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Chair

Mr. Leon Benoit

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

We're here today to deal with the 17 votes, I believe it is.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the main estimates for 2004-05, we deal with vote 10 under the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency; votes 100 and 105 under Canadian Heritage—actually, the votes under Canadian Heritage have been withdrawn because we dealt with them as a committee of the whole in the House, so we don't deal with them again here—vote 1 under the Governor General; vote 1 under Parliament; votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, 45, and 50 under Privy Council; votes 1, 5, and 10 under Public Works and Government Services; and votes 1, 5, 10, and 20 under Treasury Board. We have a fair number of votes to deal with today.

In terms of procedure, this committee can choose to approve the votes as are. The committee can choose to reduce the amounts of the vote, but in reducing the amount, it's important to know that you can't reduce the amount by more than the remaining money, the unspent money. We had a problem with that, I understand, at a committee yesterday. This amount is in the table that you have before you. On the second column from the right, it has "Total for Committee Examination". So have that in mind if you're looking at reducing the amount of the vote. You can choose also to defeat the—what's the terminology for defeating the vote entirely?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Miriam Burke): Rejecting the vote.

The Chair: Rejecting the vote entirely.

Those are the choices of the committee. Once I call the vote, it's open to any member of the committee to make their proposals and to discuss the issue.

Let's get started.

Under the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, shall vote 10, less the amount voted at interim supply, carry?

CANADA CUSTOMS AND REVENUE AGENCY

Canada Post Corporation

Vote 10—Payments to the Canada Post Corporation for special purposes.....
\$197,210,000

•(1110)

The Chair: Mr. White.

Mr. Randy White (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Chairman, perhaps we've gone through all of these, but since the total for committee

examination is left unspent at this time—is that the terminology I can use?

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Three-twelfths.

Mr. Randy White: Three-twelfths. I would propose that we vote against this and not allow that amount to go through.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Yes, Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Chairman, I guess we have to be sensitive to the fact that at least in most of these departments, two-thirds of the expenditures for the remaining period relates to people's jobs, and that would mean that all of a sudden these responsibility areas would close down. I think it's a little premature to suggest that we close down business for a quarter of the year.

I would be opposed to that motion.

The Chair: Yes, Madame Thibault.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): I'd like our colleague to give us an explanation, if he wants to make a recommendation regarding some sort of percentage. I have no doubt that all my colleagues around the table, like myself, consider this exercise very important and that, as my colleague Mr. Szabo just said, the future of government operations for the rest of his year is at stake.

I'll only speak for myself; I don't like to speak for others. However, I know that we take this exercise very seriously. We realize the impact of actions, motions that we can put forward.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, Mr. White.

Mr. Randy White: Perhaps my colleagues are right.

But let's do some tokenism then on this, seeing that we don't want to affect jobs. Why don't we just reduce the amount of \$449,302,500 by \$49,000 and just see if a department can come up with that huge amount out of the \$197 million.

The Chair: We'll have to get the agreement of the committee to back off on the original motion, or to make a decision on the original motion that Mr. White had before the committee, before we can deal with the second motion.

Mr. Paul Szabo: It would be simple if Mr. White would just withdraw.

Mr. Randy White: I withdraw.

The Chair: Mr. White has offered to withdraw. Does the committee accept that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. Now, Randy, can you go ahead with the—

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Chair, what I'm trying to say is that I've been here for 10 years and watched these estimates go through the House and watched the voting of billions of dollars. Surely to goodness in a government that suggested we could reduce budgets by 5% eventually, with a department as large as Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, including Canada Post, we can make a small reduction.

I was called to a meeting not too long ago, to a presentation by Canada Post, which had a draw, a little competition. It was not for anything other than people walking through the doors. It had a draw. The winner of the draw happened to be in my riding. Canada Post gave her \$25,000. It was \$25,000 for doing nothing other than walking into a post office one day and putting her name in a box. I would suggest, Mr. Chairman, that Canada Post has \$25,000 kicking around in its budget it doesn't need.

It is tokenism when you talk about this kind of money, but I'm suggesting that we use an amount, or at least go back to Canada Post and ask, could you not even try a little here?

I'll put a motion forward. Let's reduce Canada Post's budget by \$25,000, the amount that it gave in cash to an individual who walked through the door and put her name in a suggestion box, or a box, and was lucky enough to be drawn.

The Chair: The committee has a motion before it.

Mr. Martin—

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): If the motion fails, what's the next step?

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): I want to comment. When I raised my hand, my comment was going to be that I would be happier, if we were going to undertake this type of symbolic gesture, that it be at least tied to some specific thing that Canada Post had done that is irritating to us. I can think of half a dozen irritating things Canada Post has done recently, but Mr. White certainly points to one that is egregious—cavalier spending. I was going to suggest we tie it to the \$1,000 per day of unreceipted expenses that André Ouellet was spending while he was the CEO.

I'm actually comfortable in sending this kind of message to government agencies on the condition that we don't interfere with their ability to operate or that we don't cause some mass layoff as a result of our actions. I think there is justification for sending a symbolic gesture from this committee with our new-found authorities as the oversight committee for government operations and estimates. This is a worthwhile gesture. I can see the NDP voting for this.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Paul Szabo: I will yield to Madam Marleau.

The Chair: Madam Marleau.

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): I'm sorry if I'm a little late.

What amount exactly are we talking about, and on which line and which department?

The Chair: It is vote 10, Canada Customs and Revenue, Canada Post Corporation, and \$25,000 reduction is the motion we have before us.

Hon. Diane Marleau: That is for \$25,000. But what does it affect? My understanding was that the amount for Canada Post was the amount for our franking privileges. If you want to deduct \$25,000 from the amount that we have the right to mail out, that's fine, but we're just affecting ourselves, and that's an estimate. My understanding is that's what this is.

Mr. Randy White: It's \$197 million.

Hon. Diane Marleau: I don't know. That's why I'm asking. What is it exactly that you're looking at. As far as I know, we don't subsidize Canada Post. The amount for Canada Post I thought was an amount for our franking privileges. We need to know exactly what it is that we're going to cut. Sure, we can cut \$25,000 off a \$90-million budget and it doesn't matter much, but if it's about franking privileges, then it means a lot more.

The Chair: Paul, do you still want to go?

Mr. Paul Szabo: The question has been raised, and I think it should be clarified for all members. Maybe the research staff can help us out.

The Chair: While the researchers are looking for that answer, I'll go to Madame Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Chairman, we're currently studying Vote 10, Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (Canada Post Corporation). So I don't believe we're at Canada Post Corporation.

Second, for this heading and all the others that follow, I think it would be appropriate for the person presenting the motion to tell us, with regard to the vote in question, what kind of reduction he or she is seeking—symbolic, significant, very significant—so that we know exactly in relation to what our support is being sought and so that, when we vote, we are all aware of the scope of our decision, and so that we can do all this by 1:00 p.m. If we devote 20 minutes to each of the votes and some require longer discussions, I don't think we'll be able to complete the task today.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Thibault.

This particular vote is to do with franking privileges for members of Parliament, just so the base is there. Is there any other discussion on this motion?

Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Paul Szabo: I'm hoping Mr. White will withdraw this one, but I would like to support Madame Thibault's plea to the committee. I believe the committee should never base its decision on tokenism or some demonstration. We've done a lot of work on this, and I think it's clearly important for us to make our decisions based on evidence, based on statements by witnesses or analysis or information provided by members. One that comes to mind is the conference secretariat. I don't think anybody was really comfortable with that.

Let's not trivialize this at all. We have to do the work, and I think it should relate to specific testimony or programs identified. Where is it going to have impact? So should there be any recommended changes, we will be able to communicate to those affected what is being affected and why it's being affected, so that remedial action may be possible in the future. This is a serious process, and I hope we can keep it that way.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Szabo. I'm sure members make decisions like this for many different reasons.

Mr. Boshcoff, then Mr. White.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: With regard to the motion that's on the floor, even though it doesn't apply, I think, if we can come up with specific identities for line items like this, this is probably the place where we can make that statement.

On the franking, I have something I'd like to read into the record. As a first-timer, early in the weeks of my career the post office advised me that because Parliament wasn't in session, I'd have to pay for postage. It took several days into the next week before I discovered that indeed franking applied from the day you were elected. It's interesting how arbitrary decisions are made by the post office. And as we're discussing franking, this is the time to read into the record that I was able to get that overturned. But this could happen to other first-timers around the country from time to time. What it emphasizes is that in the organization it's important that every one of the branches knows what the policies are and what the government's position is on them.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boshcoff.

Mr. White.

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Chairman, this isn't about trivialization; this is about trying to get a handle on government expenditures. When I suggested the \$25,000 with regard to Canada Post, one member at the table, Madame Marleau, knew this was not the full Canada Post budget. Others of us did not, so we're sitting here being asked to vote on \$197 million, and quite frankly, that's the only number we have before us. Many budgets in this country in corporations and organizations are dealt with by globalization; if you want to see a reduction in your budget, you go back and figure it out. I'm not going to sit here and for \$25,000 out of \$197 million say I want it taken out of this little pot, because other than that one number, I have nothing else to value it by.

This isn't trivialization; this is an expectation, at least where I come from, that government get its expenditures in check. If that's what this committee is truly trying to do, and we're going to have an

argument over \$25,000 out of \$197 million, hell, this country's in trouble budget-wise.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Question.

The Chair: We'll put this to the vote then. On vote 10, those in favour of Mr. White's motion to reduce the vote by \$25,000.

(Amendment negated)

(Vote 10 agreed to on division)

• (1125)

The Chair: We're at vote 1 under the Office of the Governor General.

Madame Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Chairman, I don't know whether this is a procedure or something else—you can tell me—but would the committee members agree to stand the next vote, Vote 1 under “Governor General” and the votes under “Privy Council” till the end and to deal with the others first?

[*English*]

The Chair: So do you want to bring forth a motion to stand this till the end of the meeting?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I move that the votes...

An hon. member: Wait a minute.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there agreement?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Chairman, I withdraw my suggestion and we'll continue as set out in the agenda.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Then we're dealing with the—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: We're dealing with the heading “Governor General”.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Shall vote 1, less the amount voted interim supply, carry?

GOVERNOR GENERAL

Department

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$19,181,000

The Chair: Madame Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I move that Vote 1, under “Governor General”, less the amount allocated as an interim vote, be reduced by \$417,100 to \$16,266,900.

I'll explain the reason. During the testimony of the representatives of the Office of the Governor General, we were presented, once again, with the fact that the budgets had not at all been reduced, that they had increased considerably over the past 10 years. Furthermore, we still don't have a comprehensive picture of the total expenses related to the operations of the Office of the Governor General.

Furthermore, since Canadians and Quebecers live in a number of sectors, I think it would be entirely appropriate for the Governor General and her office to find a way to reduce expenses by 10%, that is by \$417,000, under Vote 1, which does not concern salaries and pensions and so on in any way.

As Ms. Uteck mentioned that the Office of the Governor General was taking an active part in the government-wide review to reallocate 5% of funds for 2005-2006, I believe it should immediately start taking an active part in an effort to reallocate funds to areas considered essential by members of the House of Commons.

That, Mr. Chairman, is why I'm presenting this motion.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Thibault.

If I could just get clarification, you called for a reduction of \$417,100?

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Yes.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. The translation was not that clear.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: The total we're voting on is \$4,171,000. I therefore suggest a 10% reduction, which equals \$417,100, thus lowering the total to \$16,266,900.

• (1130)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Thibault.

Is there any discussion on that?

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to speak in favour of the motion partly because of the history of this issue that we've seen just in recent months. People in Canada right across the country shared their outrage that for the past 10 years they've been asked to tighten their belts, and they've been asked to take a hit for the team, so we could tackle the deficit and the debt; yet at the same time, without any real authorization, other than some unilateral choice on her part, the Governor General's budget has exploded, essentially. That's the term I would use. It's grown year to year to year, expanded, expanded, and expanded. The only justification we've been getting from her is that, well, she's a more active Governor General who's doing more than previous Governors General had.

My reaction to that, and our reaction as a committee should be, well, who asked you to do more? Who gave you the authorization to do more activities, travel more, undertake more awards programs?

We believe the Governor General's spending has been out of control. It has been arbitrarily increased. It's been a cavalier style of spending, irritating to most Canadians. I think it's very fitting at this first opportunity, when we have a chance to make a statement on behalf of the Canadian people, that this committee should in fact do so in no uncertain terms—send the message that we want some fiscal responsibility here. We want to see the same kind of belt tightening that all of us have had to exercise in the past 10 years, and specifically during the five years of her tenure.

I would point out just as a final argument, when Roméo LeBlanc was the Governor General, his base budget was \$11 million in year one of his five-year term; and it was still \$11 million at year five of his five-year term. He managed to do a pretty good job on behalf of the Canadian people with that stable A-base core budget of \$11 million. It only started to climb when the current Governor General took over Rideau Hall, and it went from \$11 million to \$13 million to \$14 million to \$15 million, \$16 million, to \$19 million at a certain point. And that's the base budget. But the actual activity, when you fold in the foreign affairs department and the military and other costs, is more like \$40 million a year.

I think we received a pretty clear direction from Canadian people on what they want us to do in the reaction to this news in the previous Parliament. This is our opportunity in this Parliament to listen to Canadians and act within our power to do so.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

We have four other members who've asked to speak on this.

Mr. White.

Mr. Randy White: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I, too, concur with the Bloc motion. There are other things related to this situation as well, when we have the representatives of the Governor General here at committee. We also heard that there were sizable numbers of dollars in other departments related to travel, which we really couldn't get a handle on, but we knew it was sizable. I would like to see those amounts in future get attached to this budget, if that's what they are using and that's what she is using.

I concur with the motion. I think it's good. It's about time we set the standards.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. White.

Mr. Preston.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): I will agree also with Madam Thibault's motion and with what Mr. Martin has had to say. When we had the people here from the Governor General's office, we reviewed the budget. We talked about where it was 10 years ago and how it has grown by just over \$10 million. When I questioned that, the only answer I received in return was, we have more visitors now, we've set up a visitor's reception thing and this is... I just don't see where that answers the question of the \$10 million in increase, so I'll be supporting this motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Preston.

