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• (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)): Good morning. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 31 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee is meeting today to begin our review of the House of Commons virtual hybrid proceedings provisions, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022.

Our first panel consists of the Speaker, the Clerk and other House officials, followed by a second panel of current and former members of Parliament.

For the first panel we have the Speaker, the Honourable Anthony Rota; Charles Robert, the Clerk of the House of Commons; Mr. Eric Janse, deputy clerk, procedure; Michel Patrice, deputy clerk, administration; and Stéphan Aubé, chief information officer, digital services and real property.

Before we start, this is just a reminder that all comments should be made through the chair.

With that, I will pass the floor over to you, Mr. Speaker, for five minutes.

The Honourable Anthony Rota (Speaker of the House of Commons): Thank you, Madam Chair and honourable members of the committee, for your invitation to appear today as part of your study on hybrid proceedings.

[*Translation*]

It is an honour to be here this morning.

[*English*]

I'm pleased to be joined by officials from the House administration. They're sitting on both sides of me, and you pointed out their names and their functions. They will be here to assist with any questions that are asked.

It has been two years since the House first adopted hybrid proceedings in response to the pandemic.

[*Translation*]

The hybrid model and the resulting temporary changes to our practices and to the Standing Orders that have been implemented have allowed the House to carry on its business.

This has allowed members to fulfill many of their parliamentary duties and to vote in proceedings securely and reliably from anywhere in Canada.

Now that public health measures have been lifted, it is worthwhile to reflect on what parts, if any, of hybrid proceedings the House may wish to retain.

I would like to bring to your attention several considerations.

First, in terms of procedure, the provisions of the hybrid model required temporary and incremental changes to the House's practices and Standing Orders.

These changes, such as social distancing, were adopted to meet public health measures.

[*English*]

Some procedural changes also led to more flexibility in chamber business, such as, counting video conference participants in quorum; adjusting the number of members required for certain procedural activities; amending the procedure by which the chair determines if there is unanimous consent; enabling the electronic tabling of documents; and allowing members to speak and vote from any seat. I can tell you that last one was a bit of a learning curve for me, because you're used to people being in certain areas. All of a sudden, especially during S.O. 31s or during question period, you're suddenly looking for them and madly trying to find out where they are. But that's for you to decide whether you keep that or not.

In committees, changes helped accommodate the participation of members and witnesses, and supported in camera portions and membership substitutions. Special orders also led to the adoption of the electronic voting application change. That changed the way votes are requested and enabled the automatic deferral of votes to after question period.

The issue of electronic voting has also been studied by various committees, including this one for many years. This committee will now have to consider the matter in more detail, taking into account the use of the electronic voting application.

The committee may also wish to recommend additional changes to the Standing Orders to address some of the challenges of hybrid features that we have observed—for example, matters of decorum, dress code and backgrounds when members are video conferencing or guidance on how the House should proceed when members, witnesses or interpreters face connectivity issues.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

In addition to these procedural elements, there are several administrative factors that should be examined, especially challenges relating to interpretation services.

The availability of interpretation services has had a particular impact on committees. They have had to adapt their meeting times because of resourcing constraints and to facilitate the participation of members across multiple time zones.

Certain other types of activities, such as regional caucuses and parliamentary associations, have also faced challenges accessing these limited resources and have had to curtail their activities. This is a very important point, which concerns our decisions in the House and the decisions of this committee. We will need to continue working with the Translation Bureau to find solutions to these challenges.

The House has also made significant technological advances, including a new videoconferencing system with a higher capacity and better quality for members and witnesses. This new system also benefited from a new webcasting standard for committee meetings.

I would like to congratulate the members of the information technology team, who have worked very hard. They have continually provided us with everything possible and allowed us to get to this point, as far as virtual meetings are concerned. I saw them work day and night, especially at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. I was really exhausted myself, so I can imagine how they felt.

[*English*]

We see increasingly that members seem to prefer either televised or webcast meetings, and rarely depend on the old standard of audio-only meetings.

There are also some big-picture questions the committee may also wish to explore. For example, should the House continue to allow remote participation for all members in any situation at any time? Should this option be available under specific circumstances that the House will define? Will these provisions apply differently in the chamber, in committees, or in other parliamentary activities?

This reflection could help to provide clarity and direction in several instances. For example, if the House retains its use of the electronic voting app, can the video conferencing system be maintained and used as a backup?

The Chair: That's really some good food for thought, Mr. Speaker. We look forward to having this conversation, as members will ask some additional questions.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Can I finish, or am I being cut off?

The Chair: It's that time, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very good, I appreciate that.

The Chair: We have a strict five-minute rule for opening comments.

Hon. Anthony Rota: I'll just thank everyone, and I'll go on from there.

Thank you.

The Chair: We appreciate those opening comments.

What I'm going to do for the purpose of this meeting moving forward is to keep us really tight and on time. I know everybody's time is valuable.

We will start with six-minute rounds, starting with Mr. Calkins, followed by Mr. Fergus, Madam Gaudreau and Ms. Blaney. At six minutes, I will be going to the next person for their session. If there isn't enough time for the answer, that should be mindful in the way that you use your six minutes.

I will start with you, Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

How did that feel, Mr. Speaker?

• (1110)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very fair.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Blaine Calkins: All kidding aside, Mr. Speaker, you brought up the salient points for discussion.

It should be noted, and I don't want to draw attention to it, that you and I have been here a long time. There are times when members of Parliament have issues that they have to deal with, be they personal or whatever the case may be. Depending on what your role and responsibility is in the House of Commons, what we're talking about here is just a regular, ordinary, everyday MP having the ability to participate virtually.

In your opinion, are there roles in the chamber that will never be able to be addressed from a virtual capacity, for example, being the Speaker?

Hon. Anthony Rota: As we're going on, you see certain roles where it's essential to be in the chamber: maybe Speaker and House leaders. That's something that has to be determined by the committee: Who has to be there?

I know, when we first started some of the hybrid committees we had.... They were actually just virtual; they weren't even hybrid. They were just committee meetings. They weren't actual sessions in the House, so we did everything virtually.

To start picking certain positions right now would be very difficult to do, but I would lean towards something.... The Speaker would have to be there, as would some of the key positions in the parties, but I think that would be something the parties would have to determine themselves: Which ones are essential to be there?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You brought up that this committee should be circumscribing who some of those essential people in the House might be—whether we should have it open to everybody or whether we should have very specific circumscribed roles.

Have you personally given any thought to what some of those roles might be?

Hon. Anthony Rota: I've given very much thought to it. I believe that, if a hybrid situation is picked as an option, the committee and Parliament should decide what the parameters are, so that anyone deciding to take part in a hybrid Parliament would have limitations.

What we don't want to see is someone getting up one morning and saying, "I'm not going to fly across the country" or, "I'm not going to drive into Parliament. I'll just participate", and it's willy-nilly. I think there have to be parameters for each and every participant in the chamber regarding when they can go for hybrid—whether it's illness, or special occasions that we'll have to decide on as a Parliament. A lot of it will depend on the decisions or recommendations that this committee makes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Notwithstanding the fact that virtual Parliament allowed us to continue through the pandemic, it now seems to me as if we're asking ourselves if we want to continue with this, even though the necessity or impetus for having hybrid Parliament appears to no longer be there.

Are you worried about the image of us having this conversation at a time when Canadians are struggling to make ends meet? This appears to be something that could be interpreted by some Canadians as parliamentarians making their own lives easier at a difficult time in the Canadian context, rather than coming to Ottawa and representing their constituents.

Do you have any concerns about the image and the institution if we choose to keep hybrid Parliament?

Hon. Anthony Rota: As Speaker, that's not something I'm able to comment on.

The way I look at it, we want to make sure that we have a Parliament that will work in the best capacity possible. The role of this committee, in my eyes, is to find that best way of doing things, the best way of proceeding with Parliament so it works and so Canadians get good democracy. I think that's the role of this Parliament. To me, it's more about making sure that Canadians get what they deserve: a good democracy and a good democratic system that works.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I'd like to move on.

You talked about decorum. There were some issues with decorum. I'm not going to highlight what those were, because I think there were a number of issues and different cases. I think those are definitely concerns.

If Parliament and this committee recommend that Parliament adopt some semblance of hybrid Parliament for the foreseeable future, what would your recommendations be to this committee in dealing with issues of decorum?

• (1115)

Hon. Anthony Rota: I found that the decorum with hybrid, with not having the numbers in the chamber, actually improved. When you're on a hybrid system, or a virtual system, for that matter, and you are going to heckle or come out and speak loudly, trying to overtake someone, you not only overtake that person, but you're centred on the screen, and it's easy to identify who is shouting.

