members want to do. Having said that, it would normally be done over a 30-minute period.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Good.

The committee could still decide that the 30-minute period of bells could only happen during a certain time in the day. For example, the 30 minutes could be between noon and 5:00 p.m. Ottawa time, with no problem.

Is that correct?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Exactly. It's up to the current committee and the House to decide on it.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Okay.

I'll continue with the issue of voting, which would be a little like the Westminster model, with queuing. I understand that you have looked at the possibility of a hybrid vote, where we could vote this way, by proxy or electronically.

Have I understood that correctly?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes.

It will depend on what the committee decides, whether it chooses a hybrid system or something else. There are many possibilities when it comes to voting, and it's the committee and the members of Parliament who will decide.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Okay.

My next question relates to the technical aspect. Perhaps Mr. Aubé will be able to answer it.

If we decide to use the hybrid model, some members will vote on site, and others will vote electronically. So we'll have to make sure that no one votes twice, and we'll have to compare the two lists.

Am I mistaken?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** You aren't mistaken. It's indeed one of the controls that will have to be put in place to ensure that no one votes twice.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Good.

In a hybrid system, the time allowed for the compilation of votes, for instance, will have to be longer than in a vote where all members vote electronically. Is that correct?

• (1135)

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** It will certainly take some time to make sure that doesn't happen.

The report recommends a better way of proceeding, whether all members vote electronically or they all vote manually. If the members decide to put the hybrid model forward, we will put in place controls to ensure that this doesn't happen.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** We therefore agree that, from the point of view of efficiency alone, especially in successive votes where the result of one vote depends on the result of the previous vote, it will take longer to operate in a hybrid way than by using only one or other of the methods.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** We can assume that this is, indeed, the case.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you.

Madam Chair, I've reached the end of my questions, but I think I have about 10 seconds left.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Blaney, go ahead, please.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, of course, to all of you for being here with us today. I really appreciate all of the reports that we received.

We don't know what's going to happen in the fall and we don't know what's going to happen with COVID, and so I'm just trying to clarify something. Even if we do find a safe way to vote in the House—and you've listed numerous ways—my concern still is the travelling across the country. I come from Vancouver Island and right now we've just had our airports open up again. We were having to take a ferry to get to Vancouver to fly. Often the flights are taking anywhere from a day to two days, which means that we have members not only leaving their communities but stopping along the way.

In your assessment was there any work done to look at the risks of having members travelling from across the country? The second part of that question is how long, with any of these methods, would it take to sanitize the space? If we have people queueing in the space and if we have people coming into the House of Commons to vote in different ways, do we have any understanding of just how long it would take to make those spaces safe again?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Those are both very good questions. The health concern is probably the biggest one, when you have members travelling from one part of the country to the other. When we look at Canada, we would probably, under circumstances in Europe or other places, have about 50 countries within that same space. We have different regions, and different regions are taking care of things differently, based on their realities. We have provinces, and we have different areas of provinces that are opening up at different rates, and that is one of the realities.

When we start moving people from one place to another, yes, that's certainly a concern that has crossed our minds. We will have to rely on the health officials to make that decision, and hopefully that will be considered when the committee brings out its report.

On the other issue, when we talk about sanitizing between sittings, I talked about the block shifting, whereby a certain group would be safe in the House and it would take about three hours to go through one vote as opposed to different options otherwise. One of the main reasons it takes so long is that you bring in only so many; they vote; they leave, and then you have to sanitize everything in the chamber so that the next group coming in will have a clean and sanitized area to come through.

So there is a certain amount of time involved in making sure that everything is suitable for the incoming members.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

My other question, Mr. Speaker, is around the virtual voting practice. At this point, we have 15- to 30-minute bells, depending on the vote. Based on some of the information you've given us—I believe in one of the reports, although there have been several, so I apologize for not saying which one—you identified that there were two members you were still working with in terms of connectivity for them. Speaking for myself, if I drove 20 minutes out of town

here I would have no cell reception at all. In a sudden vote, I wouldn't be able to get that information. Hopefully, we have better planning around voting so that I don't do that. I understand that if I stay within this area I'm okay, but I don't know if all members have the same connectivity. I'm just wondering if that is a concern.

Of course, in our last report we did have a recommendation that if a member did not have access to appropriate connectivity to be able to vote or to participate in the House, we would identify where they had to go to get that connectivity and make sure that it was something the House of Commons supported them in doing. I'm wondering whether there has been any work done around assessing that and whether there are any members we should be concerned about. I don't expect you to tell us who those members are, but what is the strategy around making sure they have access to not only the House but also the capacity to virtually vote?

● (1140)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** That is a very good point. It is a member's privilege to vote, and we don't want the member to lose that privilege or not be able to access it. Overall, things have been very good as far as access is concerned. As we said last time, we had a couple of members who were having issues. Whether they go from home or from office, there is a point where they can have access.

Maybe I'll pass this over to Monsieur Aubé. He can probably give us a lot more detail on what steps have been taken so that all members can have access to the vote and all members can have access to the Internet.

Monsieur Aubé.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Madam Blaney, over the last few weeks we have reassessed every constituency office to ensure that there is appropriate connectivity. As I commented at a previous meeting, it was true that we had two specific members in northern areas of Canada for whom this was posing a problem, but we do have solutions for them. We do have the ability to provide facilities or provide connectivity to them, if this committee so chooses. We are constantly reassessing the connectivity that exists in your constituency offices. As I said, over the last few weeks we've reassessed them and made sure that the appropriate level of connectivity is there in order to participate, if the committee so chooses, electronically for voting.

Having said that, the challenges previously were more related to the homes of the members. As you know, we provide connectivity to the constituency offices. With the constituency offices, it was a little easier for us to assess the connectivity in these areas. With the homes, we do have some good statistics for every individual member, and we certainly would have a plan to make sure it was available for them. It would be in their constituency offices most preferably, but if ever there would be a need for them to stay home, we would find a way to make this happen for them.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Aubé.

We will carry on our five-minute round with Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Speaker and everyone, thank you for being here.



Let me prelude my comments by saying that the House of Commons staff has done an extraordinary and great job at keeping all of us safe and keeping the physical aspects of the building safe. I've been quite comfortable every time I've come to West Block and other areas, including to my office in the Confederation building. I want to say congratulations to the staff. If you could relay that on our behalf, I would appreciate that.

I'm not sure who these questions can go to. I'd like to start by asking whether it's correct that there have been nine sittings of the House of Commons since March 13.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes, that's correct.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Since March 13 the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic met 18 times in the House chamber. Is that correct?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Since March 13 there have been four in-person meetings of standing committees. Is that correct?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Let me check on that one. That one is....

**Mr. John Brassard:** I would ask, Madam Chair, that, while the Speaker is checking, we—

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Stop the clock.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Yes, if you don't mind.

**The Chair:** Sure.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** We were just checking. We believe there were four, and there is another one meeting tomorrow.

Many of these have taken place virtually and worked out that way, so a number of committee meetings have taken place even if they weren't in person.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For all virtual committee meetings, there are procedural clerks, interpreters, technicians and other staff who are required to be on the Hill for every minute of every virtual committee meeting. Is that correct?

• (1145)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes.

Oh, wait a minute. There are cases in which they are not required here, so that—

**Mr. John Brassard:** There's Mr. Aubé this morning, I see.

Okay. Thank you.

Since March 13, there have been 156 virtual committee meetings, lasting some 390 hours and 20 minutes. Would that be roughly correct?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I don't have the stats with me. I'll have to believe you on that. I trust you've done your homework very efficiently, and I'll have to go along with you, although I can't confirm it.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now, by my calculations, there have been, since March 13, a total of 187 meetings and sittings. Are you aware of any actual COVID-19 cases associated with any of these 187 gatherings?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'm not aware of any, no.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Are you aware of any suspected cases of COVID-19 associated with any of these 187 gatherings?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I am not.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Are you aware of anyone who has required quarantine as a precaution because of their attendance at any of these 187 gatherings?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'm not.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Are you aware of any contact-tracing effort touching upon any of these 187 gatherings?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** There is none that I know of.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Okay.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you have very helpfully laid out several detailed options for in-person voting. Can you confirm that every single one of your proposals would comply with public health guidelines?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** They were done with that in mind, and we would have to check once we started implementing to make sure, but we have done our best.

As you mentioned earlier, we have very competent staff who have done their work and made sure that everything is in place, so I feel comfortable saying yes, but as we get closer and as things change, as things are shifting with the COVID-19 situation, we would have to examine as they were implemented, if that's what the committee and parliamentarians decided.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Did you seek public health guidance in implementing these or in actually coming up with these proposals?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** We did.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Okay. How much lead time would you need to implement these in-person voting options? I heard Mr. Aubé say that the app for virtual voting could be ready by September. Would it be possible to put them into effect immediately if they were agreed upon?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I would feel more comfortable telling you that September 21 would be the best time to implement them, if needed. To implement them right now while we're not sitting—we have three more sessions left at which they might be put in place. I would feel comfortable with telling you that the September return would be the best time.

That would give us sufficient time.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Okay. Thank you.

How much more time do I have, Madam Chair?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Justin Vaive):** Madam Chair, Mr. Brassard has approximately 20 seconds left.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Okay.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that come up regularly as we discuss this is the issue of air travel. Public health has not advised of any restrictions on air travel. Do you see that being a problem with MPs coming to Ottawa to vote in person?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** We would have to look at what the health officials are saying, but air travel seems to be safe.

The thing we have to take into consideration is where the MPs have been. Have they met with groups? Have they picked something up? Are they inadvertent carriers?

That's something that has to be taken into account and something I hope this committee looks at very closely.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next up we have Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Speaker, I haven't had a cavity in seven years. Do you think that I should stop brushing my teeth?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** No. Congratulations.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Congratulations to you and the incredible work that the House of Commons staff has been doing in order to produce the result of having no cases.

Would you consider that a success?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Very much so. The staff has taken this very seriously, as members of Parliament have taken it very seriously. A lot of the co-operation amongst the parties, amongst the members and with staff has really made us to be an example for the world to follow.