Monsieur Gagnon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): I would add to what's just been said, and what my colleague has said, that I too was a bit scandalized by the answers we received to the questions we put to the Governor General. No one could say with any accuracy how much that office cost. It seems they draw on various departments, and when we asked how much that office actually cost, no one could say. If we put a question to the House, they tell us they're going to conduct a study and come back with an answer.

It seems to me, even though some think this office is extremely important, that, if we want to set an example, we have to know how much the office costs. I entirely agree with my colleague. I find she's even being very generous by cutting only 10% from the budget that we have to approve today. But I agree with her.

• (1135)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Moore.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Just briefly, I wanted to add my voice in support of this motion. I think most Canadians were pretty scandalized and shocked to see the kind of profligate spending that the Governor General, Madame Clarkson, has been imposing on Canadians without any sort of check at all.

Frankly, if we pass this motion, I think we will have sent a clear message to the Governor General that this kind of irresponsible spending has to stop, that it cannot happen in the future. I think the vast majority of Canadians, when they wake up tomorrow, when this is noted and the public recognizes that we've saved them \$400,000 and that this Parliament has sent a clear message to the Governor General that her spending ways have to stop, I think they will appreciate the work of this committee. Canadians will appreciate that those members in this committee who voted in favour of this motion stood up for sane fiscal responsibility on behalf of the Governor General.

So I support this motion and I think all members should.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Moore.

Madam Marleau.

Hon. Diane Marleau: I'm not particularly opposed to this motion, but I would say one thing. We've already passed nine-twelfths of

their budget for this fiscal year. I'm wondering whether we should give the Governor General's office a chance to tell us how it will absorb these cuts if it only has a certain amount left.

This is the budget for the whole year, but nine-twelfths of this has already been approved. Maybe we should give her a chance to tell us how this will impact on the overall job she does. I'm just wondering, is it really fair of us to do this without ever having even mentioned that we were considering it?

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Marleau.

Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Chairman, we had this discussion in the committee during the last Parliament and made a report. Certainly there was a lot of interest in what else was going on, but I think Mr. Moore is incorrect in his assertions with regard to the spending on travel.

The fact is that many of the activities the Governor General participates in as the representative of Canada are the initiatives of other departments. She is invited to go, and of course as a consequence there are costs of her going, but these are picked up by the initiatives of the department sponsoring the activity. And in regard to the last go round, it was the Department of Foreign Affairs. Whether it's Foreign Affairs, the National Capital Commission, or others, these are their programs, which are being reviewed by the departments responsible for them.

I'm concerned about this. In these estimates, other than the Governor General's salary and the base administration, the vast majority of this budget reflects spending on programs. It's \$16 million of the total, \$16.7 million for the administration of the programs, including the Order of Canada; the Order of Military Merit; the Canadian Bravery Decorations; the Meritorious Service Decorations; the Exemplary Service Medals; Special Service Medals; and Commemorative and other medals. The budget also provides for funding the administration of the Governor General's Academic Medals, the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award, and the Canadian Heraldic Authority.

Notwithstanding the person who is in the office, we can't forget that the activity level and the nature of the activities are all related to head-of-state activities. And none of those discretionary things—although I know people are concerned that there was a circumpolar whatever—are included in the Governor General's budget because they weren't initiatives of hers, but as the head of state she was seconded to represent the country on them.

Although I understand what the message is in terms of the broader activities, I'm absolutely sure the cuts here are going to impact the ability of the Governor General's office to be able to discharge its responsibilities on most of the honours requests, particularly in the last quarter of the year. I don't think we have any information whatsoever as to what specific activities are covered there. This is one of those things where maybe the messaging has some unintended consequences. I don't know what they are. I can't say; but I would think, if you consider it realistically, a 10% cut to anybody's operating budget for an entire quarter is monstrous. It's monstrous and will have some impacts.

I'm opposed to the cut. We did a \$2,000 cut in the last Parliament as a signal. I really believe if we were going to make a major cut to any department or agency or vote area, it would be very important for us to ensure that we knew what the impact of it would be. And I'm not sure that we do here, so I'm going to vote against the cut.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Szabo.

Of course, I will entertain any amount of debate you want on this issue, but I just want to remind you that we're on the second item on an agenda of 17. But let's go ahead.

Mr. Moore.

Mr. James Moore: I'd like to rebut some of the points that were just made. First, the amount of this cut is not ad hoc. The number we've come up with does take into consideration the concerns Mr. Szabo has raised.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Ten percent.

Mr. James Moore: Second, Mr. Szabo's quite correct that the Governor General was asked by the departments to go on these trips. This is where the Governor General's fiscal discipline should have come in. The Governor General is the Queen's representative in Canada. The cost of her travelling around the world unnecessarily put an undue burden on her budget, therefore an undue burden on taxpayers—

Mr. Paul Szabo: That's wrong. You weren't here for the testimony.

Mr. James Moore: — and she needs to be held accountable for that.

The Chair: Mr. Szabo, please.

Mr. James Moore: Also, had the Liberal government sent a message to the Governor General, perhaps we wouldn't be in this position, where the opposition has to work together to pass this motion. Last year, \$2,000 was cut, but clearly the message wasn't sent sternly enough by that cut, nor did the Prime Minister and this Liberal government take its due diligence seriously and send a message to the Governor General to stop wasting taxpayers' money the way she has during her tenure.

Finally, Mr. Szabo makes the point that having a cut in the final quarter of the operating budget of the Governor General is inappropriate. I would disagree. Mr. Szabo is quite correct that three-quarters of the budget has been spent. A new budget will be around the corner in three months for the Governor General. In these next three months it would be nice, after this committee passes this motion, if the Governor General took the message that not only in the last quarter of this year she has to be fiscally responsible, but next year, should she still be the Governor General, she has to heed that message and take it on a go-forward basis.

So this is not ad hoc. The government should have sent this message. This committee is showing leadership in sending that message. This is entirely appropriate, and it is precisely right to do it in the final quarter of a budget, so in the years ahead Adrienne Clarkson understands that she cannot treat taxpayers with the kind of disrespect she clearly has.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Moore.

Mr. White.

Mr. Randy White: We're going to have some difficulty with this, I realize, but we're dealing with several billions of dollars here. I just don't think it's responsible for this committee or anybody else to suggest it's late in the day and there's not much money left so we can't cut it; we might curb some operations. In this particular case it was already mentioned that \$2,000 was cut in the last Parliament, but \$2,000 out of a budget this size is absolutely petty cash. If it was a shot across the bow of the Governor General's office, it obviously wasn't heeded.

We have to ask ourselves these questions in a committee like this. If we don't start here now, where do we start? How do we proceed? If we don't start now, when are we going to start? If we don't start with the Governor General, then who do we start with—what department?

This was a department, an office, that displayed irresponsibility on spending issues. As tough as this may seem, if any other corporation in this country were faced with a similar situation, you would find there would be reductions. We see it across this country every day now, with large corporations having to draw in their belts because of mismanagement, in many cases. They're doing it.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Name them.

Where is this \$400,000 coming from?

• (1145)

The Chair: Let's have order.

Mr. Randy White: I'm not getting into a personal debate with the members opposite.

The Chair: Mr. White has the floor right now.