One thing we find in the chamber especially when it's a dull roar that drowns everyone out is that we don't know exactly who it is. That makes it very difficult for the Speaker. However, when we have people in the chamber, in certain cases what happens is—

I see a big smile there. I won't comment on that one.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I was talking more about the clothing-optional components of decorum, but that's fine.

The Chair: That was an excellent exchange, and we look forward to seeing another one.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fergus, you have six minutes.

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you as well, Mr. Speaker, and your colleagues, for your testimony.

[*English*]

First of all, if I may, I want to thank all of you, and so many of your team of people who are not here, for bringing together the hybrid system in such a short time. Frankly, you could look at a spot on the wall and say, "There's a spot on the wall," or you could say, "Oh, that wall is white." You guys did a really great job. Congratulations.

I'm wondering if you could tell all Canadians, through Madam Chair, how that success story came about so quickly, because I think, frankly, we were world leaders on this front.

Hon. Anthony Rota: We were world leaders on that, and it's something that we did put a lot of time into, but we didn't have a lot of time to put into it. That's why these 24 hours.... I think it was Mr. Patrice who described the first two months as not really two months but just one long day with naps occasionally.

The team was amazing. They came to the plate and batted a home run. Every time there was something changing, they were there with new solutions. When something would come up, when there was an issue—and there have been a lot of issues—they stood to attention and made sure that everything was taken care of.

A lot of the discussions that took place were not just internal here in Canada. They took place virtually with other countries in the world, with New Zealand, with Australia, with England—the U.K. was very strong in it. We spoke with the French Speaker, as well. It was right around the world; it was global. What were they doing? What was working? What wasn't working? I've made this joke before: I often say that it's easier to learn from somebody else's mistakes, so we were learning from each other what not to do, what worked, how they made it work, and how we made it work. It was interesting because many of them were looking to Canada for the guidance.

I look to the end to Mr. Aubé who is here and who was.... I can't find the words to describe the energy that he had and the determination to make it work. He and his team were just out of this world. They were constantly bringing things up to snuff. Whenever there was a problem, they made sure it was fixed.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: That is great. I agree completely and I congratulate you.

Although the hybrid model was a huge success, some serious questions have been raised, and I think it is important to take them into account.

Many of my constituents are interpreters who work on the Hill. We were told that there were significant problems with how the hybrid system could affect their ears, which are, in effect, their work tool.

I know you are aware of this situation. Could you tell us what arrangements you have made or are in the process of making to resolve what is a real problem for our valued interpreters?

• (1120)

Hon. Anthony Rota: This is a very important question for us. Indeed, we want interpreters to be comfortable when they work. We do not want them to leave, because that is not good for the other employees. We want to make sure our interpreters want to do the job. Also, we do not want to lose those who are with us right now, because it is imperative that Canadians receive this service in both official languages.

From the beginning, Mr. Aubé and his team have worked very hard to ensure the continuity of the service. As for the listening system, you can see that changes were made very regularly. As soon as a problem was perceived or reported, everything was done to ensure the quality of services.

You will notice that many of the problems affecting interpreters also arise in other departments and organizations. If we probe a little deeper to determine the exact nature of the problem, we realize that conditions in the House and in Parliament are quite good. We want to continue to improve them.

Mr. Aubé, would you like to add anything? There are many technical elements involved. You might be in a better position than I to talk about them.

Hon. Greg Fergus: You only have 45 seconds left, Mr. Aubé.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé (Chief Information Officer, Digital Services and Real Property, House of Commons): Together with the Translation Bureau, we have developed a continuous improvement plan to ensure that people's hearing is protected and to offer the same quality of sound to all participants, including interpreters, members and witnesses. We have been working on it for two years and have invested millions of dollars to do so. We are also continually testing our systems. That is how I would summarize the situation in 45 seconds.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I want to thank you and all the participants.

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, thank you for having taken into account that there were only 45 seconds left.

Ms. Gaudreau, you have six minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Hello everyone.

I am truly pleased that we could start this discussion. I must admit that it does not seem necessary at the moment, because we are already working in hybrid format. That said, we will address the question.

To try to understand, I will approach the question from a numbers perspective.

Mr. Aubé, we just heard you talk about millions of dollars in investments. How much have we invested in keeping Parliament going in a pandemic context? Can you give us a figure quickly?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: I would not want to state a specific figure. I can only speak to the aspect relating to the interpreters, because that is the file I'm familiar with. The bulk of the investment was used to protect the interpreters. We installed volume limiters in all the booths to protect their hearing. That cost a little over \$1 million.

There is also the whole aspect of the resources we use. I do not have specific figures today, but we have devoted resources to maintain that infrastructure and that—

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I must interrupt. Could you provide figures for the investment made to bring about these changes?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: If the committee needs it, we could get those figures to you, Ms. Gaudreau.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Perfect.

Regarding interpretation services, we compared a meeting held entirely in person to another that was held virtually. Of course, there is an impact on both official languages, as I can personally attest.

It is completely different when a meeting is held in person rather than virtually. Not only do I factor in the time when people have to say, "Unfortunately, I didn't hear you properly," but I also factor in the concern that my colleagues and I have had about incidents or accidents involving our interpreters.

To what extent do we still rely on the hybrid format in connection with the interpreters? In my opinion, our needs have declined significantly.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Aubé, perhaps it would be better if you answered.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: What we are seeing now is comparable to the pre-pandemic situation. During sitting weeks, 30% of members, on average, take part in meetings remotely, compared to 70% who attend in person.

• (1125)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Perfect.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: These are the current averages.

However, we notice an increase in remote participation during recess weeks, that is to say when the House does not sit and the members are most likely in their riding offices.

As for witnesses, the percentage is still quite high. Right now, almost 70% of witnesses still take part in meetings remotely.

Those are essentially the figures we are seeing. Use of the hybrid format seems to be returning to what we saw before the pandemic.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Let us talk about interpreters and the labour shortage. Even if 70% of elected officials attend meetings in person, how could you maintain the interpretation services you now offer if there is a shortage of interpreters? If I understand correctly, some committees have not been able to meet because of a lack of interpreters. Is that right?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: That happens sometimes. Although scheduling conflicts sometimes occur between some committees, the trend is downwards. At present, there are approximately 57 committee meetings per week, compared to 67 before the pandemic.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: So the hybrid format reduces work time and efficiency. Is that right? Just moments ago, my colleague next to me was able to get replaced, and we have had no problem holding this meeting.

What does the role of a member consist of outside the context of meetings, whether on-screen or in person? What are the benefits of meeting in the hallways, behind the scenes, where there is meaningful interaction? I'd love to hear your thoughts on this richness that face-to-face exchanges allow.

Hon. Anthony Rota: I will give you my personal opinion. It is not an official opinion. In my view, it is certain that, when we are here in person, passing each other in the hallways, eating together, or meeting in the evening or in our offices, we have an opportunity to get to know each other a little bit better as members and talk about things.

In a virtual meeting, once the camera is turned off, the discussion ends there, whereas it can continue when we are on site.

That is why, in my remarks, I said that it would be up to the committee to make good recommendations about the limits to our use of the hybrid model. In my view, determining when to use the hybrid model and when not to use it will be a very significant challenge for the committee, if in fact it decides to recommend keeping it. The decision will not be easy to make.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, since we can't have exchanges, I'd like to know if each of our witnesses could give their opinion on the effectiveness of the work and on incidents or accidents, whether related to interpreters or otherwise. They could add to our report.

The Chair: I think that's a good idea. Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

[English]

Ms. Blaney, you have six minutes.

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

As always, everything goes through the chair. I want to thank her for constantly reminding us about that.

I also want to thank the Speaker for dealing with it with such grace when he was cut off. I appreciate that tremendously.

I also want to add my thanks to everyone. Not only were we dealing with the reality of a pandemic and the personal issues we were facing with our own families, but we were also asking all the people here to figure out how to continue to run this government on all levels. I just want to say thank you. I appreciate how trying that must have been on top of everything else and how important it was that we got that work done. I appreciate that.

Through the chair, I understand there was an audio system performance review conducted over the summer that was commissioned by the House of Commons administration. Will that be able to be tabled with this committee so that we can review it?

Hon. Anthony Rota: The work was done, and there were some questions on the methodology.

I'd feel more comfortable if Monsieur Aubé or Monsieur Patrice answered the question, either one; they've been very good and on top of this. There are some details in there that I'm sure they can give you on that.

• (1130)

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We did do a study this summer, Ms. Blaney, to actually characterize our systems and measure the performance, because there were discussions and doubt about whether our systems at present were actually meeting the ISO standards. The report demonstrated that we were meeting the ISO standards related to the audio quality within our systems.

Having said that, we're still in discussion with the translation bureau to actually validate and make them understand the test. We're meeting again with them this week on Friday. I'm having a meeting with them and the NRC. We're also organizing tests next week again to demonstrate the results that were provided this summer.