• (1150)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Thank you for that.

Mr. Aubé, would you say that your main concern, when it comes to the security of virtual voting, is to police members of Parliament to make sure that they're doing what they're supposed to be doing, or is your main concern to prevent the infiltration of third parties from trying to disrupt the democratic process?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** I would say my main concern is to ensure that no one is interfering with the voting process.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Would that include a member of Parliament, or are you referring to people coming in from the outside?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** I am always of the premise that the members are honourable and will follow the regulations.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** That's a very good point.

To that end, Mr. Speaker, we have had a number of cases within the House of Commons, from time to time, where it wasn't clear if somebody was in their seat or what the rule is or if they heard the question.

It seems to me in the limited experience that I've had during the past five years that what it really comes down to is the member doing what is the honourable thing. If the member says they were in a certain position at a certain time, the rulings from the Speakers have usually been to trust the member in that regard. Is that right?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** It would be very difficult for the Speaker to have his eyes on every member, where he is, where she is, at that time. We do call them honourable members and we are all honourable members. I rely on their being honest.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** The reason I bring this up is that there appear to be two different themes when we talk about security. Some

members of this committee talk about security from the perspective of the infiltration of third parties to disrupt our democratic process, but other members of the committee seem to be more concerned about whether a member would give their device to another person or another individual who would then utilize that device to vote on their behalf.

From a security perspective, from the Speaker's perspective, which of those two are you more concerned about? Are you concerned about individuals coming from the outside to disrupt our democratic process, or are you more concerned about questioning that honour that you mentioned of the members?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** The main concern that we have when putting a system together and making sure that it works is infiltration from the outside. If someone comes in from the outside and disrupts how things are going or skews votes or arguments a certain way, then it really does interfere with the process.

Concerning the voting itself, there's enough in place where a member will have passwords or will have a certain number of safety measures that will avoid someone breaking in and taking his or her vote away or his or her debate time away. To me, it is up to the member to protect that.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** On the topic of virtual voting, during the discussions of virtual voting we seem to be going down two paths. Do we do this through an app-based application or do we do it through some kind of visual process, like on Zoom?

I want to understand. The way we do it in the House of Commons when we have a standing vote, which takes eight minutes, is that we go down rows. The Speaker and the Clerk's staff can see ahead of time who's coming up next, who might be absent, who might not.

Have you even thought of how you would practically implement that system on a platform like Zoom where you have 17 or 18 pages of thumbnail pictures and you wouldn't necessarily have everybody lined up the way that it has to go? Has that been a consideration? Have you thought about that much, Mr. Aubé or Mr. Speaker?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** It's certainly been a discussion at the table when we are talking about different options and how we will handle that. I think we're capable of it but it would certainly take a little bit longer.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** What would be your preference, Mr. Speaker? Would it be to have an app-based vote or would it be to have people standing? And I don't mean your personal preference. Based on the discussions you've had on administering the vote, what is the simplest way for the Speaker and the clerks to handle that?

**The Chair:** That's all the time we have. We don't have time for the answer to that, but maybe we'll get that on the next round.

Mr. Duncan, please.

• (1155)

**Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm in my constituency office and I've cut out four or five times, so I apologize if we have to suspend.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and the House administration team, for your leadership in this evolving situation. I think every job in Canada, including ours as members, has been evolving these days.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a note about the various in-person, app and electronic options we're looking at. Would it be fair to say that these options aren't mutually exclusive? You've talked about different options for different circumstances and times. Would you suggest that in-person voting in September be the natural preference and that we go into remote voting if need be? Can you talk about the exclusivity of these options and the ability to change?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** The ability to change is really up to the House and the individual members. Can you blend them? Yes. It would probably cause a little bit of confusion, but overall whatever this committee and the members of Parliament decide to go with, that's what our staff is ready to go with.

Is it better to meet in person or virtually come September? COVID has been changing so drastically along the way, it's very difficult to predict what will happen in a month and a half or two months from now.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Sure.

For the options for in-person voting, one of the things I made a note of was about voting outside the chamber. Is there any consideration of having a camera installed to perhaps capture the voting process? I don't know if that was noted in there at all.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'm sorry, you'll have to clarify that question on the camera. Where and how exactly do you mean?

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** For example, for the queue voting, we talked about the option presented that it could be in the Sir John A. Macdonald Building. Has there been talk of having a camera in the queue, for example, for the public to see that process?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** It's not in the proposal. It's something that could be considered as an extra precaution, but that's something you may want to bring forward, Mr. Duncan, when the report comes forward. It's not something that has been discussed.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** I appreciate that.

I'll switch to electronic voting for the roll call voting. You've mentioned the extended on-camera presence that would be required for voting that way. That's the way to identify the MPs' identities, correct? Would having that physical presence on Zoom be the way of validating that?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** That would be one of the ways of validating, yes.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** By comparison, on the remote app it would be the sign-in and not the member's physical presence. I do respect that we all are honourable members. I have no reason to suggest otherwise, of course. It would be based on the trust or honour of the

members that we wouldn't see or necessarily be able to see. That would be the disadvantage of the app, so having that in-person camera would make the validation much easier to do, correct?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** That is correct. There is a confirmation process when someone signs into an app or through electronic voting. Again, we're back to the integrity of the individual members and the honour of the members, which I trust wholeheartedly.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Yes.

Then again, with in-person votes or with the use of the facing camera, we wouldn't have to deal with that or really question that at all.

I'll just switch to committees. You may wish to defer to some of your colleagues about the virtual capacity for committee meetings. One of the comments I had written down was about the capacity of the technical aspect—and I give kudos to interpretation and all the technical teams doing this stuff.

What's the plan in the fall when we come back? Whatever we choose in terms of the technical capacities.... I think of all of our standing committees, the House and those types of things. Are we adding staff? Are we adding capacity for the short term? What's the status update on both the IT and the staffing aspects?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'll defer this one to Mr. Aubé. I'm sure he'll be able to answer that with much more detail than I will.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** We are currently in the buying process, to ensure that when we return in September, we can offer a capacity similar to our pre-COVID capacity, unless the environment changes from now to then for the worst. Our goal is to put in place the proper resourcing model to support you with the appropriate capacity for supporting all committees as we did previous to COVID.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Sorry, you just said that includes both the physical IT and the staffing requirements to administer that. Is that correct?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** We're looking at that.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** And you hope to have that by September 21.

Is that the capacity of the full-day or half-day virtual hybrid sittings and all the committees running? You're saying that you're trying to get that all lined up so we could be at full capacity with everything on September 21?

• (1200)

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** It is our goal to provide an approach to the Speaker to ensure that this happens.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, that's all the time we have.

Next up is Dr. Duncan for five minutes, please.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank all our witnesses today. I, too, would like to recognize the extraordinary job the House leadership has done in allowing a virtual hybrid Parliament.

I will talk briefly about health. Today, there are 11.5 million cases worldwide and the U.S. is at 2.9 million cases. We are not finished the first wave and I, too, would argue that the most important thing is the health and safety of everyone involved.

I would first ask our Speaker, if I may. I'm looking, Mr. Speaker, for yes-or-no answers here. Was the hybrid Parliament secure?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you.

Was it tested?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Was it accessible?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Did it provide simultaneous English and French interpretation?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Did it respect social distancing?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Did it allow all members of Parliament to take part and represent their constituents?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Did it allow for full participation by the media?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd now like to go to the Clerk.

Based on your experience, please answer the same questions.

Was the system secure?

**Mr. Charles Robert (Clerk of the House of Commons):** That's my understanding, yes.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Was it tested?

**Mr. Charles Robert:** Certainly.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Was it accessible?

**Mr. Charles Robert:** Yes.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Did it allow simultaneous English and French interpretation?

**Mr. Charles Robert:** With a few hiccups, yes.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Did it respect social distancing?

**Mr. Charles Robert:** Of course.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Did it allow all members of Parliament to take part and represent their constituents?

**Mr. Charles Robert:** Yes, indeed.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Did it allow for full participation by the media?

**Mr. Charles Robert:** Yes.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you so much.

Mr. Speaker, as we come to the fall, I don't think any of us know what to expect. It is a novel virus. It is a new virus. There is concern about a second wave, a second wave with influenza. How are you thinking about the health and safety aspects?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Health and safety is number one with everything we do. We want to make sure that anyone coming to the Hill is not bringing contamination to the Hill or leaving with contamination, making sure that everyone is safe. This has been the case right from day one and we want to continue to make sure that we do it to the best of our ability, based on what is decided by the House.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Monsieur Aubé, I'm wondering if you could take us through what an ideal virtual voting system would look like from your perspective. In terms of all the security, what would your recommendations in your ideal system look like, please?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** The first criteria that we've all been discussing is the security aspect. We want to make sure that, if we go forward with an electronic voting system, it is a secure system and we can validate that the results that are coming out of the system are the results based on the votes of the members of Parliament. For us, that is the first thing: it needs to be secure.

The second thing is that it needs to be easy to use for the members. We'd want to make sure that, with anything that we build, we would be able to engage the members to ensure that they can do this in an efficient way.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Monsieur Aubé, may I interrupt briefly for a second?

I'd like to know very specifically what security steps you would recommend from the initial notification right through to the end of the vote, please.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** More specifically, Ms. Duncan, we want to make sure that all these steps are logged, so when we notify someone, we'd log that someone did receive the message. Then when the person reads the message, the notification of votes, we would be aware that he received the notification.

We also want to make sure that we know when someone is logging into the system. We want to make sure that we know who's on it and whether it is the right person logging in.

We want to make sure that all transactions are encrypted, and encrypted in a way that ensures that no one can modify the results or influence the results through that encryption.

After that, we want to make sure it's signed. Through multiple factors of identification, we want the member to be able to sign the transaction to ensure that it is the member who made that transaction. We want to make sure that he used a House device with a House certificate, that he used his password, that he wasn't travelling from Toronto to Vancouver in the last 15 minutes, and that he did receive a confirmation. We want to ensure that the member, once he votes, will actually get a real-time confirmation of what he just did. He will also get a confirmation of his vote encrypted through different channels.