Mr. Paul Szabo: It would be nice to know.

Mr. Randy White: The fact of the matter is that it is time to make a decision. If not now, then when?

The Chair: Mr. Godbout.

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): I will speak against the motion, although I'd like to qualify it. When we had the presentation of the Governor General's office, we all expressed some frustration that we didn't have a clear budget in front of us. I don't think it's this particular budget that we have a problem with, or that I have a problem with, but it comes from various departments. Even on one of the trips we alluded to, we still don't have the figures on that.

I think this committee could possibly issue some recommendations on how these budgets should be presented to this committee. We're all after transparency, and we want to know exactly how much this office is costing the Canadian taxpayer in the end. I've had constituents call me about these various trips, and I'd like the answers.

But I don't think that particular budget is the problem. I'd have a problem if we cut the Governor General and we couldn't proceed with these decorations, and so on, because we don't have any idea where that money's going to come from. So I'd have some sympathy with changing the reporting, because I think that's what the problem is. If in that reporting we see things we don't agree with, we can modify it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godbout.

Mr. Boshcoff.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Thank you.

When departments submit these to us, is there an expectation that nothing will happen to them and they will come away unscathed? Should they be in shock if something happens to their project?

The Chair: It's our job to decide whether we want to introduce the vote. That's what we're here to do—make that decision.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: If it's simply going to be rubber-stamped, there's probably no need for this meeting. I think this is a healthy discussion. I don't know if this is a general philosophical discussion we're having now on one item or if it will apply to every department. But certainly in terms of the nature of these kinds of discussions, I think it's valid.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, followed by Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Pat Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I only want to add that I think Mr. Szabo's protestations ring hollow, in view of the fact that he's representing a government that had no qualms or problems about cutting, hacking, and slashing every social program we value in this country, right up to today, where they won't give retroactivity to the guaranteed income supplement for seniors, as the Bloc is always raising.

So here we are with his government loathing the idea of causing some inconvenience to the titular head of state. They didn't mind inconveniencing EI program recipients, unemployed Canadians, by gouging them, not giving them benefits, and using the money for something else. It really is irritating to me to hear the protestations coming from that side of the House.

They cut all the fat off the social programs, and then kept cutting until they were cutting right into the bone of those social programs, causing untold misery out there in the countryside. Yet to inconvenience Her Excellency at Rideau Hall by asking her to please try not to blow so much of our money is somehow impossible—can't be done, can't find a way to save a lousy \$400,000. I think it's nonsense.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Scarpaleggia, followed by Madam Thibault to close, as she was the mover of the motion.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Chair, this is more a point of information, which perhaps the researchers could help us out on. I'm new to the estimates and the whole process of reviewing them.

If we look at the 2004-05 estimates versus the 2003-04 estimates, we see a reduction of \$169,000 regarding program expenditure.

• (1150)

The Chair: Mr. Scarpaleggia, just refer to the page number you're on.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I'm sorry. It's page 11-2.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I'm curious. That's a good chunk of money, I guess. Does anyone know what was sacrificed as part of that reduction?

Mr. Jack Stilborn (Committee Researcher): We really don't have any information on what they did.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: The point is that there was a major reduction in programs from last year's budget.

The Chair: Your point has been made. Thank you, Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Madam Thibault, perhaps you can close the discussion on this.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: With your permission, I'm going to take a few minutes to add something to what Mr. Scarpaleggia has just said. In 2002-2003, the increase in the Governor General's expenses achieved an unprecedented 102% relative to 1993-1994. During that same 10-year period, government spending rose 23.5%, more in some departments and agencies, but less in others. When you reach 90% or 102%, I believe—at least this is what I intend to do in my way—that this figure should respond to Mr. Szabo's concerns in expressing the idea that that will have an impact. I obviously agree with you, Mr. Szabo, that this will have an impact. However, I want to say that it will have an impact solely on Vote 1, since that's the one concerned by my motion.

When you ask the question as to whether there will be an impact on Canadian honours, I think that, when you look, for example, at the area for which I am a critic, where the Minister of Public Works is patting himself on the back for finding innovative ways to save Canadian taxpayers millions of dollars, you can think that the Office of the Governor General and the Governor General herself have all the time, creativity and imagination to do things differently and to manage to save 10%, which corresponds to an amount of \$417,000. I'm not at all questioning the role and legitimacy of this office and its functions. I wouldn't want there to be any doubt on that subject.

As to travel, we asked questions on this point during the testimony, and I asked the question again yesterday in the House. The President of the Treasury Board, Mr. Alcock, said that we would have the total amount, at least for next year. That amount corresponds to approximately \$40 million, including all the expenditures made by all the departments and agencies to ensure that the responsibilities of the Governor General and her office are performed. As to the manner of travel, one of my colleagues—I don't remember who—addressed the entire question of advance people who are sent ahead of the trip. Two are sent. Why not send one? There would be all kinds of ways, like that, to save money.

The most important thing, with regard to a question that a number of us asked the witnesses, is the entire question of budgetary transparency and accountability. It is important that we have the same requirements for this office, the head of state in this case, as we have for other organizations.

In conclusion, we have heard other witnesses. Ms. Barrados, for example, said that, if her budget were cut, or if she wasn't given a particular thing amounting to 5%, she wouldn't be able to conduct the audits under the new Public Service Modernization Act. Another witness, the Auditor General, said before another committee that, if ever she didn't receive a particular amount, that would obviously entail risks. In other words, that would mean that she would potentially have to dismiss 85 employees or something like that. There's always an impact, and that wasn't suggested.

The motion isn't being presented lightly. It's being introduced out of respect for Canadian realities, out of respect for citizens who have no employment insurance for long periods of time, for farmers, agricultural workers who are so discouraged that they're considering suicide or actually committing suicide, for people in despair. I recognize the legitimacy of the office, but there has to be responsibility and accountability. This is a way of taking part in that, as regards the Governor General and her office.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

• (1155)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Thibault.

We will go to the vote on Madam Thibault's motion, which is to reduce vote 1 under the Governor General by \$417,100.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Vote 1 as amended agreed to)

Mr. Randy White: I have a question. The results of all these votes have to be in the House by next Tuesday. Is that right?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Randy White: So to address Madame Marleau's question, there really isn't an opportunity to have somebody come in and discuss this any further than we have.

The Chair: It's pretty difficult to schedule it.

Mr. Randy White: It's too late in the day.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Randy White: Okay, that satisfies me.

The Chair: Okay, let's go then to vote 1 under Parliament.

PARLIAMENT

The Senate

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$45,514,000

(Vote 1 agreed to)

The Chair: We'll now go to vote 1 under the Privy Council.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Department

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$111,358,000

The Chair: Mr. Moore.

Mr. James Moore: Thank you.

I have a motion here. It's in both official languages.

This is an amendment not unlike the previous one that was just passed by this committee. It's a symbolic one, but an important one. Mr. Szabo pointed out, and I think he's correct, that it's important when we do these sorts of things that are symbolic—and this one is symbolic—that we do have evidence.

What I'm calling for is that the Privy Council vote 1, less the amount granted in interim supply, be reduced by \$127,223.