As far as making the report available is concerned, our preference right now is to keep the document to ourselves until the validation is done by all parties engaged. We did this in partnership with the translation bureau, and we want to make sure that everyone is comfortable with the results. Once that's done, I think the conclusions of this very technical report could be shared, but as a first step, we want to keep them. It's still a working document from our perspective, because it needs to be validated with our partners through the process that we put in place.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Okay. Thank you for that. I will say, though, that I expect that I'll be coming back to this, because we do need to have it before this study ends. If we're going to be making the most educated decisions, we need to have that happen.

I know that at the end of the day, the interpreters really paid a high price for transitioning. I think we all recognize that. We know the challenges that we are all facing and the limits that we have to our capacity right now largely because of the hard work of the interpreters.

What percentage of interpreters are freelancers right now? In that context, I want to also ask whether, when they are working for our House as freelancers, they have the capacity to file health and safety incident reports. I just want to make sure that when we're hearing about the health and safety incident reports, we're not just hearing from those who are not freelancers; we're hearing from all of the interpreters who are serving us.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Actually, on that one for precise numbers, I think the translation bureau is appearing later on this week and it would be an appropriate question to ask them. They keep better figures. It would be better if they gave them to you rather than us giving them. That would be the best place to get them.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Do we know if, as freelancers, they're able to have a health and safety incident report. Do they submit them?

Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons): I would believe that they do.

The translation bureau is the employer of the employees and they're the ones who retain the freelancers. I think the question is better put to them.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'll ask them.

One of the things that was mentioned here by you, Mr. Speaker—through the chair—is the fact that we could look at addressing what people's experiences are and who should and should not get to participate in setting some sorts of standards. I think that's an interesting idea, but I'm wondering about the implementation.

As the whip for the NDP, I know a lot of personal things about my MPs that I would not feel comfortable sharing with other members without their explicit permission. If you're framing it that way, do you have any thoughts or opinions on how that would actually go into implementation? It's one thing to talk about it and it's another thing to implement it.

Hon. Anthony Rota: At a higher level it's easy to say. That's why it's so important that this committee look at all of the implementation and all of the issues that come up when you actually put something into place. Theoretically, I could say all kinds of neat things that sound good.

I would hope that this committee looks at the lives of MPs and what it involves. If it is, say, too revealing for somebody's personal situation, then how do we get around that? Or if it's something that is another situation where it doesn't quite fit into—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm sorry to interrupt, but I only have a few seconds left.

Another challenge is I imagine you're updating the systems all the time to service the House better virtually. If we don't have people using it, would you be worried about the supports, processes and updates not being rapid enough?

Hon. Anthony Rota: What I found was as soon as someone brought something to our attention, the IT team was on it right away. Whether it's one person or 337 people using it, I don't see any error or any danger of the IT department ignoring it, or any of us ignoring it.

I'll stop there.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you.

The IT department can rest assured as long as I'm around they will be employed. I can use all of the IT help in the world.

Mr. Kmiec, it will be five minutes for you, followed by five minutes to Ms. Sahota.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Speaker, on committee resource rationing, I heard the House has 57 committees. Does that include the caucus meetings?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: We have 57 slots available right now, sir. That includes the national caucuses.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: How many could you do at the same time right now?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Currently, the schedules are organized....

I'll let Eric answer that one.

Mr. Eric Janse (Deputy Clerk, Procedure, House of Commons): It's a block system. I think we have six per block, maximum. If there are conflicts, or what have you, or if a committee goes beyond its two-hour slot, then it's up to the whips to decide which committee is pushed or outright cancelled. It's largely in the hands of the whips in terms of how to use those 57 slots.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Chair, this is where there's a problem.

We have four officers on each recognized party, including the caucus chairs. I found that during the pandemic when I chaired the meetings of the Conservative Party—I think we were the first ones to meet over Zoom—we had no interpretation for three meetings. I think that is a breach of members' privileges. We had people trying to interpret for others, and I think that's unfair. I think most of that has been resolved.

The slotting system.... When you're only supposed to have four officers...and you know, whips occasionally disagree. We do. We have in the past. I've disagreed with my whips in the past when I was chair.

In the future, are caucus meetings going to be dealt with differently? Can it be guaranteed that we can always get caucus meeting slots and not just have one per week? There are different caucuses that have different schedules of meetings. Is this something that's been looked at before in terms of how they would be treated?

Hon. Anthony Rota: I believe that's something the House leaders establish amongst themselves on what gets priority so that the business of the House that is most important gets done. I would not want to take that away from the House leaders. They know and understand what's going on. I'm not sure it would work out that well to impose something on them. It's something that I would prefer to have them discuss amongst themselves to see what their priorities are.

Having been a national caucus chair—luckily it was before COVID—I know you're always struggling for resources. It's the same situation now where you just have to—

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, on the issue of research....

I finally get to interrupt you, which is great.

Hon. Anthony Rota: It's not a problem.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I've complained to you a lot over the pandemic while I chaired meetings. You have many angry emails from me.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Those weren't complaints; that was just bringing stuff to my attention.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: On the staffing, there are so many more staff now in caucus meeting rooms, especially when they're hybrid meetings. There are the MMS staff. There are more interpreters cycling in and out as well.

For the staff that we need in general for the parliamentary precinct, if we adopt a hybrid model, do we need all of these people? Has there been an assessment done on the staffing needs? Will they go up or down?

I mean to include precinct security, the restaurant staff and the people who change the water—all of these people. If a third of members are not here on average every week, do we need all of these people here? What's the answer?

Mr. Charles Robert (Clerk of the House of Commons): It's a big question that you're asking.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: That's why I asked it.

Mr. Charles Robert: It really depends on how far you want to go with the idea of your commitment to a hybrid sitting or a hybrid model. If it's scaled back, there aren't necessarily the same sort of requirements.

I think we would really have to make an assessment following the decision of the committee and the House to accept a certain model to work with.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Can I then ask a question?

You had mentioned, Speaker, in your commentary in the opening about having worked with other jurisdictions. Are any of the provincial legislatures still in a hybrid format?

Hon. Anthony Rota: I don't believe so. There are none that I know of.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: In their communications then, Speaker, did they express any concerns about not continuing in a hybrid format?

Hon. Anthony Rota: No. I don't have anything from them.

During COVID, the conversations with my counterparts at the provincial level were constant. Alberta's Speaker Cooper and I became good friends because we were kind of scrambling to try to figure out how we were going to do things. That was the same with all of these Speakers. We were just trying to figure out how we could get these things done.

Now it seems to have gone live for the provinces.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you for that exchange.

It's kind of interesting because when we're talking amongst each other, we like to talk directly to each other, but in the House we

tend to go through the Speaker and, in this committee, through the Chair.

Ms. Sahota, you have five minutes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

My first question will be for Mr. Aubé.

I want to know more about any of the security concerns. In the last studies working up to implementing hybrid Parliament, or virtual Parliament at the beginning, there were many questions about concerns about the voting app and whether it would be secure or whether our vote could end up being somehow intercepted.

It seems to us that a good job has been done, but I want to know from your end, have there been issues on the back end that have caused you worry?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Through you, Madam Chair, thank you for the question, Madam Sahota.

IT security had to be remodelled in the context of a virtual Parliament. We took major steps to ensure that the proceedings would be secured and also that the members use of all of the devices had been secured. As you remember, when we were sitting in front of this committee we had actually tabled our security posture, which was validated by the national security partners. We are continuing that. We still have these relationships in play.

We continue monitoring our infrastructure. I would say it's not related to hybrid. Every day we face threats from an IT security perspective. We react to them in the same way that we do with hybrid. From a hybrid perspective, we take a proactive approach because sometimes we have witnesses who are travelling, so we want to make sure it is the proper people participating in the meetings. We've put in place a proactive approach. We feel very strong about our security posture.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you, and thank you for all the work you have been doing because it has been seamless on our end.

For myself, I enjoy being there in person. I want to apologize for not being able to be in person today. I was extremely sick yesterday and couldn't even get out of bed. I didn't think the people on the plane would appreciate me being on with them. I am starting to see the light again, so I hopefully can be with all of you tomorrow.

My next question goes to the Speaker.

I was glad to hear you say there are certain things we should be considering, like whether certain roles need to be in person. You have said that perhaps the Speaker is something to consider. I think that's something Parliament has also considered from the beginning of time. Certain rules have already put in place, like deputy positions. There's a deputy whip. As for myself, there are deputy speakers and deputy House leaders. I think that has been implemented just in case somebody cannot be there. That's interesting.

I also wanted to get your perspective on the issue of whether democracy works. So far, have you felt that our democratic system has worked under this hybrid Parliament?

Hon. Anthony Rota: There's no question. The participation and enthusiasm has come in from all sides. I haven't heard anyone say, "Okay, we're going to stop democracy from working." Overall, people have been working well together.

