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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, November 22, 2005**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Don Boudria**

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## Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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•(1105)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.)):** Dear colleagues, at the conclusion of our last meeting, two items were left on the agenda. The first was the motion by the Chief Government Whip, the Honourable Karen Redman, concerning the delivery of services to members.

[English]

Secondly, there was an interest on the part of members that we invite the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Jean-Pierre Kingsley. We did contact both, of course. Mr. Kingsley said his preference would be to attend this Thursday as opposed to today, if we didn't object too much.

We have to understand that Mr. Kingsley is doing quite a bit of preparation in the unlikely event that some people might want to cause an election. Of course, if people decide to do otherwise, which your chairman would support wholeheartedly, that would probably make his life a little bit easier for the next little while. But I am sidetracking here.

If we decide at the conclusion of this meeting that we want to have him appear on Thursday, he said he'd make himself available. But don't forget, if some events do take place next week, is that the best use of his time at this juncture? I invite you to think about that, and maybe at the end of the meeting we can decide whether we want him to testify on Thursday. If not, there are a number of other things we have left; namely, we haven't even dealt with the document that the Ethics Commissioner has sent to us. We need to look at that.

Don't forget that should there be an election—and I won't be here after that—the new MPs and, of course, those who are re-elected are going to be subjected to this code, which is not what it should be, because we've all agreed that in order to be fully legitimate we have to adopt these rules of procedure for him to administer. You might want to think about that as a possible item for this Thursday.

I will leave it up to you. At the end of the meeting, perhaps we can review that, if that's suitable.

We now have a motion from Mrs. Redman.

Mrs. Redman, the first thing we would ask you to do, if it's your intention, is to move this motion, and then we could discuss it. When we finish discussing it, we can dispose of it whichever way the committee likes.

I suppose that would be the only item for today, except for discussing the agenda for Thursday, which of course we would do at the end.

Yes, Mr. Hill.

**Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC):** Before discussing this motion, I am certainly not opposed to any discussion on it, but I want to point out that this has been discussed ad nauseam at the BOIE. It has been brought up a number of times. It has been brought up as a number of questions of privilege that have ended up being entertained at this committee. A subcommittee of the BOIE has dealt with this—and, I might add, to no avail; there was no consensus.

Furthermore, quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, I find it a bit offensive that we would try to deal with an issue like ten percenters on the eve of an election that could handcuff a future Parliament. I find it totally unacceptable that we would try to deal with this issue at this point when we haven't been able to reach consensus, to deal with it somehow and make rules for the next Parliament. It doesn't make sense to me.

**The Chair:** Mr. Hill, I think what you're giving us, if I can call it that, is your speech.

**Mr. Jay Hill:** I called it a filibuster—

**The Chair:** We don't want to call it that, of course, but I think you're giving us your speech in response to what you think might be the comments of Madam Redman, which of course everyone is fully entitled to do.

Madam Redman, the floor is yours. I am told by the clerk that the motion has already been moved, so please speak to it.

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Speaking to this motion, I actually very much welcome the intervention of Mr. Hill, because I would tell you that this is exactly why I felt compelled to bring this motion before the procedure and House affairs committee. He is quite right, we have dealt with this time and time again.

I guess the reason we're here, Mr. Chair, I believe, is that the behaviour is getting more extreme. I believe the elasticity of the rules as they exist is indeed being tested by individual members. It seems that it's only on a complaint basis, through the House standing on a point of privilege, that we deal with some of the more egregious examples of these ten percenters.

The motion before you asks the Board of Internal Economy to restrict the use of ten percenters to the members' own ridings. As well, the ten percenter regroupings would be abolished and partisan logos would not be permitted on ten percenters and householders.

Now, clearly, the rules do allow for these things to happen, and I'm sure all parties participate in them, so I would say that I do this in the spirit of being open and transparent and making good use of Canadian taxpayers' dollars.

There's no doubt ten percenters are an important tool in enabling members to communicate with their constituents, but this Parliament has seen a dramatic change in both the number and the nature of the content of these ten percenters. It's for this reason that I believe we need to further regulate this tool to ensure that it is not abused in the future.