That amount of \$127,223 comes from a report by CanWest News Service that this government spent \$127,223 on a poll last February to determine the best way to diffuse negative reaction to the Auditor General's report. The poll was entirely partisan and was roundly criticized in the House by all parties, including some Liberal members of Parliament. The poll was inappropriate and clearly demonstrates that \$127,223 is an amount that is unnecessary to be in the hands of the government, because this poll was done in a way that was entirely unnecessary, and I think taxpayers would appreciate that this kind of money not be spent on partisan polling.

It's fine—and this is why we're not reducing the whole amount—that the government do polling to gauge the public's views on all kinds of issues, but to have partisan political polling to determine whether or not the public has lost faith in the Liberal government because of the sponsorship inquiry and whether or not the government should launch elections based on the results of that poll I think clearly goes beyond the bounds of the appropriate use of the Privy Council's budget with regard to polling.

Therefore, I move that the budget be cut by \$127,223 to reflect that misuse of taxpayers' dollars.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Moore.

Is there any discussion on this motion?

Mr. Szabo, go ahead.

• (1200)

Mr. Paul Szabo: I think it's kind of interesting, but I wish we didn't have to get into those items where it's anecdotal.

Mr. Joe Preston: So do we.

Mr. Paul Szabo: If that's the way we do things, and every time somebody does something that maybe he or she shouldn't do, you automatically cut, if that's what the member is saying, then maybe we should take the Conservative Party's mailings under franking privileges, with the party logo and so on, to all those ridings and reduce your budget for that purpose because you did something that was wrong. I certainly don't agree with doing it that way, frankly.

Maybe the member can just tell me the reference again. I was not aware of this. What was the source of this information?

Mr. James Moore: It was Jack Aubry, CanWest News Service. The copy I have here is the *National Post*, but I understand that it was in most CanWest papers across the country. It was widely publicized. This was published on November 8, 2004, page A4, so it's a recent story.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Okay, I can't respond to media things, but the point is that I would hope that somehow we could link things a little bit more on evidence or testimony. It was not raised when they were here, and I think it should have been.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm sorry I was away for a moment, and thanks for the opportunity to comment on this.

I think Mr. Moore has actually met the very test Mr. Szabo was asking about. If you want to send a message like this, tie it to some specific detail you find such as a maladministration, if you will, of the funds of that particular office in the previous year. I think Mr. Moore has done that quite well, because I for one am very critical of the idea that the PCO should be spending public dollars for clearly partisan purposes, namely how to cope with the reaction to something like the sponsorship scandal or the Auditor General's report.

I would only say to Mr. Szabo, maybe you have to get used to this or something. You've been in government for a long time, but it wasn't that long ago that at committees the opposition would have to sit here and take whatever the will of the government side was. Well, you're seeing a manifestation of the will of the opposition side surfacing here, Mr. Szabo, and we're going to express our displeasure with some of your government's conduct over the past 10 years. Maybe it's finding its way to this committee. But this is our right, and I think that where it can be demonstrated as justifiable, you're going to see a lot more of it.

I support Mr. Moore's—

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Chairman, I don't disagree with the member. I accept his views. I respect his right to state an opinion, and I'm sure he's not saying I shouldn't speak at all to table my views. I want to be open with the committee too.

Mr. Pat Martin: No, absolutely not, but you shouldn't speak while I have the floor.

The Chair: Yes. Mr. Szabo, you must ask for the floor. We'll get to Mr. Preston, and then, if you like, you can speak, Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Joe Preston: I agree 100% with what's being done here, for the same reason as Mr. Martin just gave. Mr. Szabo stated that we should come up with exactly areas where we think the department whose vote we're dealing with has spent money that didn't have anything to do with the running of the government. We clearly have an example here of where the government's action was not in the best interests of the country, but only in the best interests of the governing party. We need to make sure this money is not spent this way in the future. If we take it away now, perhaps that'll be the case.

To refresh Mr. Szabo's memory, I'll mention that we did speak to the Privy Council people who were here about polling and surveying and talked to them at length about what their budget was on that. At least, I remember asking questions about it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Paul Szabo: The only point I would raise is that if there are specific issues known, I think it's important for the committee to raise them with the witnesses when they're here to make absolutely sure there's not a problem.

For instance, Mr. Boshcoff raised an issue with regard to the Governor General where he said, gee, they had two visits. But the witnesses said this particular event involved several other cities. It was never established whether or not there was a change in the arrangements, the venues, or the requirements of anybody or that there was a reason for it. It was never established, so the fact that there were two is not a reason for you to reduce it. Was there a rationale? That was never established.

So maybe we can do a little bit better job if in fact that's going to be the basis for reducing it. For the future we have to learn from the process. That's all I'm raising.

● (1205)

The Chair: We have Mr. Boshcoff, followed by Madam Thibault.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: I can appreciate Mr. Moore's raising the question about whatever the polling was, but as an elected representative, you don't go to a media source, take someone's interpretation of a story, and use that as your gospel in terms of a government decision. There's innuendo and whatever it may be. I'm not saying the point you're trying to make isn't so, but if you're going to reference something like that, I would really like to see the questionnaire itself. That may be one part of it, or maybe that was the only question; you can have those kinds of things.

In general, as to the type of question and those points, I don't disagree with being able to raise them, but we have to be able to... as opposed to springing them on us and saying, I read something in a newspaper, so take fifty grand off.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boshcoff.

Madam Thibault, followed by Monsieur Gagnon.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I'd like to add that I think that, although a colleague or I may occasionally present a motion and the amount seems symbolic, the amount of \$127,233 probably corresponds to the employment insurance benefits of 12 or 15 persons in Canada, in Quebec in particular. However, this affects me because I think that every cent counts and that we, like all other members and other persons, must manage the budgets as though every cent was ours and we didn't want it to leave our pocket unless it was spent in the right place.

So, while this amount seems symbolic, it isn't for me because it's not symbolic in the pockets of a number of Canadians, Quebecers.

Furthermore, our role on this committee this morning may be the role that's least known to the public. It's nevertheless a very important role. We are accountable, we are responsible, and if I had any doubt... Even if the gentleman explains to us how this came out in the newspapers, when we consider everything that happened regarding the scandal and everything that happened around it, I think we have lessons to learn for the future about exercising very great prudence. In this case, I will completely support this motion and I'll vote with my colleagues who have already spoken in favour of it.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Gagnon.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: In the same line of thinking, I find it somewhat curious that such a big deal is being made out of such a small cut. We seem to think we're going to put the Privy Council in difficulty with a reduction which, as I see it, is very symbolic relative to the amount of money spent.

As regards symbols, seniors who were deprived of the Guaranteed Income Supplement, as a result of the government's fault, learned yesterday or the day before that there was no hope of retroactivity beyond 11 months. As to this \$127,000, I know some seniors who might perhaps sympathize with the Privy Council because they haven't received their due for years now and they've never been asked to vote on that. They haven't received their due for years, simply because they weren't properly informed.

So I'm pleased to support this motion, since, for once, it takes into account what it can do to others when they're deprived of essentials. The Privy Council surely won't be deprived of essentials if we cut its budget by \$127,000.

• (1210)

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

Mr. White.