I think Canadians can be very proud of the system we have. There are people who prefer to come in person, which has worked out well. Even during the depth of COVID, with the limitations, everyone got the chance to speak and to put their opinions forward, within the limitations and parameters set by Parliament.

We serve as an example of how democracy can continue to work regardless of what's thrown at it.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For other jurisdictions that have gone back because they may have only had temporary provisions in place, like our Parliament does, I want to know what your conversations were with them.

I have taken the opportunity to have some conversations with members from the U.K. They have told me that politics really got in the way. Earlier, my colleagues wondered what Canadians will think and whether it is a good time to doing this, optically.

I'm wondering whether our committee's focus should be on optics or if it really should be on whether we can continue doing this in a responsible way. We see now that most parliamentarians want to be in Parliament. It is generally only that odd time when a situation comes up that could make it unsafe for everyone or other situations come up around their own health and family issues.

Do you have comments on that?

• (1145)

The Chair: You will have to reserve the opportunity to comment at a later time.

Thank you, Ms. Sahota. I see you sniffing, but I hope you're feeling better.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'm much better.

The Chair: Good.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I will be very quick, Madam Chair.

I have four questions to ask. After that, I'm going to talk about something that happened last week.

How many interpreters are needed to keep the number of committee meetings at 57?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Madam Chair, I don't have the exact numbers.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Could you give them to me?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: We can give them to you, but you should ask the Translation Bureau representatives when they appear on Thursday.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I'm going to do that, because I'd also like to know how many interpreters were there before the pandemic and how many are needed to keep up the pace. I'm going to need to know that when we hear from them.

I will now talk about the action plan. We keep talking about the scarcity of labour and the lack of interpreters. What is your action plan?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: I'm not trying to dodge the question, but again, the Translation Bureau is in the best position to answer you. We are asking the same questions as you are, and we expect to get answers soon. So I would ask you to ask them the same question this week. That will be the best way to proceed.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: They already have the questions, so they will already have the answers.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Parliament uses the services of the Translation Bureau. We use the services of its staff. They are not employees of Parliament, but of the bureau.

We work closely with the bureau. We ask them to provide a certain service, but it is not always easy for them to provide it.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, I would like to explain what we went through last week. It is good for the witnesses because we would not be here today with a consensus had we not all been present.

Indeed, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs tends to have constructive exchanges. We were able to come to an agreement to carry out the order of the House of Commons. It was done, I can confirm that. There were four of us, we took a break and we were able to come to an agreement. That's a real-life example, and I could name many more.

Since I have 20 or 30 seconds left, I would like to make a comment—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but you have no time left.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: It's too quick.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Chair. My question, through you, is this: Is how members participate tracked?

Do you track who participates virtually compared to who participates...? There's no tracking at all...? Okay. Thanks.

One of the things that I'm also curious about is that there was a pilot project of interpreters working remotely. I'm just curious if there were qualification requirements for that and if they were qualified for that by translation bureau standards. I would hope that you would know the difference.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Yes. There were serious concerns about the quality of interpretation, but to give you a bit more detail on what those parameters were, I'll leave it to...

Would Monsieur Aubé—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: What I'm trying to understand is, were their qualifications the same, of the same rigour, as what is required for the translation bureau?

Mr. Michel Patrice: Through you, Madam Chair, in the pilot project, as has been reported in the board's minutes, definitely there was an aspect that required the same quality in terms of interpretation that the translation bureau would offer.

• (1150)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: The same credentials...?

Mr. Michel Patrice: The same standards—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: The same standards—

Mr. Michel Patrice: The same standards of quality.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Okay. Is there a way that can be verified? I've heard that is not the case, and I just want to make sure that's correct.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Through you, Madam Chair, one of the recommendations, Ms. Blaney, is that moving forward, for now we would be using interpreters from the interpretation bureau. That was one of the recommendations that came out of the pilot of the board.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Okay.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: We would use the same qualifications and they would be provided by them.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

Hon. Anthony Rota: If I could add on to that, the pilot project was to see if it was viable to go outside of the interpreters bureau, and it determined that, no, for now, we stick with what we have. We might look at it down the road again, but for now we stay with what we have, and we work with the parameters we have or the limitations that are there.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: My time is almost up, so I'll concede the last 10 seconds.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Calkins, five minutes go to you, followed by five minutes for Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

This is just a quick question. Are we able to maintain now, with the hybrid or the virtual capability, the same operational tempo that we were at in 2019, prior...? Are we able to support at the same level our operational tempo—committee meetings and so on—at the same tempo?

Mr. Eric Janse: Through you, Madam Chair, I would say not quite. There are still requests made of the House administration for, as has been raised, caucus meetings, additional committee meetings, etc., and we're not always able to support that.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Okay.

Mr. Eric Janse: As mentioned earlier, it's up to the whips to decide what gets priority.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Yes, I remember that. I probably knew the answer to the question before I asked it, but I asked it anyway.

I have a question for you. In 17 years of being a member of Parliament, I've had my name only called once by the Speaker of the House when I did not rise to speak, and that was when I was in my constituency office. It had nothing to do with the IT capabilities of the people here, but it had everything to do with the IT and the capabilities.

I don't live in what I would consider to be a remote rural area. I live on the Highway 2 corridor in Alberta. I was unable to connect to the House when my name was called, and I was very frustrated that my IT service provider was unable to get me connected.

How often does that still happen?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Through you, Madam Chair, I don't have the exact details, Mr. Calkins, but I can say that the mobility enabling requirements for hybrid are one of the key principles: having proper Internet and having a proper cloud service provider are key elements that we need to offer for hybrid.

It does happen sometimes, as you remember. I've been at the House for 25 years and there's only been one time that the House has been down, and it was through an Internet outage during the pandemic. It does happen. We've seen it in a limited number of times, and it does happen to members, depending on where they're located.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Most of the things we do in the House of Commons and our committees writ large are public, and they should be public.

For those times when we are in an in camera meeting or a caucus meeting per se, which is being delivered jointly through a hybrid or whatever you want to call it—a virtual process—can you guarantee to this committee and the members of Parliament currently here that everything we do and say in an in camera meeting is not exposed because somebody is participating virtually?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: To answer this simply, I cannot guarantee that, sir. I don't control the end person—where they are participating. I can only guarantee the infrastructure we provide, to make sure that it is secure.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Is cabinet meeting virtually?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: I wouldn't want to comment on the cabinet, sir. We provide support to them, but I would leave that answer to the cabinet participants with regard to what they offer from that service and who participates.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Okay, thank you.

There are organizations, consultancies, professional firms throughout the world that guide corporate entities and businesses on their ability to make good decisions so that they have good governance structures. They provide business consulting, for example.

Has the speakership or anybody in the leadership we see here today consulted with any third party organization about post-pandemic recommendations, as companies, businesses, other large organizations and large governance bodies try to cope with the reality of this? Have we consulted with anybody about whether or not virtual decision-making is in any way, shape or form compromised compared to in-person decision-making?

• (1155)

Mr. Michel Patrice: Not in that context.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Is it reasonable to ask that we might consider seeing whether somebody has the capability to offer that advice?

Hon. Anthony Rota: I think the job of this committee is to make sure that we get the best system possible and the best recommendations possible. If the committee determines that's what they want, I think it should be looked at.

I certainly wouldn't stand in the way of having a third party look at it. It has to be an impartial third party who is willing to look at all the options and recommend what they believe is best.

Personally, I don't see a problem with it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Gerretsen, you have five minutes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you very much.

With respect to Mr. Calkins' last question about ensuring security virtually, is the House in any way able to ensure that a member who participates in person in a committee meeting does not release any of that in camera information once they leave the committee room?

Hon. Anthony Rota: I can answer that one. I think the answer is obviously no.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: How do we ensure the credibility of committee meetings? Is it not based on the honour of the member being assumed?

Hon. Anthony Rota: I think we're talking about two different things. One is on the honour of the member and the other one is somebody eavesdropping online. I think these are two things.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Aubé's response was specifically about how he is unable to determine what happens on the other end. If I am participating from my living room, he's unable to know if there's somebody out of the screenshot whom I have let listen in on a meeting.

In a similar vein, it's not possible to ensure that I don't leave a meeting that I personally have been involved in and share that information, right? To that end, all of our committee meetings, as with our proceedings in the House, are all based on the honour of the individual. Am I correct in that?

Hon. Anthony Rota: There is no question.

Mr. Aubé, did you want to add to that?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: No. I would agree with that statement.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

The Chair: Please address your comments through the chair.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Right. Of course, Madam Chair.

She is very, very good at this. Mr. Speaker, I would be concerned if I were you. I think she's eyeing your job.

My next question, Madam Chair, through you, would be with respect to....