All parties have significantly increased their output of ten percenters. They've also adopted a centralized strategy for distribution. Specifically, these seem to focus on redistribution in unheld ridings. But rather than focusing on members' own parliamentary initiatives or those of their parties, these ten percenters have been used for negative and often personal attacks. We've seen the deplorable examples of blatant abuse of the House of Commons privileges.

It's neither appropriate nor valuable, I feel, for members of Parliament to circulate material of this nature. Clearly, what we do with our party funds under the banner of partisan politics supported by those who choose to support the parties is a totally different matter. This is something to do with the use of taxpayers' dollars and our role as members of Parliament.

Ten percenters are not an appropriate venue for electioneering, and by eliminating partisan logos on ten percenters and householders we can take a big step to ensure that they can continue to be used to put forward policy discussions as well as bring updates to parliamentary affairs.

Throughout this minority Parliament, we've seen a significant increase, as I've said, in the ten percenters in unheld ridings. Ten percenters, as everyone around this table realizes, are unlimited, and a continued increase in the distribution of ten percenters in unheld ridings will become—and I would say have become—a significant expense to the House budget.

Mr. Hill made a comment that the Board of Internal Economy has dealt with that, and I would absolutely concur with him. As a matter of fact, I think I've done my best to push this matter to the fore. But the reality is that the statistics we receive and the documentation we receive in the Board of Internal Economy is in camera. I think this issue needs to have an open and transparent discussion so that Canadians and other parliamentarians will be able to see the exponential increase in this cost to the House.

The ability to send material into ridings held by a member of another party leads to aggressive mail strategies and electioneering-style messaging. Ten percenters are a tool for MPs to communicate to their own constituents, as I said—and I would defend that—but anything further than that is an unnecessary financial burden on the House, and I would say it's a misuse.

Regroupings are an additional area of concern. Again, this is an area where partisan smears can dominate the content. Canadians have a right to see responsible use of their taxpayer dollars. Political parties do have resources to support the communication of their political message. Partisan propaganda is not an appropriate

expenditure of public funds, and its distribution reflects poorly on all of us as parliamentarians—and I believe it to be disrespectful of the institution that we serve.

Our committee has the opportunity to make a clear distinction between political propaganda and parliamentary communications, and I believe this motion is a step forward in ensuring parliamentary resources are used and not misused.

Mr. Speaker, I have a whole file full of examples.

• (1110)

**Mr. Jay Hill:** I don't think he's the Speaker.

**The Chair:** No, there's a good chance I won't be either, given that I'm not running again.

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC):** But you would have been a good one, Don, since the subject has come up.

**The Chair:** Order, please.

Madame Redman.

**Hon. Karen Redman:** There are examples. I would like to say that I don't come at this with a belief in any way that any one party has not stretched these rules. So I have examples—and I have not photocopied all of them—of one of the parties, and it's not our party, that sent out what would seem to be a legitimate survey, as many members do in ten percenters or householders, and then closely following on its heels constituents received a partisan letter that was asking for them to sign up to this party as well as asking them if they would like to make a donation.

So clearly there has been a database collected, and that has been from the kind of information that could otherwise legitimately have been gathered through a member of Parliament's reply card. I think many of us do this, but I certainly would not expect to be on a member of Parliament's mailing list and then find myself being asked if I want to join a party.

The two things that I think we're all pretty clear on that you cannot do is ask for a vote or ask for money through any mailings that go out through the House of Commons, and yet we have a colleague, again from another party, who says, "In the coming election, I urge you to carefully think about supporting [our party] once again." It goes on to say that while they're not running, they would like them to continue to support that party.

I would say, I think this is really stretching the elasticity of exactly what this kind of communication is meant for. We certainly have had, I think, a very egregious example perpetrated against some of our cabinet ministers, having to do with the sponsorship issue. I know that had full debate in the House. As a matter of fact, I think it got several days of debate in the House.