This is the way we want to ensure that it was the member who voted and to confirm that he voted. The last part of this is that we want to monitor all these activities while the votes are happening.

• (1205)

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you, Mr. Aubé.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That was very helpful, actually, and very clear.

Next we have Madame Normandin, please, for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

Since Mr. Brassard touched on it, I'd also like to come back to the issue of standing committees. I attended a meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration two weeks ago. Could someone confirm for me that the members of those committees had the option to attend remotely when the notice of meeting was sent out?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Who's answering this question?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'm sorry. It's a good question, and we need to discuss what happened.

No, they didn't have that option. They had to attend in person.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Perfect.

This may not have been brought to your attention, and I was wondering if you were aware that, given the physical distancing measures, there couldn't be more than a certain number of people there, which meant that the number of assistants was limited and that the witnesses—in this case, it was four senior officials and the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship—could not be physically present in the room.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Absolutely.

This needs to be considered when there are committees, and it's very important to have the option of being there virtually.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Right.

I want to mention the case of my colleague Ms. Jenny Kwan, a member from British Columbia who is on the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. While in the case of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic, she could attend meetings virtually, she had to travel to attend a meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration that lasted two hours.

Is that statement accurate?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I believe so, yes.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Okay.

If we can, for instance, attend the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic virtually to ask questions in question period under some of our parliamentary privileges, but we have to vote or attend standing committees in person, doesn't that create some kind of hierarchy between the different parliamentary privileges?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Not really.

It's the decision that must be made by parliamentarians and by this committee, based on what it finds possible to do in person and what it decides to do virtually. I don't think it's about hierarchy. It's a simple decision that needs to be made, and it's a decision for you as a committee and as members of Parliament.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** If we decide that, on the one hand, members of standing committees must sit in person but, on the other hand, it is possible to vote remotely, is it correct to say that certain privileges will be more difficult to exercise than others, because it will be possible for parliamentarians to exercise them in a hybrid or virtual manner?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes, it would certainly be reasonable to say that.

However, some elected members live a long way from Ottawa whereas others live here. We cannot say that those from far away have fewer privileges than those who are closer. It is up to each member to go to the designated place or to do what they have to do in order to exercise their rights.

• (1210)

[*English*]

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

Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Just to follow up on my last line of questioning, does the Speaker feel that the amount of time for bells is sufficient for voting in a virtual sitting?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** It's really up to the House. What was suggested was 30 minutes, and it's during that 30 minutes that the member has to vote. It's not like in the House, where you have 30 minutes of warning, and then you're in the House and you vote.

You are told there's going to be a vote, and the bells ring for 30 minutes. Once that 30 minutes is up, your voting time is up. Yes, that's something that was suggested. I feel comfortable with it. If the committee should feel that we need more than 30 minutes, or less than 30 minutes, really, it's not a time that is carved in stone. It's a suggested time that seems reasonable. Reasonable means different things to different people. I would rely on the committee's and Parliament's advice on how we would determine the amount of time.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I'm going to follow up as well on the issue of committees. Right now, there's a particular list of committees that can meet virtually, and the rest, if they want to meet, have to meet in person. There are ongoing negotiations among the parties, as everyone knows. Can I get any information to understand if we will have the capacity for all the committees to be able to meet?

I understand that part of the challenge, historically, has just been the capacity, and also the time constraints, because we have a big country with multiple time zones, so we are trying to pick times when members like myself who are in British Columbia are not sitting in front of a computer at 5:30 in the morning. We're trying to honour that.

Will the capacity be there in September for all the committees to be able to sit?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** That is one of the things that have been restricting the number of committees that can sit.

On capacity, if you don't mind, I will pass it over to Mr. Aubé, who would have a better handle on what it would take. Or would Mr. Gagnon be better? Which one of you would be best to answer this question?

**Mr. André Gagnon (Deputy Clerk, Procedure, House of Commons):** Maybe I can begin and Stéphan can follow up.

The special order that was adopted by the House on May 26, which was essentially a reorder of the order as previously adopted, mentioned that some committees, about nine, would be able to meet virtually. That special order ends on September 21. Your question, from that perspective, would relate directly to what happens on September 21, in terms of what committees would be meeting. From that perspective, with the information we have right now, that means the committees would have the possibility to meet only in person.

Maybe Stéphan can add to that, but as you are aware, the number of rooms that would meet the health guidelines is fairly limited on Parliament Hill.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That's all the time we have.

Next up we have Mr. Tochor for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to our guests.

I have a question for the Speaker, and it has to do with travel. I know you've been an MP for a while, and you don't have a medical background, I believe, but would you agree that if we're concerned about the safety of members, we shouldn't be heading back to our ridings on weekends and in between our sitting dates?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** That's an option that has been discussed by many people, whether they stay here on the weekend or go home. The less exposure you have, the better it is. That's up to each individual member to decide, unfortunately.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** Even before the pandemic, we would take steps. If we know we're going to be in a room with or close to people who are sick, we take precautions. That's what we should be doing in our personal lives and business representing our constituencies in Ottawa.

I have some questions about the app, Mr. Aubé. With the app you're developing right now, could you tell if a member was on a beach in Mexico when they were voting?

• (1215)

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** We could, sir.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** Could you tell where they were in the country? Would we restrict if a member was across the street from Parliament in a licensed establishment having a beverage? Could you tell where that individual was?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** I wouldn't say that we'd go to that level of detail, but I would certainly say that we have a requirement to monitor where the House of Commons devices are used. We monitor from a regional perspective. I wouldn't say that we get down to that level of granularity.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** It's actually interesting that you bring up devices. I have the iPhone that was issued from the Government of Canada. Could you track right now where I was?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** We don't track, sir, where you were. We can just track the location of where you are as per the device. We don't archive all the locations of where you are. We track to make sure that the devices that are participating in these events are within the guidelines that we've set for these meetings. As I said earlier in a previous meeting of this committee, we do geofencing, which means we ensure that the people who are participating in these meetings are within the areas that are allowed.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** Then the technology is there, on the hardware, to track where members are. As much as you say you geofence and take precautionary measures against abuse, you could track, on my iPhone, that I am right now sitting in my riding office. Is that correct?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** We could identify where you are. I wouldn't commit to saying that you are in that particular office, because we don't do that as per our security practices, but we certainly ensure that you are in a specific area or region.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** Okay.

I'll change gears a little bit. Right now, obviously, as a committee we don't have consensus. However, from reading the body language and testimony and questions for the last few months, I believe that a proxy voting system would possibly have consensus across all parties.

To the Speaker, on September 21—without spending another dollar of taxpayers' money, because I know we're spending a lot right now—if we just implemented proxy voting handled by the whips, are there any thoughts as to whether that would be ready to go sooner than September 21?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** A very simple, straightforward method... What we would need is a decision, and then it would be implemented. It's fairly straightforward and simple. The question is, do individual members feel that having one person vote for them is acceptable? That would be the main question that I would bring up or think about.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** You're saying it would be acceptable if all members felt comfortable doing that. It would not involve any taxpayer dollars spent on it, and we could run it next week with minimal changes to the Standing Orders.

I still have questions as to why we're spending taxpayers' dollars on an app that may never be used, hopefully. If it is used, a consensus over changing the Standing Orders would have to be found, and I don't think we're going to find that.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'd have to defer to someone on the cost of a proxy vote. I'm not sure what would be involved costwise. We've looked at different options. As staff and the Speaker's office, we are looking at what members want, and what we're able to do.

Maybe I could defer to Mr. Gagnon or Mr. Robert for the costs on a proxy vote.

**Mr. Charles Robert:** It's really just a decision of the House as to how they want to manage a voting system. Proxy or block voting is just basically a decision. You're quite right to point it out that way.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** So that would be the most affordable one, and we're going with the most expensive option out there, which is developing an electronic voting system. Is that accurate, Mr. Speaker?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** When we're given direction, we want to make sure we have the best system available.

**The Chair:** At this point, we're at the five-minute mark, and I was just informed by the clerk a little while ago.... I just want to get permission from the committee members to start right off the top of the rounds again, because that's what I had in my mind. Generally, when we have extra time after our first round, we go back from the five-minute mark, which is the middle, after the first set where each party goes, but I think it would give each party a little more time if we go right back to the beginning, and we do have enough time to do that this time.

How do the members feel about whether we start back at the six-minute round or just from the five-minute mark?

My second point is that Ms. May apparently has another meeting to attend, and she was wondering if she could have a few minutes of time.

Okay, so we're starting off from the top. Mr. Tochor just had his six minutes, and next we'll hear from Ms. May.

Ms. May has one question, I understand, and then we'll carry on with our regular order.

Thank you, Ms. May. Go ahead with your one question.

● (1220)

**Ms. Elizabeth May:** First of all, I wanted to underscore the points that others have made, especially Rachel Blaney. We're both on Vancouver Island, and I have to say that the Minister of Health for B.C. has asked the federal government for evidence that it's safe to pack the airplanes. I haven't seen that evidence. I don't think it's safe, so I'd ask my dear friends in the Conservative Party not to hope that I have to get sick to prove that I was right to be very concerned, so concerned that I've paid personally for the seat next to me that I'll be taking today to get to Ottawa in hopes that I might get some physical distancing.

My question is this: Has the Speaker been in touch with the British Columbia legislature, which is currently using Zoom for voting? I'm wondering if there has been a confirmation. As far as I know, that's the first provincial legislature in Canada that is using distance voting so that people are not physically congregating in Victoria.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** We haven't been in contact as of yet. There has been some contact back and forth with many provinces. B.C. is one that is on our radar for the next week or so, and we plan on asking how it has gone and how it's worked. It's definitely something that we've discussed with other jurisdictions, but we want to make sure that we get all the input that we can beforehand.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Ms. May.