I know that early on in the pandemic, when the hybrid provisions were implemented, there were a few incidents in which individuals immediately jumped at the opportunity to abuse that. For example, if I recall correctly, one member participated from Oklahoma—out of the country. Another member participated from a boat on Lake Simcoe, if I remember correctly.

I'm wondering if there's any way to be able to control that an individual is actually following the rules, i.e., participating from within Canada, which is what our rules state. Is there any way to ensure that, or, again, are we relying on the member to do the honourable thing, which is to obey the rules?

Hon. Anthony Rota: When we talk about the honourable member, we talk about honourable members, people who are sticking to the rules and trying to make sure that everything works well. Yes, we're relying on the individual. That's from a personal point of view.

From a technical point of view, it's something that I would like to let Mr. Aubé answer, because I know one of the parameters is that you have to be in Canada. Lake Simcoe is in Canada. That's not a problem, so you could be fishing and participating, which I'm not sure—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That's as the rules are stated right now.

Hon. Anthony Rota: It's as the rules indicate right now, but Oklahoma is not in Canada. There are two parameters, and it's making sure the individuals know what the rules are.

Mr. Aubé, on technical parameters, I don't know if there's anything there that we can enforce.

• (1200)

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: If I can add through you, Madam Chair, we had the technical capabilities, sir, but, if you remember, in time we made the decision for the honourable member, if they were not in Canada, to identify themselves as not being there, because we didn't want to prevent a member from participating in an event.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I think it's fair to say, through you, Madam Chair, whatever is adopted in a hybrid model we would look to apply in terms of an individual who is participating in the House. It needs to come from the same perspective of doing things in an honourable fashion as it would if they're doing it on hybrid.

Hon. Anthony Rota: If it's being done dishonourably, then our system doesn't work. Yes, it is up to the honour of the individual. I'm sure that Canadian people do not elect dishonourable people.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Do I have any time left? I'll give it to Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): How much time is there, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It's all yours.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Through you, Madam Chair, to Speaker Rota, you said that a Parliament may continue to function regardless of what's thrown at it. I thought that was really insightful.

In your opinion, is this study really just a matter of looking at business continuity for our Parliament in times of crisis?

Hon. Anthony Rota: That's exactly it.

It's not only in crisis but how you want to look at adapting to what's out there. That's something that's going to be key to the report that comes out of this committee, in my opinion, because we'll be able to look at it, or parliamentarians will be able to look at it, and say, "Okay, this is the recommendation so we can continue to make sure democracy works in Canada."

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Sahota, I see that your hand is up.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes, I have a request to you and the committee, Madam Chair.

Mr. Aubé and the Speaker alluded to different studies that we'd done before this. I think some of the testimony and the findings from those studies might be useful. I'm wondering if it's okay with the committee if we allow our analysts to include reference to those studies as well.

I am referencing the study of February 2, 2016, and especially the latest studies that we've done in 2020. There were a couple of studies that were tabled.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

They are all related to the hybrid proceedings, I guess, so it would probably be relevant to be able to have them.

I don't see any objections.

Go ahead, Ms. Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: It's still based on the questions that have been asked today, Madam Chair. If it's something that our witnesses couldn't share with us because of time constraints, I think that's in order, but no more than that.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): This is a point of clarification, Madam Chair.

Is Ms. Sahota asking that we include those studies as part of our overall report that will be done or that they're presented to committee members for further consideration when we do our report and our draft report?

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, do you want to respond to that?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I would say both, and I'm open to hearing from the committee members on that. If we could include them, then referencing them would be made possible, and we'd also have them to view.

Mr. Brad Vis: If the House of Commons has already undertaken background information related to the utility of a hybrid Parliament, that is something that would be appropriate to include in the background work of any study, given that those were reports written on behalf of all parliamentarians through House administration.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vis, Ms. Sahota and Madam Gaudreau.

Mr. Speaker, and your entire team, thank you for all you do. You make it look very easy. Keep up the good work, and enjoy the rest of your day.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Thank you for having us.

The Chair: We will suspend to switch the panels.

● (1200)

(Pause)

● (1205)

The Chair: Welcome back for the second panel on our study of hybrid proceedings.

I would like to welcome our guests who have joined us. We have with us Parm Bains, MP for Steveston—Richmond East; Laurel Collins, MP for Victoria; Dona Cadman, former member of Parliament; and Léo Duguay, president of the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians. Welcome to all.

We will start with three-minute opening comments, so if you could keep to three minutes, it would be greatly appreciated.

We'll start with Mr. Bains.

● (1210)

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the honourable members of Parliament for inviting me as a witness for this important study.

I am Parm Bains. In 2021, I was honoured to be chosen by the people of Steveston—Richmond East to serve as their member of Parliament. However, well before I was elected—in my thirties—my doctor discovered that I was born with a solitary kidney and, at some point in my life, I would need a replacement.

As I began my work as an MP in Ottawa, my symptoms worsened and upon my return to B.C., I was informed that my only kidney was deteriorating faster than expected. The time had come to prepare for a transplant, and I was to immediately receive dialysis treatment.

To ensure that there were no conflicts with my parliamentary responsibilities, I trained myself to self-administer the dialysis treatment at the nocturnal dialysis unit at Vancouver General Hospital, where I would stay overnight three days a week. While I waited for my transplant, it was crucial that I avoid contracting viruses, like COVID-19, so that I could be operated on safely when the time came. If it had not been for the hybrid Parliament provisions, I could not have safeguarded my health and kept my commitment to represent my constituents in Parliament.

Because I was able to fulfill my responsibilities virtually in the House of Commons and in committees, I was able to speak to bills, the Emergencies Act and the study on military procurement, and share an untold inclusive Canadian heritage story confronting the realities of systemic racism. I was also able to provide statements in the House regarding key investments the government is making in Richmond—over \$100 million so far, since 2015. I have been able to participate in all respective caucus meetings to communicate Richmond's economic and service priorities. I was able to vote on every important measure introduced in the House.

In 2016, this committee released a report entitled “Initiatives toward a family-friendly House of Commons”. Although the virtual proceedings were not one of the recommendations, the hybrid provisions are vital to the pressures caused by uncontrollable long absences from Ottawa. The hybrid provisions allowed me to fulfill my parliamentary obligations, limit my exposure, maintain strong mental health and reduce the fears my family had as they supported me through my health journey.

I would like to end by thanking all the medical professionals, the dialysis unit, Canadian Blood Services and the organ transplant team at Vancouver General Hospital for making it possible to appear before you all. I received my transplant in August. I am very fortunate and extremely grateful to be able to continue serving the city. I was raised in Richmond, British Columbia, the province in which I was born.

I look forward to joining my colleagues in the new year in Ottawa.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bains. We look forward to seeing you back in Ottawa too. I didn't know that, so I thank you for sharing that with us today. I wish you good health.

Ms. Collins, three minutes go to you.

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the committee for the invitation to speak here today. The work members do in the House of Commons and in committee is vital.

Critics of hybrid Parliament often imply that virtual work somehow results in members doing less work, so I'd like to share four examples of how hybrid Parliament gave me the chance to keep working when I otherwise would not have been able to.

The first example I want to share is when I was pregnant. At that time, my midwives recommended that I not travel in my third trimester. I wanted to keep working, and virtual Parliament allowed me to continue participating in debates in the House of Commons, to vote, to question ministers in question period, to continue my work on the environment committee, and to continue bringing my constituents' concerns to Parliament. If we hadn't had virtual Parliament for those three months, I wouldn't have been able to do any of those things. I wouldn't have been able to do my job. Instead, I was able to continue working into my ninth month of pregnancy. Not every woman wants to do that, but every woman deserves the choice. Women deserve the choice to participate. I've said it before and I'll say it again: If you want more young women to enter politics and more women to stay in politics, make Parliament more family-friendly. Hybrid Parliament is a tangible way to do that.

This connects to the second example I'll share. As the parent of a young infant, being allowed to work remotely when needed means that I've had the flexibility to keep working, even when we've had occasional child care challenges.

The third example is when I was sick. Like many members who got COVID-19 this past year, I followed public health guidelines and isolated. I wouldn't have been able to continue working if it

weren't for virtual Parliament. I participated in committees, voted and rose numerous times in the House, all while isolating.

The last example I want to share is when my father passed away. I was able to fly home to visit him while he was still lucid and to keep working while remaining close by. Then, a couple of weeks later, I was grateful to be able to quickly get to the hospital when the doctor called, so that I was present when he passed.

Virtual or hybrid Parliament is fundamentally about giving flexibility to members in order to ensure we can continue to participate. When members are sick with COVID or other illnesses, in the later stages of pregnancy, or have a family emergency, this is a tool that allows us to continue to carry out our duties as members of Parliament.