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Chairman, I'm trying to get a perspective on this. I've been used to doing this practically all my life, walking into board meetings and being on one side or the other. Either I'd tell people they had to reduce their budgets because we had to deal with a certain level of funding or make a profit, or at times other people would tell me this was what they wanted my department to operate under; this was how much I had to do it with. It's no different here in what we're doing. Anybody at this table who is familiar with global budgeting, zero-based budgeting, or anything like that should know this is what we're doing, except that while these reductions are perhaps symbolic, they are relatively minor in the scheme of things.

Coming up is this \$2-billion vote for Public Works. If anybody in this room thinks there's no waste in Public Works, you're kidding yourself. We should be sitting here saying we think Public Works—or another department, or all of them—should be reduced by a certain amount, and we should be building efficiencies into the system and leaving the cuts up to those who run it.

I'm not going to sit here and debate the relative merits of an article in the newspaper, but I'm satisfied enough to know this department

can certainly work on less money. So let's stop quibbling over who said what or where it is and get down to managing government. We're certainly not cutting much out of this. If you really wanted to look at effective cuts, they would be a heck of a lot more than this.

The Chair: Thank you.

As the mover of the motion, to wrap up, Mr. Moore.

Mr. James Moore: I think all the arguments in favour have been made. I've substantiated where the amount comes from. When the story was published—it was widely published—the Prime Minister didn't deny the veracity of the data. The Minister of Public Works didn't deny the veracity of the data.

This is clear. This is symbolic. It's important, and I call the question.

The Chair: Just before we go to the vote, there's been a change in the number by \$10. It should be \$127,223.

(Amendment agreed to)

Mr. Pat Martin: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—I hope it's a point of order—did we just vote on vote 1?

The Chair: Vote 1, Privy Council.

Mr. Pat Martin: There's still vote 5.

The Chair: Yes, votes 5 and 10.

• (1215)

Mr. Pat Martin: Could I please first raise a question, and perhaps a point for the record?

I'd like to know why vote 40 under Privy Council does not come to this committee. I point you to page 22-14 of the main estimates, the Indian residential schools resolution file, which falls under the Privy Council. I tried to raise this at the Indian affairs committee, where I'm also a standing member, and they said we don't deal with this matter at that committee, that it's a Privy Council issue and it will be dealt with at the government operations committee.

Hon. Diane Marleau: Somebody has to vote on it.

Mr. Pat Martin: I specifically came here today with the hopes of being able to comment on and vote on the Indian residential schools question, which is an aspect of the Privy Council.

I raise this as a question to you or to the clerk.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

The only answer I can give is that particular vote wasn't referred to us. It of course was referred to someone, and I can't answer who it was right now.

Just before we do that, we have to actually have the vote now. We've amended vote 1, and we have to have the vote on that. Then we'll get to other comments that may be made here.

Let's go to vote 1 on Privy Council.

Shall vote 1, less the amount voted in interim supply, as reduced, carry?

(Vote 1 as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Chair, will I be able to follow up?

Is there any guidance that you, as chair, or the researcher or clerk can offer on whom I would appeal to in order to have my right to comment and vote on the estimates regarding the Office of Indian Residential Schools?

The Chair: Mr. Martin, we'll find out where that did go and let you know as soon as we can.

Hon. Diane Marleau: When it goes back to the House, you can vote on it.

The Chair: Let's go to the next votes.

Under Privy Council, shall votes 5, 10, 15, 20, 45, and 50, less the amounts voted in interim supply, carry?

PRIVY COUNCIL

Department

Vote 5—Grants and contributions.....\$15,597,000

Canadian Centre for Management Development

Vote 10—Program expenditures.....\$27,709,000

Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat

Vote 15—Program expenditures.....\$5,897,000

Canadian Transportation Accident Investigation and Safety Board

Vote 20—Program expenditures.....\$26,017,000

Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada

Vote 45—Operating expenditures.....\$37,809,000

Vote 50—Contributions.....\$16,200,000

(Votes 5, 10, 15, 20, 45, and 50 agreed to)

The Chair: Now we go to Public Works and Government Services.

Shall vote 1, less the amount voted in interim supply, carry?

Mr. White

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Chairman, I mentioned this before, and I don't quite know how to get at this particular situation, but we're talking about \$2.33 billion. Surely the message can be sent by this committee, if it's not going anywhere else, that we expect departments like this to exercise some cost reductions or efficiencies throughout the year. I don't sense an appetite at this committee to make any particular reduction without having some prima facie evidence, but I, for one, cannot and will not put my hand up for \$2 billion without any semblance of scrutiny in terms of cost reduction.

The Chair: Mr. White, something I will note is that we'll have the votes on the supplementary estimates quite soon, within a couple of weeks. This is an unusual timing for the main estimates to be voted on, because the main estimates for the next year come in March. So there are other opportunities.

I know you know that, Mr. White.

Mr. Randy White: I know that, and you can believe that we'll be loaded for bear when those things come.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. White.

Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to remind members, having been the parliamentary secretary for Public Works and

Government Services, that it is ostensibly a service agency to all other areas of the government.

Mr. Joe Preston: It must grow.

Mr. Paul Szabo: In doing the testimony, there were substantial references to their inability to stop programs that were consequential to decisions made elsewhere.

This is one that I would certainly like to see some study done on. It may not be in terms of specific expenditures, but maybe in terms of best practices in procurement, or whatever. I know they've done a fair bit of work, and are doing some work, and that this is something we should do.

I'm cautious, though, to be careful not to create any unintended consequences here, because this is one, particularly, where could be some ripple effect to approved programs elsewhere...

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Boshcoff.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My concern with across-the-board reductions for departments such as this is not that we want to micromanage and not that we know they couldn't cut whatever amount we suggest to them, but my fear is that the regions end up carrying the brunt of these reductions in universal budgets. So unless we're more accurate in our decision-making and our suggestion, then it's the smaller communities that end up having the offices closed and the bridges not being repaired.

That's my only concern, and I'll be glad to study this with all of the members in this room.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1220)

The Chair: Madame Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to tell my colleague that I understand his intentions. However, I hold the contrary opinion and I want to explain why. I think it should be targeted. By targeting our comments and our requests regarding the effect the motion will have if it is well targeted and if it is carried will really send out the right message. My great fear, if we stuck to general cuts, and even if it were 0.5%, would be that we wouldn't be able to determine what we would allocate it to. I would very much fear that things would turn in the direction Mr. Boshcoff just mentioned, that it would affect the regions, the least well-off and, indirectly, people who obtain a service, and so on.

It may not be at all what Mr. White intends, but, in listening to his remarks, I wanted to make my own, in light of what motivates me, of what I consider important and of what I would still like to demand and defend, that is the well-being of society.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Thibault.

Shall votes 1, 5, and 10, less the amounts voted in interim supply, carry?

PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Department

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$2,033,689,000

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$304,789,000

Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$5,761,000

(Votes 1, 5, and 10 agreed to)

The Chair: Now to the Treasury Board. Shall votes 1, 5, 10, and 20, less the amounts voted in interim supply, carry?

TREASURY BOARD

Secretariat

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$111,451,000

Vote 5—Government Contingencies.....\$750,000,000

Vote 10—Government-Wide Initiatives.....\$10,876,000

Vote 20—Public Service Insurance.....\$1,609,500,000

(Votes 1, 5, 10, and 20 agreed to)

The Chair: Okay, those are all the votes.