Mr. Tochor, would you like another minute? We had just gone over the five-minute mark there, but you hadn't had your complete six minutes. If you want another minute, you can go ahead with another question.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** My other question would be along the lines of the different options on cost. I'm sorry to be a stickler and a Scrooge here on rating the costs associated with the decisions this committee will make.

The most affordable one is a proxy vote, which seemingly all parties can agree on and which doesn't cost the taxpayer a dime, or some parties have put forward developing an electronic solution. Is there a middle ground? Maybe that's the pairing or the queuing of people.

Mr. Speaker, could you comment? Is there a middle-costed one that would cost in between the proxy and the luxury of an electronic voting app that allows you to vote from anywhere in the world? What would be the middle option on this?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** That's a good question. I'll be honest with you. We haven't really looked at it from a cost perspective. It's more from an efficiency perspective, basically following the directions given by this committee and by the government and opposition House leaders in their letters. That's where we look at all the options that way.

Once we have all the options defined and we know what's being offered, then we can decide. Then we can cost them out and find out exactly for a final decision, but at this point, I don't have details on it.

It sounds like what you're saying makes sense. One is less expensive than the other. That would be the logical assumption, but what I've found with assumptions sometimes is that I'm not always right when I assume one thing and then find out that we didn't take everything into consideration. A lot of work has been done in the background for both of those cases to make sure that they are implementable.

● (1225)

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** Along those lines—

**The Chair:** That's all the time we have.

Next up is Mr. Turnbull, please.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thanks, Madam Chair.

Mr. Aubé, I have a couple more questions for you.

For starters, I think the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security recently certified in camera video conferencing. Is that correct?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Yes, they did.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Great.

How would you compare the level of security needed for a public electronic vote in comparison to an in camera video conference meeting? Would you say that the in camera meeting requires a higher level of security than a public vote?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** I wouldn't want to compare them, Mr. Turnbull. What I would say is that both require the level of security for the task at hand, sir.

We have been engaging also with the Communications Security Establishment on electronic voting. We've been meeting with them. They've worked with us to validate our tool box, validate the tool kit that we want to use, if ever we want to move forward with an application.

We certainly feel that the proper security measures and security controls could be put in place to make this happen, recognizing what we own here at the House of Commons.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** What level of security certification would we seek for an electronic voting system, if we developed one?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** I would say that having the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security act as an auditor for the infrastructure that we're putting in place would certainly be the appropriate level of security for such an app, sir.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Okay, great.

I know Mr. Jones testified that the House of Commons would rank as one of the top organizations in the country in terms of IT security. Would you agree with that?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** I think we pride ourselves on our security, sir.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Great.

Just to go back to this, the voting we're talking about is legislative voting. It's a public vote. We've heard that there are solutions out there. The U.K. obviously developed one that wasn't used but now is being used by the House of Lords. It is great to hear that that effort has not gone to waste. Members can log in. They can vote. They can confirm their vote. They can even view the public disclosure on the website of how they voted, to double-check it.

What kind of real interference could we have here? Mr. Aubé, can you tell me? I mean, the results are the results. If they're double-verified, how can someone interfere with our democratic process?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Mr. Turnbull, I believe that's the aim we're shooting for, sir. Excuse the expression, but that's the aim of the architecture. That way, there are multiple validations.

The only place where we feel there still could be a potential risk is someone trying to prevent someone else from voting, but we feel secure that the results will be the appropriate results. I would just say that if someone, such as a state-sponsored actor, tried to prevent someone from participating in the voting process...but this is a very minimal risk, we believe, sir, in the discussions we've had at this stage.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Could we not have a phone line system so that if someone were prevented from using the web-based tool, they could phone in and log their vote that way, in those very extreme and improbable circumstances that you mentioned?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** You could, sir.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Okay, great.

I know that the House administration and your department pride themselves on reacting quickly and having really robust monitoring of all activity. I know we've had other members ask about that today. I know that you've highlighted in the past how a quick reaction time is key.

Can you speak to how quickly you think we could be reacting to any kind of threats or interruptions that may occur?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** The plan, sir, if we decide to move forward with this, is that we would have people looking at real-time monitoring during these voting processes, sir, so that we could actually oversee and ensure that everything is properly happening during the voting process, both from a support perspective and also from a security perspective—hence the time frames that we've asked for to initiate the votes, so that we can turn our eyes to the voting process from a security perspective, Mr. Turnbull.

• (1230)

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you.

The last question is for the Speaker, and maybe Mr. Dufresne, Mr. Robert or anybody else who wants to respond. What are the repercussions of a member of Parliament falsifying their identity? Let's say they wanted to give their PIN and contact information to somebody else. What would actually be the repercussions of doing something like that? I would think they would be pretty high. Can anyone speak to that?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** It's a question of privilege. Basically, it would be contempt of the House. It would be very severe, and actions would have to be taken accordingly.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Based on that, do you think that most members...? I think you said they are quite honourable and that you don't question their integrity.

What do you think the chances are that members are going to put themselves, our democratic process and their integrity at risk by not wanting to log in and getting their kid, their wife or somebody else to log in and vote for them? Do you think that's really likely?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I can't say anything about the likelihood. All I can tell you is that I trust the members and their honour and integrity, and I would have to go with that.

Just as with anything else, when laws are put in place, they're not put in for the majority; they're put in for the exceptions, those who are going to break those laws. Overall, I have a lot of trust in members of Parliament, regardless of what party they're from or what their beliefs are. It is something that I believe is tantamount to being a member of Parliament.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.



Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

I would like to begin by asking what are the chances, in the very short term, that all 338 members will be back in the House for regular business, for question period, and to express their opinions.

Is it likely that it will happen in the very short term? Is it foreseeable at the moment?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Sadly, predicting the future is not exactly my forte. It is very difficult to say because of COVID-19. It is impossible to predict.

What is foreseen at the moment is a resumption on September 21, depending on what the committee and the House decides. So I have no answer for you.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** But it is possible that, come the fall, the 338 members may still not be able to sit in the House for regular business.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** That is a possibility, yes.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Okay.

Currently, we are operating in a hybrid manner, which allows members who do not want to get on a plane because they are afraid or because they are older, for example, to exercise their parliamentary privileges in spite of everything. The formula in place at very least allows parliamentary privileges to be exercised for a part of regular business.

Is that correct?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Right.

If other standing committees required sitting in person, or if we had to establish a voting system that would not allow electronic voting, some of the parliamentary privileges, the regular business, could be exercised virtually. However, if we want to exercise our right to vote, or our ability to sit on a standing committee, we would then have to travel.

Am I right?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Once again, that decision has to be made by the committee and the House. Everything is possible and depends on what we want as members, as a House. It is a decision that we have to make.

At the moment, members can choose whether to attend or not. The committee's decision will determine whether they can participate in the business of the House as such, or can do so from anywhere in the country or around the world.

• (1235)

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Let me come back to the matter of cost.

A good part of our work can be done virtually and we continue to participate in the House virtually. But if we insist that members of standing committees sit in person, it will incur costs, because people will have to fly here, right?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** There are costs, yes.

As I told Mr. Tochor earlier, logic tells us yes, but we have to compare the two ways of proceeding.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** For example, if the committee recommended that a designated mechanism be triggered in the event of a pandemic, or in other exceptional circumstances, for regular business that did not include electronic voting, would it not create a disparity between the members who are consistently able to exercise their privilege in the House, because they want to be able to do so virtually, and those who are not able to travel because they are afraid that their health may be affected or that they are avoiding the risk of infection?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** That is a plausible interpretation, a possibility.

If we open that door, I believe that we will have to open it for everyone, so that it is the same for all. When we start doing things for one group only, Parliamentary privilege is breached. It could be a concern for an independent member, for example.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** I would like to ask one final question. I am still hammering on the same topic.

If we opt for a system of rules that allows members to participate in the House debates virtually, it would be logical to apply that virtual system to all parliamentary privileges, including sitting on standing committees and voting. If all 338 members are able to be present in the House in the fall, it would be a surprise.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I am looking forward to the committee's direction in that regard. Logically, it is up to members of the committee and to members of Parliament to decide. Your recommendation will have a major influence on what is done in the House.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madame Blaney, please.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

I'll go back to the issue of committees. If the House decided that all committees were to be able to meet virtually around September 21, how long would it take for us to get the capacity to do that?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'll refer that question to Monsieur Aubé, who will probably be able to answer better than I will.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, I can't answer that. Our goal is to make this assessment over the next weeks to ensure we're ready for that, but we have not finalized that assessment yet, Madam Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you. That's helpful.

Ms. May mentioned earlier the provincial British Columbia government and the work they're doing and how much collaboration...that was very clear from the testimony we had.

One of the areas I found most compelling was the issue of testing and the ability of members from all parties to participate in the testing process so that questions could be asked and any concerns could be brought forward. Especially when we look at the diversity of our MPs from across Canada, I think that testing should be done and of course everyone should be able to participate and give feedback.

As we move forward, I'm wondering what kind of plans have been thought about in terms of potentially looking at the app process and testing that, and any other form of voting or work in the House. What are the plans for that? Do you have any direction on where we're going in that area?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'll defer to Monsieur Aubé on this one, because it's more on the technical...on the app.

What we've done so far is looking at the different possibilities, based on what has been asked of us, and coming up with different possibilities. You'll see in the report quite a number of different ones, whether it's in person, virtual, or a hybrid.

I'll pass it on to Mr. Aubé to answer the question on the app and where it's at.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Madam Blaney, I support the direction you're going in with your question.

As the Speaker said, what we have right now is a tool box. These are elements to deal with identification, notification and reporting. What we need to do now is make it a product that is usable by the members, and to do that there will definitely need to be some consultations with a subset of members to finalize the requirements. There will also need to be some end-user testing to make sure it is usable and efficient while we're using the app. Then, finally, we also need to make sure it works in the different regions with the limited bandwidth that exists in some areas.

This type of testing and finalizing of the requirements will be happening in the next few weeks, if we are asked to move forward with such an initiative. At this stage, all we want to do is ensure readiness. If ever they decide to go with it, we can start running with the members at the same time in order to be ready for the fall.