I hope that hybrid Parliament is strengthened to make sure there are more stringent accountability requirements for the government and ministers, but also to make sure there are enough translators and policies to deal with technical difficulties and interpretation challenges, so we can take care of the health and safety of workers and ensure members can participate equally in both languages.

I hope you make hybrid Parliament permanent, so we can make Parliament more accessible for future members, especially women, members with young families and members with disabilities. Make hybrid Parliament permanent, because it's an important tool to increase participation and representation, and to make Parliament more equitable for all.

Thank you.

● (1215)

The Chair: Thank you for those opening comments.

Ms. Cadman, it's nice to see you. Welcome to committee. You have three minutes.

Ms. Dona Cadman (Former Member of Parliament, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

Good morning, and thank you for allowing me to participate in this discussion.

Something happened this weekend that made me stop and say, “What the fuck. Why do shitty things happen to good people?”

I've known my sister-in-law's brother and wife for some 30 years. Over the years they have lost a son to a motor vehicle accident, and a year and half ago their other son became a victim of the opioid crisis that we find ourselves in. Three weeks ago the wife was diagnosed with cancer and died on Saturday. So here he is, my sister-in-law's brother is all alone. His family unit that he and his wife created is gone. Anyone's life can change in a blink of an eye. I know this all too well.

On October 18, 1992, we were thrown into every parent's worst nightmare. While walking home from the bus stop, our son Jesse and two of his friends were set upon by six other older and bigger youths. In the ensuing scuffle, Jesse was stabbed in the back, which pierced his heart and lungs. A quarter of an inch would have made a difference. A young man's life was cut short at 16 in a matter of minutes.

From 1993 to 1997, my late husband and I, with incredible friends, formed a non-profit organization called CRY, or Crime, Responsibility and Youth, to lobby for changes to the Young Offenders Act.

In June 1997, my husband, Chuck, was elected MP for Surrey North. In 2004, Chuck was diagnosed with cancer, and the following months were filled with doctor appointments, surgery, chemo and drugs. Physically, it was getting harder and harder to travel back and forth from our home in B.C. to Ottawa. His last flight from Ottawa was in May 2005 after the vote that saved the government from an election. He died on July 9, 2005. Three years later, I was elected in Surrey North, and served from 2008 to 2011. I can speak as an MP and as a spouse from experience.

Our point of being elected is to be the voice of our community that elected us. Sitting in Ottawa does us no favours. The jet lag from back and forth travelling can play havoc with your health. In our case, it was only three hours twice a week, but when you counted door-to-door travel, it added on 20 hours. For some MPs, it was worse.

COVID changed everything. Virtual meetings became a normal way of conducting business, and keeping in touch with friends and families. Chuck would have loved to be able to participate while recovering from surgery. Mentally he was fine, but the body was suffering. You can't ignore the fact that jet lag plays a prominent role in a person's health, with multiple time zones. The thought of staying in the riding but still participating in government proceedings, wow, this sounds so good!

This October 18 will be the 30th year since our tragic family event that drove both me and my late husband, Chuck, into politics. Much has changed, but much hasn't. We need more efficient government for our constituents. Let's not let tradition be an enemy of our progress.

Thank you.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Duguay, it's over to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Léo Duguay (President, Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

First of all, I want to thank you for the opportunity to talk to you a little bit about a topic that has been very close to my heart for a very long time.

[*English*]

Just looking at it historically, in 1985, when I was first elected, our government started a special committee on the renewal of Parliament. I asked the prime minister if I could be part of that committee, so I was named. It didn't take very long, in a short meeting with the chair of the committee, James McGrath, to realize that when people talk about renewing Parliament and making changes to Parliament, there is an incredible kind of momentum that drags it back to where it has always been.

In 1985 I wanted to look at two things. The first was to look at electronic voting. The second was to look at improving the House of Commons, looking particularly at question period, which, as you know, has been and is a show that takes away from committees, where a lot of you do some magnificent work.

Having said that, I'm in Charlottetown today. I could not participate in this meeting were it not for Zoom. I think that speaks for itself.

The three other panellists have made the case for why we need to have a hybrid Parliament. I want to make the case simply to say that there are lots of safeguards built into this. I mean, there are whips in our caucuses. There is the electorate. There is the Speaker. I think we currently have an incredible ability, as your Speaker said, to deal with honourable members. When honourable members don't act honourably, someone else usually takes that into consideration, and that is usually the electorate.

By the way, the association of former members of Parliament and senators is an association to which all of you will one day belong. I just want to hope for you that you belong to our association at a time of your own choosing. We have a lot of members of our association who did not choose to be ex-members of Parliament, but they are.

I will close with this one offer. Former members have time on their hands. They have expertise. They care a lot about democracy and they care a lot about Parliament. Our association would be pleased to put together a special committee of members, of all political stripes and ideas, to look at the renewal of Parliament. Parliament's renewal is a complex thing. A hybrid Parliament is one aspect of it. I think there is very strong agreement to continue a hybrid Parliament, but there are a lot of other things that could be done.

Simply put, if you ask former members of Parliament, who care a lot, if we want to help, the answer is "yes". We care, and we will help.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Monsieur Duguay, for your words and for your offer of help.

We will now enter into our six-minute round. We will start with Mrs. Falk, followed by Madam Romanado, Madam Gaudreau and then Mrs. Blaney.

Just as a reminder to members and guests, all comments and responses should be made through the chair, please.

Mrs. Falk, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Through you, I want to thank all my colleagues and the witnesses who have presented and are contributing to this important discussion.

We know that the work we do as parliamentarians has a real impact on the daily lives of Canadians. I think that's why it's so critical that these discussions centre around efficacy and also efficiency so that any resulting recommendations from the study aren't serving us but are better serving in the best interest of the Canadians we serve. I think that's very important and should be top of mind.

In discussing the hybrid Parliament, we know there are obvious discussions around work-life balance and the impact it has on the abilities of MPs to perform to their fullest in their job. I am a mother of four young children. I had my most recent child five months ago, and I would propose, even, that hybrid Parliament has its own challenges that we've all endeavoured.... There's an expectation that members of Parliament are fully engaged in parliamentary work, which I absolutely agree we need to be in order to be successful for our constituents. When you're home in the riding, there are other priorities and responsibilities that are competing for your time. Each and every one of us knows that. Whether that's family obligations, local events or local engagements, there seems to be an expectation that because you are physically present, you can do all of these, and do them to your fullest. But I would say that in reality, that's actually to the detriment of our executing our parliamentary responsibilities.

We've come across limited resources with committees when we've done hybrid. I know that all of us have experienced committees that couldn't be extended due to a lack of resources. Sound checks have gotten better than they were in the early days, but through you, Madam Chair, I'm wondering if the witnesses would agree that the committee work that is done is critical to the parliamentary process and that this work should not be limited by resources.

• (1225)

The Chair: We'll go in reverse order.

Mr. Duguay.

Mr. Léo Duguay: I'll leave the question of resources up to you. That's your job, not mine.

I can only reiterate what I feel very strongly about. The best work in Parliament gets done in committees, and other things sometimes, including question period, detract from the excellent work that members of Parliament do. I think you should try to do everything you can to make sure the committees are fully resourced.

The Chair: Ms. Cadman.

Ms. Dona Cadman: Yes, I think the committees should continue. We have to have the committees. I still think you can do things over the Internet. It's been proven that we can do it. Security, of course, has to be tightened. The security that I think could be tightened is on the back end, not necessarily with us, the people who are

using it and who are getting three to four meeting IDs, passwords...too many passwords and things.

I would suggest that you start thinking about the back end instead of the front end.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Collins.

Ms. Laurel Collins: I think the work that we do in committee is vital and a lot of really important amendments come forward for legislation.

I just want to remind the committee also that for members who are sick, for members who can't travel because they're pregnant, for members who have things come up in their life, they wouldn't be able to participate in committee at all. Without these options it means that many members won't be able to always actually take part in committee. I think that is really what we need to focus on.

The Chair: Mr. Bains.

Mr. Parm Bains: I'm not sure I witnessed any limitations in the resources. I understand there are some challenges with making sure our interpreters are available. Not only was I able to fully meet the obligations of my committee work, preparing for questions and everything that's associated with committee work, but we also have pre-committee meetings, which I was able to fully participate in, and meet with our caucus to ensure we understand what reports are coming out and the level of the studies that are being done.

• (1230)

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I just want to get in one more quick comment.

I think we have to be careful as parliamentarians about setting a precedent of working while we're sick. I don't think it's actually good for physical health or mental health to put ourselves in situations where we might not be there in the headspace. Sometimes our body actually needs to be taken out for a while so that we can heal.

Regarding resources too, Madam Chair, I participated in committees where our committee actually has been cancelled because of lack of resources, rooms or translators. I think that's something that should be top of mind as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Romanado, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Through you, I'd like to thank all of the witnesses for sharing their stories with us today. I think this is very helpful for us in deliberating on whether or not hybrid Parliament should continue.