Now we have to move one more motion. Shall the chair report the estimates as amended to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you all. We've dealt with the main estimates. Of course, we'll be dealing with the supplementary estimates in a few weeks.

We have some other business, though. There are two other items of business.

Madam Thibault, I believe you wanted to bring to committee the issue of the subcommittee meetings held in camera and that those be kept confidential. The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I want to share an article with my colleagues. I would like us to go around the table to get your impressions and comments. In reading an article in *The Ottawa Citizen*, as we do every morning or evening, as our schedules permit, I realized that a journalist's pen can be one thing and the way in which our remarks are reported another. I wanted to know whether we all agree that, when we sit in camera, everything remains within these four walls, and whether, if something were to leak out, we should be immediately informed of it. If someone's involved in a media scrum, issues a news release or whatever and is misquoted and claims to have made comments in a general context and there's no reason why his or her comments should have been cited as they were and he or she requests a retraction...

Since I always speak to the people concerned, I went to talk to my colleagues who were cited in the article. I didn't have occasion to speak to Mr. Martin, but I spoke to Mr. Benoit and my colleague Mr. Preston. I did that because I thought that what goes on here in camera is based on mutual trust. My colleagues and the Chairman reassured me, saying they'd only mentioned that such and such an item might come up in the order of business. I'm going to quote, in English, the paragraph that particularly concerns me:

● (1225)

[*English*]

“Committee chairman and Conservative MP Leon Benoit confirmed the committee is drafting a report that will either criticize the appointment or recommend it be rescinded”.

[*Translation*]

That obviously referred to the appointment of Mr. Feeney. The reason I raise this question is that this disturbed me. I thought it was as though something had leaked out of our committee's in camera proceedings. That's why I would briefly like to hear my colleagues' comments, if you want to make any. I hope you'll understand that this disturbed me because I thought the information had leaked out of the committee.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Paul Szabo: I saw the articles in various newspapers and I think it's very timely for Madame Thibault to raise this issue about mutual respect and the need for in camera proceedings to work. We have some important things to do, and our steering committee, I think, has to be free to be a little free-wheeling in its thinking so we can make sure all the points are out.

Thank you, Madame Thibault. I think everybody understands the intent, and I'm sure all honourable members are going to respect the committee.

The Chair: Mr. White.

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Chairman, I don't have a problem with in camera business being kept in camera. I do have a problem with the nature of the business, in particular, even in the last steering committee meeting. Much discussion took place that I felt, quite frankly, should be in public.

I think if we're going to have in camera meetings in the House of Commons—and I've said this in many committees before—what you do in camera should be in camera business, not necessarily things that should be out in the public. That's the only criterion I would base it on.

That doesn't mean that because you think something in camera should be disclosed you use discretion. I'm just saying that before the meeting takes place we should use the discretion that many items should be public, and if they should be public, they should be said in a regular meeting, not necessarily in camera.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. White.

Actually, I will look for your guidance on this. If anybody has objections to what we're dealing with in camera or suggestions as to what we should be dealing with in camera and what should be public, I'd welcome your comments.

The comments that have been made have been directed to a quote that was attributed to me. I just want to say I've been a member of Parliament for 11 years, and especially in roles such as critic for immigration and defence I was asked many times by the media to comment on what went on at in camera meetings. I have never once done that and I never will.

The comments in this article had nothing to do with what was said in an in camera meeting. I just want to make that clear. Madam Thibault, you can be assured I will never do that. I haven't in 11 years. I've been asked many times by the media, and I won't do it. I won't do it in a sneaky way; I won't do it in an open way.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Chairman, I very much appreciate you're taking the time to do this. I appreciate the fact that you didn't feel insulted because that wasn't at all my intention. I simply wanted assurances that we were on the same wavelength. I thank my colleagues for taking a few minutes to comment on the subject.

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Gagnon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: I have a few words to say in reaction to what I just heard from Mr. White. There are obviously times when we feel there are in camera discussions that could be public. However, as member of a committee sitting in camera, it's not up to me to decide to make them public. The point is to discuss the matter in committee and to say that certain things could be made public. That's how I understand things. In camera proceedings must be respected if we haven't decided to make things public. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Szabo.

• (1230)

Mr. Paul Szabo: I just want to get reaffirmation from the chair, and maybe from the committee as a whole, that steering committee meetings are a bit different. They're normally held in camera because this is where we should be trying to exhaust all of the.... It's something that's not very entertaining for the public, in any event.

But the most important thing about steering committee meetings is that after all is said and done, the steering committee is there only to recommend to the full committee, and it is the full committee that must decide. The steering committee is simply recommending; anything we deal with in terms of decisions or recommendations is going to be in a public forum.

Should this standing committee decide to go in camera, I'd certainly agree with Mr. White that it had better be a rare circumstance and for a damn good reason.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Szabo.

We have one other order of business. That's to deal with the second report of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

Maybe just take a minute, or are you comfortable with it?

Madam Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Chairman, when I read the third paragraph: "It was agreed, —That the Committee invite the President of the Treasury Board to appear to discuss the appointment process..." That was the process, but from what I understood, we really want him to send us a document because we all had the impression there was a procedure or a written process. I would like him to come just to explain the process to us, saying, for example, that it must be mutual, honest, etc. I want him to talk about the fact that he had said there would be a mechanism, a written procedure. However, we still haven't had the pleasure of seeing that basic document. I would like that to be reflected in the third paragraph. I imagine you're submitting it to us for our comments before signing it and sending it. So I would like that to be added, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Marleau.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Marleau: I wanted to come back to this point. I think it's important to realize that the President of the Treasury Board hasn't yet issued a written policy. Last spring he issued a kind of interim directive. I had the impression that we perhaps wanted to invite the President of the Treasury Board to tell us about what he was going to propose, if he hasn't yet done it. If he's already done it, he can bring it along. Then we could propose certain procedures which we think should be part of what he'll do or present to us. It's the same thing one way or another. I know there's still nothing final as regards procedures. Moreover, I've been told that what he said at the outset was only provisional. It was not very definite.

[*English*]

The Chair: Let me comment, Madam Thibault, on one of your points. The subcommittee did agree to have the minister back to talk about process and then to do a report on the process of the appointment. That, of course, is reflected in this document. We'll be voting on it, and it's up to the committee to decide whether we go ahead with issuing this report or not.

Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Chairman, it's very difficult to get the full sense and the nuance from minutes of steering committee meetings, but I think, for the benefit of all honourable members, the intent was this. We had an experience with this process. We were preoccupied with it, it's important, and I think all members should know we want to exhaust all our concerns and questions about what we think are the rules, what we think the rules should be, and maybe even have some further input with regard to what latitude committees should have in discharging their review, in that process. We think this is an opportunity to make a constructive contribution to this area, because it appears it is not nailed down somewhere. We'd like to have a role and make a mark for ourselves, in a sense, by driving the agenda in terms of the process and how it's applied and operated upon.

•(1235)

The Chair: Mr. Szabo, the way I heard it—although as you say it's always hard to get a clear sense of what's proposed—there were two things proposed. One is that we have the minister back, do a report on the process of this particular appointment, and then, as you suggest, and I think it was supported by the committee as well, in the future do a review of some kind—we never arrived at how to do it—on what the appropriate procedure for appointments would be.