• (1240)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Earlier, you spoke about being ready for September 21, so it sounds like testing for the process is also part of the timeline you've outlined.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Absolutely, it would be. It would need to be.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Okay, that helps a lot.

I'm just wondering if there has been any thought put into.... Once this is implemented, will there be a continuous review process? Because things change, I'm curious if, in your plan, you've looked at how we will review. I think this is important because of the reality that there is so much we don't know. Probably one of the most frustrating parts of living through COVID-19 is that things are changing continuously. I think all of us wish it would go back to what we were used to in the past, but it's just not there yet.

As we go through this process, I'm wondering if we will have a process where we can review it. Would that go through the whip's office, for example? Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** If the committee asked the House to build a product for voting.... This is a standard practice that must exist in the life cycle of a product, such as a voting product. Since you would be the main users of this product, there would definitely be a need for continuously improving the product based on members' feedback.

The usual approach that we've taken in the past.... When we need to engage members, we usually do this through the whip's office. We basically seek, through the whip's office, identification of members with the proper representation from all the parties, and then we work with this group of members. We've done that in the past for the constituency offices, for example the standards that we established for the constituency offices. We worked with the whip's office to identify members and do some testing. We've done that also with the new Office 365 for the new members. We asked the whips to identify key members to work with.

This is standard practice, Madam Blaney. We would certainly like to see as a recommendation from the committee, if you decide to move forward, that we engage the members, because this is the only way we can make the experience successful.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

I see my time is almost up, but I want to say that during COVID my office moved to a new location, and the House was amazing in helping us get everything set up during that time. I just want to say thank you to all of you, because you're doing tremendous work and I think all of us are incredibly grateful.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Blaney. You're absolutely correct.

Next up, from the Conservatives, will be Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you.

I had some very similar questions to Ms. Blaney's, in regard to the committees, and you did have a chance to answer most of what I wanted answered. Obviously, it would be a real concern that committees wouldn't all be able to meet in September if things move ahead in a virtual way at that time.

The one thing that you didn't really cover, on that point, on the capacity issues that we've had with committees and all of that.... I guess there are a couple of things I wanted to ask, in addition to what you've already had a chance to respond to.

First, you already indicated that you couldn't really tell us whether we would be in a position to have all the committees meet in September. That would be a real concern, I think, but if there are to be full-day virtual or hybrid sittings, what kind of impact would that have on the committee capacity? Is there a potential that we could even see a reduced committee capacity over what we have now?

Second, I know that one of the issues with capacity has been around scheduling the caucus meetings. If we were to have a sort of regular sitting week schedule, whether it be virtual or hybrid, would there be the ability to support all four caucus meetings simultaneously on Wednesday mornings, or would there have to be adjustments made there?

• (1245)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** The caucus meetings themselves, if they're all happening at the same time and there are no committee meetings, obviously there's no problem in getting them service. That would not be much of an issue. That would work fairly well.

As for the resources and having to reduce the number of committees, again, I think Monsieur Aubé would probably best answer this, but overall what I've noticed with staff here is that it's amazing. Every time there's a challenge or a wall put up, they do hurdles over it. I mean, they just jump right over it and go on to the next step, almost as if it wasn't there. I have a lot of faith and hope in the ability of our staff.

Maybe I'll let Monsieur Aubé comment on that a little bit more. My answer is based on past experience. I'll let him answer with the actual resources that he has to work with.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The goal, Mr. Richards.... As you know, from a scheduling perspective, for committees, the approach was that we could schedule up to six committees in parallel, pre-COVID. Currently, as you know, we have windows that are smaller than that, basically due to the number of people who were available to us at the beginning.

The tight time frames also.... In order to implement this infrastructure, because it was a little bit new, in the facility we had to reconfigure some of the infrastructure within the committees to make this happen. We also had a skill set issue. Having said that, over the last weeks we've been building on that and adapting in order to increase our capacity.

That's what we're looking at for the fall. We're basically seeing where the pain points are that we have right now in order to plan, if possible, recognizing that all of this is going to be based on what happens from here to September, from an environment perspective. If everything is okay, we're looking at making the decisions in order to bring back the number of committees that we can bring back, sir.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay. I understand that you're not able to tell us that we could absolutely have a full committee complement. Is there a chance that if there were full-day sittings, a regular weekly schedule but done virtually or in a hybrid way, we might see a reduced capacity for committees at this point, or do you see no concern there?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** If the COVID environment remains the same, I don't see a reduction of committees, at least from my team and my team's ability to support you in the committees, from that perspective. If the COVID environment doesn't change, I wouldn't see a reduction. That wouldn't impact our capability in a way that it would reduce our ability to support you in the number of committees, sir.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay. So, at the end of the day, the bottom line is that we shouldn't see a reduction in the number of committees if there are to be full-day sittings, but we're not certain we'd be able to increase it to the level that would be ordinarily expected.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** We're striving for that, sir. We're striving to bring it back to where it was previously.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next up we have Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I just have a couple of questions, so I might not take the whole time.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just build on Mr. Tochor's questions. Mr. Tochor raised a good point about people perhaps being in different locations, maybe on a beach in Florida. In the time that we've been doing the COVID-19 meetings, the hybrid meetings, are we aware of any member of Parliament who has been outside of the country while doing that?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'm aware of only one.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** And who would that be?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Ms. Rempel was down in Oklahoma, I believe.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Oh wow, I didn't know that.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** She's been participating in all the virtual meetings quite actively, so it's been working out well. Where they're located, really, unless the House wants to get into that, I'm not sure that's something pertinent, as long as they—

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** You know, Mr. Tochor raised a concern over it. Perhaps it is something that we should consider in our recommendations—that you have to be at least within the country of Canada to be participating in our democratic process.

Also, Mr. Tochor said, perhaps anecdotally, what if somebody was at a pub down the street? How do we know they're not voting from there?

Are you able to say with some degree of certainty, Mr. Speaker, that no member of Parliament has ever cast a vote while under the influence of alcohol?

• (1250)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I don't know. I can't say for sure one way or the other.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Okay.

One last thing he said was about perhaps spending money on an app that we never end up using. My thought on that is.... Would you agree that there are a lot of things we spend money on that perhaps we hope we never have to use? We hope we never have to use the Parliamentary Protective Service, but we still need to have it there in case we need to use it. We hope that we never have an incident that requires its usage, but we accept the fact that there is a risk and therefore we should be investing in mitigating that risk.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** That's certainly a point of view.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** The last thing I'll ask is just to jump back to the previous round of questioning. I asked you.... I'm not trying to interject you into the political decision-making on this, but Mr. Aubé did touch on this with another set of questions. Is there a preferred method that's been discussed within the clerk's office, in the discussions about voting, in terms of the ease of voting? What would be the easiest way of doing it, whether it would be through Zoom or an app or anything like that? Has there been any discussion that's led to that?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** There's been much discussion on it. I would hope that the direction would come from the committee, based on what we've given as far as facts go, rather than us dictating to the committee or suggesting to the committee what would be best. I think you should read through the literature and take a look at what we've put forward so far. I would hope that the committee would be able to make that decision.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't have any other questions, Madam Chair, if there's another member who would like to use the time.

**The Chair:** I believe Ms. Petitpas Taylor is raising her hand.

Go ahead. You have about one and a half minutes.

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'll just ask a few questions since we have a bit of extra time.

I think, first and foremost, we would all recognize or agree that Canadians have taken the public health warnings very seriously when it comes to dealing with COVID-19. We certainly have seen a huge economic impact as a result of COVID-19 and the loss of life has been substantive in this country, but when we look at the overall measures that Canada has taken, we have a lot to be proud of.

I'm hearing a lot of talk about the investments that we could possibly be making with respect to developing an app. If we look at all businesses within the country right now, I think we are all looking at making sure that we have a continuity plan in the event that we have a second wave.

My first question would be for Monsieur Aubé.

On the cost of developing an app, would you be able to provide us with a bit of an estimate? No one is asking that direct question, but I'm wondering what the costs would be for developing an app that we could use for the continuity of Parliament.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** As I said earlier in my comments, Madam Petitpas Taylor, right now we're leveraging the existing resources that are currently funded by the House for other activities. We've reprioritized some other activities in order to focus on this, because

we want to ensure that we're ready if we're asked to be ready. I consider that to be a sunk cost, as it relates to the resources that are being used right now.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, that's all the time we have, but there is another opportunity coming up after the Conservatives go.

Mr. Brassard, you have five minutes.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I have just a couple of questions.

I appreciate the fact that Mr. Gerretsen hasn't had a cavity in seven years. I haven't had a headache in the last week and a half, but I have one today and it usually appears when I'm around arrogance and condescension.

My next question is for the Speaker.

One of the issues that came up during the course of this study.... There has been a lot of talk about honourable members but, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you can understand that the issue of voting electronically could be abused. It could be abused in the sense that perhaps a member in a close riding, for example during an election, wouldn't want to come to Ottawa because they are battling a close election, or there could be another circumstance where an MP who is charged with a serious criminal offence perhaps wouldn't want to be in Ottawa because then they would have to face the parliamentary press gallery and in some cases perhaps the opposition.

I'm wondering if there have been any circumstances considered at all where there would be consequences to those situations where it could be implied, or otherwise, that a member of Parliament is just avoiding their responsibility of being in the seat of Parliament in Ottawa for their own electoral purposes or to avoid the parliamentary press gallery in the event that they're charged with a serious criminal offence.

● (1255)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I believe that what we're looking at here is COVID-19. This is not an ongoing thing where people would be able to chime in and vote whenever. Once COVID-19 is over—or the safety period, the period of concern, is over—then we would return to normal proceedings.

I've seen other jurisdictions where they've used it for maternity leave or other areas. That's something, again, that would have to be taken into consideration, not only by the committee but by the members of Parliament themselves. However, at this point what we're looking at is how we deal with COVID-19 or any future pandemic and what will trigger that mechanism to work.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Part of the concern is that this could extend beyond COVID-19. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I don't like asking you a political question, but you were a Liberal candidate in the last election, and page 54 of the Liberal Party platform said, "with Parliament to introduce new technology or other institutional changes".