I'd like to start with my colleague, MP Bains.

It's great to see you on the screen and I'm really looking forward to having you back in Ottawa when it's safe for you to do so. I'm glad that you're taking care of your health.

You mentioned that while you were ill and in line to receive a transplant, travel was not possible for you, but you were still able to be the voice of your constituents in Ottawa through the hybrid provisions. Can you elaborate for the committee on how that ability allowed your family also to be put at ease, that you were not putting yourself at risk to come to Ottawa, but were still able to serve your constituents?

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you for the question.

Through you, Madam Chair, it was not possible to travel, because every other day I would have to go to receive the dialysis treatment. However, because I was doing it overnight, I was able to fully commit myself to the work I needed to do. In addition to that, I was able to meet with stakeholders, identify priorities in my community, meet with the city. You see your local mayor and local councillors at events and things like that, but there are various departments within the city—the engineers, the city manager, the planners. I needed to talk to them about affordability and the housing initiatives we have, the various programs we can deliver. It was really interesting to hear them say that they had never even met their member of Parliament in previous years.

I think the member prior to us said this shouldn't be for us, that it should be for the residents and the citizens of Canada—this should benefit them. I believe my doing that work was actually benefiting them even more, because I was able to ensure that I could schedule things where I was meeting with stakeholders and committing to the parliamentary work, getting online, and really managing both aspects of it, and being able to really deliver on the priorities that are needed in my city.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, MP Bains.

Next I would like to go to MP Collins.

You highlighted four situations in which a hybrid Parliament allowed you to continue doing the work you do and representing the citizens here in Ottawa.

We've heard this. Please pardon my language, but shit happens, and people don't always plan for illness. Who plans for an illness? Who plans for the child care when a day care closes down because there's an outbreak of gastro, or something else happens, and you have to stay home?

This hybrid provision has allowed MPs to continue the work they need to do while taking care of business that, unfortunately, has come their way in certain situations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Duguay, you said that you discussed this issue with several former MPs. Had it been possible at the time to have a hybrid Parliament, would they have been in favour of such an approach? Do you think we should think a little bit more about having a hybrid Parliament?

• (1235)

Mr. Léo Duguay: The overwhelming majority of former MPs are adamant that, had there been a hybrid Parliament in their day, they would have been able to participate in its work much more often. The other witnesses today say that there are many reasons why

we should have a hybrid Parliament, and those reasons would have been the same when I was a member.

[*English*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you so much.

With that, I'd like to turn it over to Madam Cadman.

First of all, my deepest condolences for all that you and your family have gone through. I can't even imagine. I want to thank you for your advocacy for victims in your son's name and for your continued work in that field.

Perhaps you'd like to reflect on what you've heard today in terms of current parliamentarians being able to continue to do the work they're doing. Would you like to make any comments on that? Thank you.

Ms. Dona Cadman: One thing I'd like to say is that our community elects us to carry their concerns to Ottawa. Being in Ottawa all the time, you hear very little news about what happens elsewhere, especially in B.C., or any of the outer areas from the centre of Canada. It's usually just about Ontario and Quebec. I'm sorry to say that, but that's the way it seems.

Out here we hear about everything across Canada, because we're way out here. They do it on the east coast, too. If we're not in our communities listening to the people who elected us, we're not doing our jobs.

I have just one other thing to say, please. MPs spend usually three weeks in Ottawa and one week at home. We should reverse that to one week in Ottawa and three at home.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Distance was mentioned earlier. I would like to inform my colleagues that, even in Quebec, there are elected officials who have to drive 10 hours to get to Ottawa. It is possible to take a plane, you may say, but there are accessibility problems. You have to be very careful.

I went to Vancouver just two months ago, and I can tell you that the trip took me less time than going to the north shore or the Gaspé. I took the plane. There was a two-hour wait before boarding. In short, in less than 10 hours, I was there. That's what I had to say about the distances.

I would also like to share my appreciation. We must recognize the things that worked well. One of the things that comes to mind is the application for voting. You remember, Madam Chair and colleagues, that it used to take forever during recorded divisions. Now, with this application, votes are expedited.

With that said, I would like to express my support for our witnesses. I have a lot of sympathy for what they are going through.

First, Mr. Bains, do you miss working on the Hill? I understand that you have been away for a while.

[*English*]

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you for the question.

I apologize. My French is not that good, so I will be speaking in English.

Yes, of course, I miss seeing my colleagues and being able to discuss important work face to face with them. I have a tremendous amount of respect for all my colleagues. They've been extremely supportive. Many of them have called me throughout the week over the time I've been absent from Parliament. I have built great relationships over the phone through various caucus meetings.

Again, the hybrid options allow me to do that and remain in touch with everybody. Although I miss being physically there and doing the work there, I've had all the opportunity to ensure that I'm developing strong relationships with my colleagues. I am a rookie MP. It is my first year and I've been able to develop strong relationships.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have a lot of concerns. I am a mother, and work-life balance is important to me. I have to say that every party can have a procedure. We all want to have more women and more young people in our ranks. We all agree on that. We also don't want to put the brakes on new technology.

With that said, Mr. Bains, in the context of having to worry about your health, has the hybrid Parliament made you work more? I understand that this is helpful for keeping in touch, but you also had to take care of your health. I'm concerned about whether the hybrid model made you work more because there was no reason not to.

[*English*]

Mr. Parm Bains: It's a tough question. It's hard to measure. I'm not afraid of doing a lot of work, so I'm not sure if I was doing more or less.

I think being accessible could allow you to actually do more and be more productive. You're not being challenged with the travel time, with getting from here to there, or with being late for things. You have access; you're there and you are ultimately more accessible.

I would agree with you. I think you end up doing more work when it comes to a hybrid Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you very much.

Mr. Duguay, I'm going to ask you my last question. Since the 1980s, you have seen a lot of things and witnessed the evolution of technology.

You said you favour in-person participation in committees. I digress here to point out that the witnesses missed some of the informal discussions that we had outside our meetings.

If I understood you correctly, would you agree with the continuation of witnesses appearing in committee by video conference, but not necessarily with the hybrid format in the House of Commons generally?

Mr. Léo Duguay: I believe in having the same conditions in committees as in the House of Commons. It seems to me to be entirely appropriate and responsible to have hybrid meetings, as this allows for participation in the proceedings both in person and in virtual mode.

I reiterate that most of my colleagues and I are adamantly in favour of not requiring members of Parliament to come to Ottawa all the time to participate in the work of the House of Commons.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duguay and Ms. Gaudreau.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Madam Chair, and, as always, through you, my first question is for Ms. Collins.

I really appreciate the information that you shared today about your specific challenges. I want to say how much I appreciate all the speakers sharing, in some cases some incredibly personal stories. I apologize that we're in a situation where we have to force members to show their most vulnerable realities so that we can talk about why it is so important to talk about a hybrid Parliament.

One of the things Ms. Collins mentioned was making Parliament more accessible. We know that we still do not have the representation of women within Parliament that we want to see. We've never reached that threshold, and we're all working towards it. I believe every party is committed in different ways and levels.

I'm wondering if you can talk about how this really allows you to be able to meet your commitments as a parent and to meet the commitments to your body to carry a child. What does this potentially mean in the future for women who are looking at joining us here in Ottawa?

• (1245)

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you for the question.

I think fundamentally we need to encourage more women to run. My experience, especially when talking to young women and women from my area here in B.C., is that it's incredibly hard to convince them. You have to be honest with them that your commute is a minimum of 10 hours door to door, oftentimes much longer, and on top of that is the time that you have to spend away from a young infant for the demands of this job. It is a challenge.

If we can make Parliament more family friendly, we know it will increase women's participation. The Library of Parliament did a study. The report said that there are seven key factors that contribute to barriers that women face, and one of those key factors was the absence of family-friendly and gender-sensitive workplaces. It's vital that we address this for our future parliamentarians for representation and for equity.

A lot of the time I think we also miss the conversation around people with disabilities. This technology opens up the possibility for many people with disabilities to run and to be a member of Parliament, even though maybe their health or their disability might have disallowed that in the past.

I think it's critical that we look at this and really look at how we make Parliament more equitable and more accessible.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you for that.

One of the other questions that I have for you, Ms. Collins—it's very odd to keep calling you that, but we'll go with it—is how hybrid Parliament is also helpful when you're in Ottawa. I think we forget that we used to not have a voting app, which meant that people who had small children were often not able to be there to read stories to their children and tuck them in at night. We also know that things happen, as was so eloquently said earlier. I think sometimes terrible things happen, but if we're able to step out of a room and vote, it really makes sure that we're able to express what we're hearing from our constituents.