Mr. Paul Szabo: You may recall the concern, for whatever reason, that there be a proper review done of qualifications and competence, that we in fact concentrate on the process, and it left us in an awkward situation. I don't think we want to say, oh well, the opposition said the guy was great, and therefore we're okay. The issue really was the overall process. We're talking about one thing, not two: we're talking about the process, and that we have to hold the minister to task on this. He has to come and explain why written things and press releases are different from letters that are sent to the president of a corporation. We don't even know whether the same or a similar thing has been sent to everybody—what did they do with Rabinovitch and that kind of thing? I'd like to be able to know that there is a process that's applicable to all, and that if we have some concerns, for instance, whether there are discretions that could be included...so that in the event that you had a part-time appointee to a board of a directors, say, maybe the full court press wouldn't always be necessary.

I don't think the process that's there right now really responds to every possible appointment we may see. We have an opportunity to make a contribution to this thing, so I hope we're going to deal with it comprehensively, as a process to be applied and utilized by all committees and for all appointments that are relevant.

The Chair: Yes. I was just reminded we are talking about an in camera meeting in public here, right now as we speak. We have to be a little careful of that.

There was someone else.

Mr. Godbout.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Godbout: Mr. Chairman, I agree. If we invite the Minister, he must have a policy, an interim document. I don't like discussing abstract matters. So if there were a way of having that document, we could study it. Our time is precious, and I think it should be used properly. If we have to make recommendations, we should make them in full knowledge of the facts, on the basis of what has been submitted, on the basis of what is under study or of the policy, if there is one.

[English]

The Chair: We do have that information and can easily get you a copy. Basically, it was the minister's press release from last March, I believe, and then a follow-up letter that gave instruction to the head of the appointment committee, and an attachment to that letter. That's what we're talking about, as far as I know.

Mr. Marc Godbout: Okay. I thought there was a conflict.

[Translation]

Le président: Ms. Thibault.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I wanted to reassure Mr. Godbout because we received accompanying written documents through the clerk. As the witnesses had assured us, we received copies of a letter with an attachment. I think that committee members, and not just my usual colleagues, will have to make sure that people who come here have these documents. The reason why I insisted that a written document, whatever it might be, be submitted to us, if there was one—and I'm going to find my quotation in my documents before we meet with the minister—is that it was clearly mentioned that there would be a policy. That's not an intention or a verbal encouragement to the effect that it would be good to do this or that, together with a note. There would really be a procedure or, if you will, a written policy. That's why I asked that what exists, even if it's only an outline that officials are currently working on, as you say, be submitted to us and that a copy of what we've already received be distributed to colleagues. I think that's very important.

Thank you for allowing me to speak, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Godbout, that would be the reason you may not have received these documents. They've been circulated to the committee, but you're a new member so that would be the explanation.

Mr. White.

•(1240)

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Chairman, on that paragraph three, I was under the impression, as well, that we thought the minister was going to bring a draft or bring a document to the committee.

Mr. Paul Szabo: We're going to get him to do that if we can. We should ask for the latest and greatest.

Mr. Randy White: That's what I would prefer to happen. I would prefer that he come with his proposed policy so that we can talk to that rather than just talk about this and delay it even further. It would be a lot better if he were to bring his draft policy here.

The Chair: He indicated to me personally that's what he intends to do. At least, that's my impression.

Mr. Paul Szabo: I met with him yesterday and I think it's his intent to come before the committee to deal with this matter as fulsomely as the committee would like.

The Chair: The only other items in the report are witnesses on Bill C-11.

Are there any concerns about that?

Yes, Madam Thibault.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Chairman, or Madam Clerk, I was wondering whether you could tell us what success we have had to date. I thank people for sending the document prepared by Ms. Stoddart, the Privacy Commissioner. I would like to know whether we have managed to convince her to appear before our committee again because I think her testimony is essential. If you need people to support you in approaching Ms. Stoddart, I'll be pleased to go to her office and invite her personally.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Thibault, I'm sure if we invite her to come she will come. Should we add her to the list? Do you want to amend it?

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I'm asking whether my colleagues agree because I think her testimony is essential.

[English]

The Chair: We will add Madam Stoddart to the list.

Would someone like to move adoption of this report?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I have a point, Mr. Chair. I had a request from a group to appear. I believe Ms. Burke was aware of it, the

[Translation]

Centre for Research-Action on Race Relations.

[English]

Would we be able to invite them as well?

The Chair: We will still be having meetings after Christmas. We're certainly open. At any time, this committee can decide to have more witnesses, and that could well happen.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I understand.

I have another point regarding the CBC. I could be wrong, but I thought we were going to invite them to appear on their own as opposed to being part of a panel.

The Chair: Are they part of a panel? Is that the way they're coming?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Their issues are very different. I suppose they are related to the newspaper associations, but I just don't know why we're lumping them together with the Mounted Police legal fund.

Mr. Paul Szabo: My recollection was that we were going to split the two hours. CBC would be separate, and the other two were going to be a panel.

The Chair: We will do that. That's my recollection as well. We'll give CBC a separate hour, then, at this meeting.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Perfect.

The Chair: Does someone want to move the...

Sorry, Madam Thibault.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Chairman, I imagine there will be three separate testimonies. I don't think the people from the Mounted Police Members' Legal Fund or those of the Canadian Broadcasting

Corporation will be heard at the same time. I imagine the three groups will follow one another, as is the case when we have three separate groups of witnesses.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Perhaps I misunderstood, but we would invite them together or...

Ms. Louise Thibault: For an expert debate. I thought there were a number of experts from the CBC, a number of experts...

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: If that's what it is, I entirely agree, Ms. Thibault.

Ms. Louise Thibault: So I misunderstood.

Hon. Diane Marleau: I think we wanted to have the CBC alone.

M. Francis Scarpaleggia: I think they have to be separated.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Szabo, I'd like to have your opinion on that.

[English]

The Chair: This is having CBC for one hour and the other two for the other hour. Is it acceptable to split that?

Mr. Paul Szabo: It could be split. We haven't even invited those other two groups yet for a specific date, and this may in fact turn out to be another day as well, where another will be at...

[Translation]

Mme Louise Thibault: All right, we'll separate them.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo: We have to make the best use of our time and not have people who contradict.

•(1245)

[Translation]

Mme Louise Thibault: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo: I had one last item. I made an inquiry. We did discuss at the steering committee Bill C-8, and it's not referred to in our report.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Paul Szabo: It is a technical, consequential matter, a very brief item. The fact that you have to have a bill means somebody needs that bill to be able to continue to do other things.

I don't think the bill is a major consequence for our consideration, but it is our responsibility. I would hope that perhaps we could spend half of one of our meetings on Bill C-8 and dispose of it at the same meeting.

The Chair: Should we have CBC for an hour and then take the other hour to deal with Bill C-8. Is that acceptable? Can we just do that, then?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Yes.

The Chair: Great.

Okay, we need somebody to move this report.

Yes, Mr. Godbout.

Mr. Marc Godbout: I so move.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: I second that.

(Motion agreed to)

The meeting is adjourned.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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