As someone who was a Liberal candidate running on that platform, what was your understanding of what that commitment could look like? Would it be your understanding that the issues we're dealing with here today could satisfy the Liberal Party platform?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** As a progressive member of Parliament, I always want to see things work better and I want to see how we can improve on what we have. I think that's the way we all look at it, and I believe that's the same for all MPs. When we're looking at the system or the legislation that we're looking at, we want to make sure it's working better than what we have today. That's basically how I read it and how I see it. It's basically how we get things working better than they are today and serve Canadians better.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Thank you.

I have one last question, for Mr. Aubé. On June 11, the committee voted to order the production of the House agreement with Zoom and related documents. Can you confirm whether any of those documents have been provided to our clerk, Mr. Aubé?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** They have been provided, sir.

**Mr. John Brassard:** They have been?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Yes.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Thank you so much.

That's it, Madam Chair. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Brassard, they were provided by the deadline and they were circulated to all committee members, so please check back.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor:** How much time do I have, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** You have five minutes.

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor:** Thank you so much. I may not be using all of my time, so if other committee members want to get ready, that would be fine.

I also want to take a moment to thank once again the witnesses for appearing today. You always shed a lot of light on the many questions we have, so thanks to each and every one of you for being here today.

I want to follow up on my questions to Monsieur Aubé. During my question, when talking about the issue of cost, you indicated that it's a "sunk cost". What did you mean by that?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** What I meant by that, Madam Petitpas Taylor, is that we're already paying the salaries of these employees right now, so, for preparedness, we reprioritized their activities in order to work on this. Recognizing that we're already paying their salaries, whether they're working on this or not, I consider that to be, by definition, a sunk cost, meaning that it's not an additional cost to the House of Commons, as it's recognized that they're already paid by the House of Commons.

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor:** That's great. I just wanted to confirm that there's no additional cost being incurred as a result of working on the development of an app.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** That was the intent.

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor:** That's great.

I think we can all recognize as well, with respect to businesses across the country as I've indicated, that many of them are working to make sure they are prepared to deal with a second wave of COVID-19. All Canadians would expect that we, as parliamentarians, will do all we can to ensure that we can continue to do the important work that Canadians have sent us to do. I think it's very responsible on our part to ensure that we have the tools that we need to use if necessary and that we all stress that we want to be back in Ottawa as soon as possible to be that strong voice for our constituents.

I have another question for Monsieur Aubé. I feel as though I'm picking on you, so my apologies about that. During one of the lines of questioning, perhaps by Madame Blaney but I'm not sure, we talked about the issue of a hybrid system and the possibility that people would vote in person but also electronically, and how we would ensure that that would not take place. Maybe it was Madame Normandin.

You indicated at one point that there would have to be some types of controls put in place in order to ensure that that did not happen. Have you thought about those types of controls? If so, what would they look like?

• (1300)

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** There has been a lot of discussion on that subject. The first premise was to eliminate the possibility of this happening, so one of the recommendations made by Mr. Gagnon's group and my group was to all use the same system. That way electronically we could validate in real time whether people were voting once or twice because we could evaluate who was voting on the system.

That being said, right now if the committee asked whether in a hybrid voting system people could vote in the House using their in-person vote instead of using the system, that would be something that we, together with the people in Mr. Gagnon's shop, would need to look at to establish the controls and the processes. That being said, electronically we can actually ensure that the vote of one member is not tallied twice. We can actually control that. There's the ability for someone to enter a vote in person instead of using the electronic system, and we can ensure that it's not entered twice for the same person. That's fairly easy to do. It's just more a time issue and an efficiency issue when people are in the chamber.

If we're being asked to make sure that the people in the House are not also voting electronically, we will require some time at the end of a vote to ensure this doesn't happen.

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor:** That's great.

I wonder if Mr. Gagnon has anything to add to that, because we often see him around the table making sure that we are voting appropriately.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Gagnon:** Actually, in the past, members frequently have voted twice. As you know, some members vote yes, then they get up and vote no. It's not uncommon.

[English]

That said, and to repeat what Stéphan just mentioned, it would be very important not to mix those two types of voting. If the House were to decide to vote in an electronic way, it would need to do so, even for members who would be in the House in a hybrid sitting model. If the House were to choose to go with in-person voting, it would be important for the House to do so, if it wanted to do so, to relate to that and go all the way on it.

That said, as the Speaker mentioned a bit earlier today, it's possible that in some specific cases members would be allowed to vote remotely, and I think the Speaker mentioned members who were on maternity leave or sick leave.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Point of order, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Thank you.

I'm trying to confirm with Mr. Aubé, because one of the things we asked for, in all the related documents with Zoom, was the actual contract with Zoom. I can tell you that I haven't seen that, and if I haven't, then it's my mistake. I just want a confirmation that the contract with Zoom was circulated to members of the committee. I know from talking to some of my colleagues that they haven't seen the Zoom contract either. Is it there?

**The Chair:** Mr. Clerk, do you want to speak to that?

**The Clerk:** Yes. On June 15, the House of Commons administration did provide the committee, as per its order for the documents, with multiple documents of a contractual nature between the House of Commons and Zoom. There was an email sent out to members of the committee—I have it right here—at 11:48 p.m. on June 15. That was received by me approximately 20 minutes before I sent it to members of the committee.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll go back and look for it. Maybe I missed it in the volume of documents.

• (1305)

**The Chair:** No problem. We were all surprised, because we received it in the nick of time, so that's why it really stood out.

We are carrying on with two and a half minutes each.

Madame Normandin.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

I would like to hear what Mr. Aubé has to say about the subsequent approach that we are going to adopt, to establish an electronic voting system, for example.

Do you have an idea of what the timeline would look like? We actually have to submit our report around July 21. If we are going to implement electronic voting, we would like it to be ready for mid-September.

Is that a wide enough window for you to be able to establish the system and test it in advance?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** We think so, Ms. Normandin. Given the work that was already done in the last six weeks, we believe that

we are able to meet that timeline. However, your schedules may well be affected, because we will have to get people involved. It is easy to develop it internally, without consultation, but we will have to take the time to hold the meetings we need in order to consult members who wish to be part of the process.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Okay, but the tests with various members can be done on an individual basis, can they not? It does not need to be done in a group, as I understand it

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** It could certainly be done on an individual basis. When I say a group, I am thinking about all the members we will have to work with.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Right.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** The consultation would be done individually, and we could provide the team with feedback from various members.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** So part of it will still need members' collaboration in order for it to be implemented.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Yes, it would be useful to be able to do a small-scale simulation. Then, perhaps we could do a large simulation with the entire House before we use it officially.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Right. I have another question for you.

Ideally, we would like everyone to still be able to vote in the House in person. That is Plan A. At the moment, we are working on a Plan B, which involves a system, an application, that would allow us to vote using the House's various electronic devices.

However, have you worked on a Plan C, just in case Plan B does not work, so that we have a backup solution if we run into problems?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Today, the Speaker introduced a plan when he was discussing the request by the Opposition House Leader. That is one of the plans that have been proposed.

Plan C, actually, is a plan like the one we discussed with Mr. Turnbull previously. This is to support members individually when they run into difficulties and to give them another way to communicate with us. Those are the things we are considering. However, we have made no decisions along those lines, because it has to be validated or recommended by your committee.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** So it would be helpful for us to make a recommendation about the need for a Plan C.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** That would be good.

The premise would be that people will not be able to vote if they run into difficulties. Does the committee accept that, or does it want us to come up with another way of voting on an individual basis for members who run into difficulties? That should be a committee decision.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Okay. Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Of course, with our traditional format of voting in the House, we all stand in the House to be recognized, voting either yes or no. I'm curious about our capacity to use Zoom to do something similar. What's the difference between having people stand on Zoom so that we are able to see them stand up and vote and using an app? Is connectivity the challenge? For either issue, what is the plan for addressing connectivity?

What happens to me sometimes, although more when I'm at home than when I'm in the office, is that I have a day when the connectivity is not very good and I keep getting bounced out. It sounds as if a few of our members have had that experience in their constituency offices as well.

Those are my two questions.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Go ahead, sir.

● (1310)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I was going to talk about how important it is to verify the individual who's voting, one of the key things that we have to work on, and then pass it over to Monsieur Aubé if there's anything else. I know there have been some security concerns about who is actually voting.

As for the vote in the House, you could do it visually or have electronic voting in the House, as was mentioned earlier, where a member's name is displayed once the vote is taken. Members can see how they voted, and everyone can see it. You see it instantaneously, confirming what you've done. Within a 30-minute period, again depending on the direction we get, you could change your vote or leave it as is, depending on what you thought. It has happened in the House that members have stood and voted the wrong way. I can honestly say that I've done that before while I was in the benches, and it will happen again before long.

I'll let Monsieur Aubé continue before I get myself deeper into trouble here.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker answered the first part of the question.

The question of the difference between using Zoom and using an app is really about enabling more mobility for the member. That's one part.

The second part is efficiencies. We believe that through a voting app, you could generate more efficiencies to accelerate the members' votes. When they are doing votes, if there are multiple motions members are voting on, during the bells the app could accelerate that for them and make it easier than having to stand in the meeting and say yea or nay on each of the motions. It's flexibility that you can give yourself, if you choose to do so.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That completes two rounds of questions.

I want to know whether members have any more questions. If so, we could start off at the top of the five-minute round. If not, we could briefly, for a couple of minutes, discuss a few things I want to put on notice for tomorrow's meeting. It's really up to you. Is there a desire to continue with questions?

Mr. Tochor, do you have one question?

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** It's a rant and a small question, if that's acceptable.

**The Chair:** Do we want to go back to the five-minute round or just allow Mr. Tochor to have his question?

Go ahead, Mr. Tochor.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The comments I'd like to put on the record are around cost again. It's no surprise that I am allergic to spending taxpayers' dollars when we don't need to. The idea that Ottawa is working or improving things in Canada is, I don't think, held widely in my province or across Canada. I think there is ample waste going on with our federal government that we don't need to find new creative ways to waste taxpayers' dollars on an app.