I'm wondering if you could talk about that as well.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Honestly, it was transformational for me, especially as a mom of a young infant. Being able to vote electronically made such a huge difference in terms of the time that I could spend with my daughter, especially in those early months.

Some of the questions from the previous MPs were around whether this meant more work, and I would say, yes, it did. I was working more on my parliamentary duties. I was working more when it came to being in the constituency and hearing from constituents. I was also doing a better job as a mom, as a parent and as a partner. I was able to do all of these things much better.

I love my job. It's such rewarding work. It's such a privilege to represent the riding of Victoria. If we were to go back to a world without a virtual Parliament.... I'm committed to running again in the next election. I don't know if I would choose to run again after that. I've spoken with other members across party lines who have young families and who have said the same thing. We have an opportunity to make Parliament more accessible and to allow members to be better at their jobs and also better at fulfilling the other duties in their lives.

I also want to mention the piece around working while sick. I agree with the member who mentioned that we don't want to normalize the idea of working while sick, but that's actually happening in person and that's scary, because that oftentimes will spread the disease. But there are all kinds of illnesses and diseases, and we want to give members the choice. We want to give women the choice. We want to give people with disabilities the choice. We want to give members the choice to do this work in the best way possible.

• (1250)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much.

I'll go to you, Mr. Bains, and ask specifically about how having the voting app impacted your ability to address your serious health issues.

Mr. Parm Bains: Very simply, at the outset, when my symptoms worsened and I had to train myself with the dialysis treatment, there were times when I had a lot of doctors' appointments.

The app allowed me, while being there and being excused from certain duties at the time, to ultimately not miss any votes on the important motions and bills that are introduced. I was able to vote on every single one. Because of that app, I didn't miss one. Very simply, accessibility was extremely important.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bains.

We will squeeze in two quick five-minute rounds. Ms. Goodridge will be followed by Mr. Turnbull.

Go ahead, Ms. Goodridge.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses.

I'm a member of Parliament for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake. Before this, I was the MLA for Fort McMurray. I actually resigned my seat at 38 weeks pregnant to run in the 2021 election. I had my son in the middle of the election and came to Ottawa for the first time with a five-week-old. My husband, luckily, took parental leave and supported our family as we did the back-and-forth with an infant for the first year.

That was spectacular. I think that some of the virtual options, specifically the vote app, gave me a space where I knew that there was always an option. I would argue that this is an important function that should continue.

I think that opens it up for more than moms, because there are amazing dads. We have to stop talking in this gendered space that only the mom is the primary parent. In my household, that's not the case. My husband is the primary parent. My husband is the one who takes care of my son when he's sick. My husband was the one who was up five times last night—not me. My husband's back home in Fort McMurray with my son.

I really am disappointed with some of the conversation, as if this is only going to open things up for moms. No, this is going to open things up for people.

I'll get off my little soapbox on that one, but I do think that it's important that we keep that in mind. If we're wanting to have more women and more young people in politics, we have to stop gendering this conversation and only saying that it's good for moms. This is good for people.

In the year since I have been elected here, I have seen a lot of abuse of the virtual system. I've witnessed someone use the virtual Parliament from a washroom. I don't understand why someone thought that was an appropriate way to be participating virtually—in a washroom here in the West Block—but that happened.

We have seen so many abuses. There is a real conversation to be had. In order to strengthen this to allow for people who have good, legitimate reasons to support their parliamentary duties, parameters need to be put in place so as to not cheapen it and then at some point Canadians reject this idea completely.

My question is for Ms. Collins.

What are your thoughts on having parameters around how people can participate virtually? What kind of parameters would you like to see?

Ms. Laurel Collins: I think that's a great question.

I mentioned in my opening statement that I would love to see hybrid virtual Parliament strengthened. There needs to be more accountability for ministers and for the government. When you take on the role of a minister, there should be some accountability in terms of being able to answer what that looks like. I think this committee should be looking at that and should get the best expert advice.

We do need to ensure that we have all of the resources when it comes to technical pieces and interpretation, so that virtual Parliament is strengthened. I think there were hiccups in the beginning. The more we do this, the better it can be.

I also want to mention that, like you, I was lucky enough to have a partner who took 14 months of paternity leave. He travelled with me to Ottawa. He's now back at work. He has a very busy job. He has to travel for work—

• (1255)

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: Thank you.

I don't have very much time left, so—

Ms. Laurel Collins: I wanted to mention single parents and the need to open that up for them as well.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: I appreciate that. Perhaps at some later point someone can bring that up.

The piece that I want to jump in on regarding this is the fact that in the province of Alberta, as a legislature, we sat through most of the pandemic. We had different social distancing rules. We sat in person.

At a certain point, when there became concerns around overall continuity of the legislature, we brought in provisions that allowed for voting. We could vote virtually, but we weren't allowed to interject into speeches virtually. In the Government of Alberta, we've always been allowed to participate by teleconference or video conference in committees, but in the chamber itself, interjections were not allowed virtually.

I would recommend that as this committee goes forward, they look at some of the best practices from different provinces and other jurisdictions. There are ways of strengthening this, as Ms.

Collins and some of the others alluded to, that could build upon some of the best practices found in provinces like Alberta.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Goodridge.

Mr. Turnbull, you have five minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks, Madam Chair.

Ms. Cadman, my questions will be for you.

I just want to say, first of all, thanks for being here today. I also want to express my heartfelt condolences for both of the losses that you've experienced. I understand that your husband, Chuck, passed away on July 9, 2005—that's 17 years ago—of a malignant melanoma. He faithfully served as the member of Parliament for Surrey North until his final days.

I wonder if you could share with us what that experience was like for you—specifically, watching his two-year battle with cancer and his health decline and the toll that travel to and from Ottawa each week must have taken on him.

Ms. Dona Cadman: It was very hard. At first, in 2004 when he was diagnosed and had surgery, that was not too bad. He couldn't travel because his body was just not healing as well as it should have. Mentally, he bemoaned the fact that he couldn't be doing his work. He had his secretaries and LAs coming out and giving him stuff. He was working at home. If he could have seen his colleagues—he had so many across parties—it would have given him a little more oomph, maybe a little more hope, a little more smiling and reminiscing with colleagues. It was very sad.

Back and forth was way too hard. His last flight out was very hard for us. He came home, and he was in bed for about five days. He could not move. He was just worn out.

That's a hard thing when he loved his job. I know that when you're an MP, you're there for a reason. The reason is the people who elected you. We have to be there for them.

Thank you.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Do you believe that the travel to and from Ottawa, in fact, exacerbated his health decline in any way?

Ms. Dona Cadman: Oh, yes, I do. I really do.

The back and forth... I mean, when you come here, you have a trip of four and a half to five hours. You get off the plane. Sometimes you have to go to another meeting. It's hard, especially when you've been up since three o'clock or four o'clock eastern time and coming out this way.

Yes, travel is hard, not just for us, but for everybody.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Ms. Cadman.

I want to ask you one final question.

How do you think things might have been different for you, your late husband and your family if Chuck had had the opportunity to participate remotely in Parliament like we have today?

Ms. Dona Cadman: It would have made it a lot easier for us. Watching him decline when he wanted to participate and could participate was harder than anything—watching him slowly decline. That part of the politics that he loved was taken away from him. It was very hard. I think that ended his life a lot sooner than maybe it should have or could have.

• (1300)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Would you say, in a way, that having a hybrid Parliament accessible for people like your husband in those circumstances would have added a bit of humanity to someone who is committed, obviously, to doing his job until the end? Just knowing what you experienced, would that have added a little bit of humanity?

Ms. Dona Cadman: Yes, I think it would have. It would have made him feel like he was still part of the group. You know, politics is very close. You're with your friends, your other.... He was just cut off, and that was hard. Yes, I think it would have helped.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Last, do you think you would have had more quality time with him if he hadn't have had to travel to and from Ottawa?

Ms. Dona Cadman: Oh, definitely. Definitely.

The last year of his life was very hard, coming back Friday night and then going back either Sunday night or Monday. He would spend most of the day in bed on Sunday just so he could get up and go back to Ottawa.

Yes, travel is hard for everybody.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you very much, Ms. Cadman.

The Chair: Excellent.

To Parm Bains, Laurel Collins, Dona Cadman and Léo Duguay, on behalf of PROC committee members, thank you so much for your time. It has flown by.

I know, Ms. Collins, that you wanted to add something. If anybody wants to provide anything that they would like the committee to consider, please send it in writing to the clerk. We will make sure that it is circulated.

With that, I hope everyone keeps well and safe.

We will see you soon.

Mr. Brad Vis: Can you outline for our witnesses when submissions would be due for consideration by the committee?

The Chair: When we're among members, we'll figure out a date. I'll talk to the subcommittee and find out what we would like to do.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: No problem.

Thank you. Have a good day.

The meeting is adjourned.

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