Don't mind the partisanship of this, but right now we have really serious questions with the Ethics Commissioner about sole-source contracts and runaway boondoggles. This is going to be another example of government thinking that they can do things better than previous governments.

I think this is another example where, in generations to come, my kids will be paying for this debt, and it irritates the people I represent that we are talking about plans A, B and C with no hard cost. We're going with seemingly the most expensive and the most elaborate solution to a simple project that could be done with proxy voting tomorrow.

When my kids ask me 20 years from now what I did when I was an MP to stop the trillion-plus dollars in debt that is being racked up, I hope to tell them that it was only a couple million bucks, but nickels and dimes make dollars, and we were able to stop excessive spending in Ottawa a little bit. I hope that I could tell them in 20 years' time that my role in this was that maybe their income tax rate, instead of being 54%, will be 53%, but it's going in the right direction.

I am very frustrated that we are going with the most expensive option out there, while off-the-shelf—not even off-the-shelf—we have the ability to do proxy voting today.

That's my only comment. I hope that we can find a solution with consensus across all parties that doesn't cost another dime of the taxpayers' money. I'm kind of frustrated that we're not considering that road, not as plan C but as plan A.

● (1315)

**The Chair:** Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Aubé, I just want to go back to the answer that you gave to Ms. Petitpas Taylor. I heard you say that this system would be built by House of Commons employees. Is that correct?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** It is the case, sir.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** So, if an app-based voting system was done, it would be built by House of Commons employees, and you said that you would just be reprioritizing what those employees do, so they're the same employees who were going to be paid the same amount of money, no matter what. Is that correct?

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** It is the case right now, sir.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Duncan.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a question on another note regarding testing, if I could, to Mr. Aubé and even to the Speaker.

As we look at recommendations, I think we've asked several witnesses about testing, and I know Madam Normandin just asked some other questions on it. You mentioned having a small group of MPs test the system before going to a larger group. Would that be PROC? How would you pick members? Would PROC be a natural spot?

I was thinking of maybe getting that on the record perhaps for some of our recommendations, trying to make ourselves as useful as possible here in our committee. Would it be a natural selection for our PROC committee members to be the guinea pigs, for lack of better words?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I can start off, and I'll let Mr. Aubé finish.

Based on experience, what we did, even with the hybrid system that we have for the COVID-19 committee, was that it started off as a concept, then it became implemented.

We got a bunch of staff—some of them in the chamber, some of them outside the chamber, some of them from their homes—who all came on board and tested it. Then we got a number of MPs to test it out to see if it would work across the country.

I'll pass it on to Mr. Aubé, who will give you more of a technical background on it. There is testing that happens, and it's amazing how quickly it all came about.

Again, I'm very proud of the staff and all the MPs who participated. It really was something that the world looked at with admiration and something that we can all be proud of.

Monsieur Aubé.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Mr. Speaker just described the exact approach that we would like to take, if we're being asked. I am certain Mr. Duncan wouldn't want to remove that decision from the whips. As you know, this is part of their responsibilities, so I would leave that to them, but it would certainly be a great recommendation for the people who have participated and listened to all these witnesses. Participating in the development and testing would be a great asset to us at the House of Commons.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** If I could just add one more thing on that, Mr. Duncan, the PROC committee is very useful and helpful. I admire and appreciate all the work that it is doing right now. Whatever it decides to do, I'm sure it will be an even better process.

**The Chair:** Great save, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** There's no pressure on our part now.

**The Chair:** Before adjourning, we need a time frame to get all the submissions in for our recommendations. We had this discussion in the past, but we were unable to set a deadline, because we were waiting for this meeting to occur, as well as the response from the Speaker to the opposition House leader's letter. Now that all of this has happened, could we hear from the analyst in terms of when we would need all the recommendations finalized, so that the interpreters and the production teams have enough time to meet our deadline?

Mr. Barnes, can you help us with a fixed date or some guidance?

• (1320)

**Mr. Andre Barnes (Committee Researcher):** Unfortunately, I won't be able to give a very helpful answer. I'm at the committee's disposal. I'm not entirely sure when members are going to feel comfortable about making recommendations. I'll do whatever I can, once the recommendations come in, to add them to the report.

**The Chair:** We have some committee business scheduled for tomorrow's meeting, and the majority of the meeting will be dealing with the consideration of the draft report. Last time, we got through the draft report. The version we will be using tomorrow is the most recent version sent out on July 3. That version has a track-changes copy and a clean copy attached. Is there any preference as to which copy you would like to work from tomorrow? I know that was brought up last time.

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Madam Chair, on that note, I have a thought, and you'll see what other members think. I was thinking a bit about tomorrow's meeting. Obviously, there may be some changes required to the report, I would assume, based on quite a bit of information and many questions that were answered today, which will be helpful.

Through you, Madam Chair, could our analyst give us some sense as to how many changes would potentially be required to the report? I have some thoughts, but I want to hear what our analyst's take would be on how many changes would be required to the report based on today.

**The Chair:** That's a great question. We do have two meetings remaining this week, and we have three for next week.

Mr. Barnes, in terms of additions from today's meeting, would you have anything to add?



**Mr. Andre Barnes:** If Mr. Richards is wondering about the volume, it might be about an extra page that would be added from today's meeting.

**The Chair:** What about the time frame?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'd like to have a sense of not only additions but whether there might be some changes to what our existing text is as well. What do you think the scope of that would be?

**Mr. Andre Barnes:** At first glance, my approach, as of right now, would be to add as opposed to alter what's currently there. That would be done by end of day tomorrow, at the latest, and ready for translation.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** That may change my thoughts, then. I was thinking that potentially it might be more beneficial for us, rather than to carry forward with the meeting tomorrow, to kind of go forward on Thursday and have a final clean report, but if it's a matter of adding rather than changing anything in the existing report, that may not be necessary.

**The Chair:** Also, in terms of what I was saying before, I think we did get through quite a large chunk of the report last time. We last left off at the discussion portion. I don't think we went through the provincial sections, but we had at the previous meetings, so there wasn't much to change in the provincial sections. We could go through that quickly, and then we'd very much be on the discussion. That's the section that hosts all of the recommendations.

So I think we'll probably be diving into some of the discussion on that, at least. That's not to say that there won't be changes. Madam Normandin has also circulated some recommendations that she's wanting to put forward. She's prefaced that by saying that they may be altered a little bit, but those are her initial thoughts. That was very helpful. If anyone else wants to circulate that to the rest of the committee, or just bring it tomorrow or to the next meeting, I think that would be helpful.

I'm thinking that by Thursday, if we could have a good sense of all of our recommendations and have them in, that would give us enough time to really be able to discuss them and then appropriately decide on them. What does everyone think?

I know that Andre didn't really give us any kind of hard and fast deadline, but I think a chunk is already in. From what I'm hearing, some of the parties have been talking about what they want in the report. We'll probably be seeing some of that in tomorrow's meeting.

I want to give you enough time and not say "tomorrow", because we have heard so much today. Perhaps Thursday's meeting would be the more appropriate meeting to have all of that finalized and in for. Does that sound good?

Justin, do you have any feedback on whether or not that's possible?

• (1325)

**The Clerk:** Madam Chair, if the suggestion was that draft recommendations from all parties would be available to the committee for this coming Thursday meeting, there might be timeline issues involved in terms of the translation and providing enough time for Andre to incorporate them into a draft report, all for Thursday. That

might suggest a fairly tight deadline for draft recommendations to be submitted by everybody.

**The Chair:** Perhaps I was being too flexible.

**The Clerk:** We make best efforts to have it ready, but there might be some time pressure in terms of getting all of that material translated for the coming Thursday meeting.

**The Chair:** What would you say, then; perhaps Wednesday?

**The Clerk:** If you were to provide a deadline of end of day Wednesday, for example, the idea would be to have that material turned around and incorporated into the draft report for perhaps the meeting next Monday. That would provide the opportunity to have everything translated and incorporated into a new draft.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I thought it would be helpful to have that knowledge. Essentially, it sounds like we would need two full business days following the submission of recommendations by all parties in order for them to be ready for whatever meeting—Wednesday for Monday, for instance, or Thursday for Tuesday. Obviously, expecting them sooner than end of day Wednesday is probably a stretch, I assume. That leaves parties two and a half days, which is fairly reasonable. Even doing it a day sooner still wouldn't allow us to have them in time for Thursday's meeting, to my understanding.

I'd like to get a little more clarity from you, Madam Chair, on the expectations for the meetings tomorrow and Thursday. Obviously, the intention would be to try to go through the discussion portion of the report and try to conclude that, saving the part that maybe won't be completed yet, based on today's meeting. Then you mentioned something about the discussion portion of the report that would have recommendations in it. How would you see that looking? Logistically, I don't see how that would work.

I'm also struggling to understand what we'll do at Thursday's meeting if we don't have the materials prepared. It may be that we'll have to look at the following week and add a meeting there, if needed, or just try to conclude it all with the days we do have the following week.

I guess I'm trying to understand what we would actually—

**The Chair:** From what I'm hearing I think most of—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** We're still working on the discussion section, but I hope that won't be the case.

I'm just trying to get some clarity as to what your plan is.

**The Chair:** Yes. I think you're correct that we'd start on the discussion section. That's the part that has all of the recommendations.

The way the analyst has laid out the report, the recommendations fall into the discussion section. I believe most of the parties have their recommendations fairly well prepared and will want to discuss them tomorrow, but I want to give you leeway as well. I want to make sure that you're ready. I sensed that you would perhaps not be ready, given the testimony today and the new additions.

That's all, but I do think that most of the parties... and other members can speak up, if they are ready to bring their recommendations to tomorrow's meeting. Then we can start discussing some of them, but the report would still not get finalized until everyone's recommendations are in.

I'm at your mercy, however you want to do it.

• (1330)

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Madam Chair, on that, I feel like I'm hearing two different things. I am a little confused.

I think that, in order to be discussing recommendations, we should have all parties' recommendations. That's not to say that...you know if the other parties are ready and perhaps my party.... We'll have to just have a quick powwow on that, but maybe we could be ready as well.

I'm hearing, I think, two different things here. I'm hearing that our clerk is indicating that we would need to have everything translated and all that done in order to be able to have those discussions. Then I'm hearing you say, well, we can have some of those discussions with partial...with having some of the recommendations, but we wouldn't have the translations and things like that.

I'm looking for some clarity on what we can and can't do. I don't think it's reasonable, frankly, to have a discussion about recommendations when we have some of them and not all of them. If we're being told that we can go ahead and have discussions without the translations and things like that, that does change.... Maybe we could try to push ourselves to have things ready, but if that's not the case, if we can't actually do that, then I'd rather take the time to get things—

**The Chair:** I'd love it if you could have them ready for tomorrow.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Yes, but I'm trying to get clarity, though. I feel like what I'm hearing from our clerk is different from I'm hearing from you.

I'm trying to getting a sense as to what the process is here, because I'm hearing from our clerk that we have to have—

**The Chair:** I guess what I'm saying is that it shouldn't preclude discussion. I'm not saying we have to vote on anything tomorrow at all.

Maybe we'll refrain from voting on anything and finalizing things, but because Madam Normandin had already circulated her recommendations and I'm sure other people will be mentioning what they're looking to recommend tomorrow, we could start discussing where they would be best inserted.

Tomorrow we will go through the draft report. I think it's going to come up because there are already some recommendations on the table, but we don't have to vote on them. That's what I'm trying to

say. We could maybe have an official deadline of Wednesday, end of day, where they're completely translated and then incorporated into the report. At that point only would we move forward on voting on some of them.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I have two points on that, Madam Chair.

If I'm the only one feeling this way, even if some of my colleagues in my own party feel this way and all the other parties disagree, I guess we're going to do it the other way.

First of all, I don't think it's fair or reasonable to have discussions, whether there's voting or not, about recommendations when only some of them are there. And this is not to try to stall. Obviously based on today, we want to do a little work. Tomorrow we wouldn't be able to be ready, but we might be able to be on Thursday, depending on whether we're allowed to do it officially without the translation and whatnot being done by the committee workers. And if that's the case, then great.

If that's not the case, my second point would be that I'm not one who believes in having a meeting for the sake of having a meeting, so if it's discussing some things but not making any decisions and we'll have to come back and do it all over again when we have.... I don't see the point. That seems to me like digging a hole and filling it in. I'm not a big fan of that.

Maybe I'm the only one feeling this way, but I would much rather have us...we've got everything in, in a proper format and we're prepared so we do it and work to complete it as quickly as we can, rather than just filling time.

I'm trying to get at the idea...if we're prepared but there aren't going to be changes to any of the existing parts of the report, the actual background stuff we've been working on, fine, we finish that. But I don't know that we would then want to start a discussion about recommendations until we're prepared to deal with them appropriately. I don't think we're there for tomorrow for sure, and there's some question in my mind whether that's the case for Thursday or if we can go ahead without all these official translations and all the rest. If I'm hearing that we can't do that, then perhaps we're better off to focus on when we're in the right spot to do it.

I hope I'm clear in what I'm suggesting. I don't know how others feel about it; maybe I'm the only one feeling that way.

• (1335)

**The Chair:** I'm not sure what you're suggesting, but I was trying to be flexible. We could discuss the discussion portion. I don't care if we don't discuss recommendations because everyone doesn't feel comfortable. We can do them on Thursday. That's totally fine. I was saying it seems it will come up naturally, but if it doesn't, that's fine with me. Justin, is Wednesday good then?

Ideally I would like the date to be tomorrow, but I was trying to be flexible and give everyone enough time. I feel I've walked into something I think we've cleared up now, that you definitely would not be ready for recommendations tomorrow. It seems the team needs recommendations at least by Wednesday so they can translate them and have all that work done for us. Does that sound good? Then we could just go through the discussion portion and whatever is left of the draft report tomorrow, have the recommendations officially in for Wednesday, and then carry on with Thursday's meeting.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Sure. From my perspective, Madam Chair, it sounds just fine, but I thought I heard from our clerk that he didn't feel we could have them in Wednesday and be ready for Thursday. If we can be ready for Thursday on Wednesday, that's great. I was hearing that wasn't the case and that was the only issue. I was wondering if Thursday was going to be possible. If it is, great.

**The Clerk:** Wednesday potentially could work depending on when all the recommendations could be provided to me. For example, if it's around noon, that would buy some additional time for translation. One of the issues for translation is it depends on the total volume of material that needs to be translated, and then some time is needed by the analyst to incorporate that into a new draft and have that turned around.

I defer in some respects to Andre about this as well in what may be feasible if we're talking about a timeline for draft recommendations to be sent in on Wednesday with the view of having some new version of the report that may include draft recommendations for the Thursday meeting. That is one of the issues.

In terms of time constraints, it might also be possible to have the draft recommendations in a separate document, and members can go through them along with a draft of the report, which would cut down on some of the time.

Obviously one of the factors here is the time required for translation. If the documents weren't be translated, for example, it would obviously cut out a lot of time. However, one of the routine motions of the committee, as we all know, is that the material gets distributed in both official languages unless there is unanimous consent of the committee to do otherwise.

**The Chair:** Is there any discussion in response to that? Would you like to have that if it is easier?

I guess Andre could tell us.

Are you going to insert it? If we do have recommendations to you at some point, for Wednesday, would you find it easier to have them just in a separate document or inserted right into the report?

**Mr. Andre Barnes:** It's difficult to comment on this because there are too many unknowns. It depends on how many recommendations there are and how lengthy they are. If there are a lot and they are very lengthy, it will take a while for translation to be able to turn that around. The more recommendations there are, the more work it will be for me to insert them.

Is there overlap among the recommendations? There are too many unknowns unfortunately for me to speak about it intelligently.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Unless I am mistaken, last time, we were supposed to provide our recommendations already translated. Is that still the case? I want to be sure that I fully understood.

In addition, I would like to emphasize that my recommendations are not final. In fact, if you intend to come up with something similar, we should be able to discuss it and draft a joint recommendation, that would jump over those preliminary steps.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Yes, I also recall thinking the parties needed to translate because we were under the wire. We didn't have a lot of time so we had the parties translate and submit. That's precisely what you just brought up, and precisely what I was trying to say for tomorrow's meeting.

Now that there are some recommendations that the Bloc has put forward, there might be other recommendations that people have that you'll want to combine, rather than how it was last time when we had to put like recommendations together and then we had to discuss which recommendation overlapped which portion, and then remove one. That's all I was really saying, that we could probably have some of that discussion tomorrow, if it naturally occurs and the parties feel ready to have some of that discussion. If it doesn't occur, then that's fine as well, because then we can do it after all of the recommendations are viewed and all of them are finalized by the parties.

In terms of translation, Justin, is that something we could consider this time, to have the parties translate?

**The Clerk:** If the parties were to commit to providing their draft recommendations in both official languages, meaning that it would fall to them to have the material translated before they submit it to me, it would buy a good amount of time in terms of the work that would need to be done to have the material prepared for Thursday.

However, what we end up doing is just moving the burden related to the timeline. We're just shifting it from what the committee staff needs to do to the shoulders of the members' offices in terms of getting their translation work done before they're in a position to submit their draft recommendations in both official languages.

From our perspective, from the committee staff—and again, I would defer to Andre—it would make things easier for us if by Wednesday what we received from all the members of the committee were English and French versions of their draft recommendations.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I'm happy to do that. I think that, as we go forward tomorrow, we're going to have a better sense of what we need to do on Thursday. I don't know if we're ready to have that conversation, but it may be something that we have to have. We will have our recommendations in. Of course we have to review our recommendations within the context of what we heard today, but I'm happy to make sure that they are received on Wednesday, translated.

I also just wanted to clarify with Mr. Richards. He said that there was going to be a “powwow” and I’m wondering what that looks like, or did you mean a “meeting”?

**The Chair:** I think he meant, maybe, with other Conservative members? I think he meant he was going to have a powwow—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I have no idea what she’s talking about actually. To be honest with you, I don’t recall—

**The Chair:** I think you said something like “we have to discuss” but I think you were referring to—

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** You said you were going to have a “powwow” with your members, so I was just asking for clarification. I think you meant a meeting.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I don’t recall the comment. Sorry I can’t help you. I don’t even know what I was referring to.

**The Chair:** Okay.

It sounds like we’ve come to a consensus, so could all parties have their recommendations in by Wednesday at noon?

**The Clerk:** Do you want them in both languages, Madam Chair? Is that the suggestion?

**The Chair:** It seems like Ms. Blaney is able to do that, and most are. That would be very helpful.

Mr. Richards.

• (1345)

**Mr. Blake Richards:** We’ll certainly do our best. I hope that we can.

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

Sorry that I didn’t catch the issue that you brought up, Ms. Blaney, or recall it in the same way. I should have.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Oh, don’t worry. It will be in the notes and Mr. Richards can review it.

**The Chair:** I’m sorry about that.

One other thing that we’re going to have to discuss in tomorrow’s meeting is Mr. Aubé’s testimony that was provided in camera. The notes were circulated, and they found that a portion still had sensitive material so they just struck that out. We can discuss that when we’re in camera in tomorrow’s meeting. Mr. Aubé is willing to make himself available for it if there are any questions for him as to why portions are redacted and why they’re considered sensitive.

Justin, do you think we could deal with that at the top of the meeting?

**The Clerk:** Yes, if that’s what the committee wants to do. It would also probably make it easier for organizing Mr. Aubé’s availability if this issue is dealt with right away at 11 a.m., when the meeting starts.

**The Chair:** Yes, and there might not be many questions for him, so he might not have to be here for very long, but if there are some, at least he will be here to field them. Then we can move on to considering the draft report.

All right, thank you.

Have a good day, everyone. See you tomorrow.

The meeting is adjourned.







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