Mr. Chair, from my perspective, again it saddens me to see that we are demeaning this House, this institution. The behaviour of a few people, I find, is really bringing down what is already a difficult row to hoe in being a person in public life in Canada. And because it's on a complaint basis, it seems to me that it's only when it becomes terribly egregious that people act on it.

I do believe we're also asking people in printing to...not really police this, but there have been ten percenters, I know from our party, that have been returned. I think that if the rules were made clear... And another thing that has come up for debate—and I haven't had a satisfactory explanation on this—is that it's allowable to use political logos. But we have examples where other parties are using political logos that are not their own. When I queried printing and asked how this happens, they said, clearly, we would assume they got the permission of the other party.

I have to tell you that on the example that Mr. Coderre brought to the House, I am absolutely sure nobody asked our party if they could use our logo, and I'm absolutely sure we would have said a resounding no.

So there are many examples where I feel that the rules, because they're too broad in allowing a few things that lead to partisan mail-outs and personal smears, should be reined in. I think again this would be a playing field that we would all use as we go forward.

●(1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for the, shall I say, fulsome presentation.

Mr. Hill.

**Mr. Jay Hill:** Well, I'll try to keep this short.

But I want to start off by suggesting that Madam Redman seems to believe, despite the fact that we couldn't reach a consensus any time this has been brought to either the BOIE or this committee in the form of questions of privilege, that she can somehow miraculously come up with the solution to this problem in the dying days of this Parliament.

It really strikes me that it's very similar to a lot of things the government has been doing over the past couple of weeks. All of a sudden, when they know they're going to get thrown out of office, they come up with all these wonderful ideas on how to fix things around here. It's another deathbed conversion, where all of a sudden, my goodness, the thing that's now seizing the nation is on trying to deal with ten percenters. That's the first thing.

I think it's a bit rich when she talks about the responsible use of taxpayer dollars, when government advertising, specifically the sponsorship scandal and the abuse of that, is resulting in the defeat of this government, as per the Gomery inquiry. She then sits here and talks about the responsible use of taxpayer dollars on how we communicate with Canadians.

This is an issue that I have repeatedly raised, Mr. Chairman. Every time this issue has come up, I've said that I'm more than willing to look at the use of householders and the use of ten percenters as soon as the government starts to be aware of the need to look at how they spend millions upon millions of tax dollars. That's the first point.

I've never heard any concession on the part of the government that we should maybe take a look at whether it's appropriate to put up big banners, ads, and logos advertising the Government of Canada, because it gives an unfair advantage to whoever the government is. Over the past dozen of years, that has obviously been the Liberal Party of Canada. They've blurred the lines, and it has been well reported in the Gomery report that they blurred the lines between

what was in the best interests of the Liberal Party of Canada and what was in the best interests of the Government of Canada.

The other issue I want to put on the table is that this whole issue of ten percenters and the abuse of it, which she wants to address with this motion, doesn't deal at all with franked mail. We know this for a fact, and I know that one of my colleagues wants to raise this issue as well.

There have been a number of occasions when Liberal government members have presumably used a database that they somehow collected, or they have simply used the Canada list of electors, to send franked mail at a horrendous cost. It costs far more than a ten percenter would cost, which would maybe be 10¢ or something, to send a piece of literature to a Canadian in a different riding. This is what she wants to prevent with this motion, yet her own colleagues have been sending out franked mail in addressed envelopes, with something similar to a ten percenter inside the envelopes, at ten times the cost.

Her motion doesn't deal with that. I presume she has no problem with that, because she doesn't want to address it; she only wants to address this ten percenter that seems to be a huge problem.

●(1120)

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much.

I know there are several colleagues who would like to speak to this. Hopefully, we can eventually dispose of the item, and then we'll deal with it at the time.

Of course I don't want to stop anybody from speaking. In any case, whatever colleagues want to do with this motion, after some time the positions of various people are going to become somewhat clear. I think it seems to be developing that way already, but we'll see a little later on.

[*Translation*]

Do you wish to say something, Mr. Guimond?

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, as a member of the Board of Internal Committee and of the sub-committee that looked into this matter, I have to say that I am somewhat torn between my professional duty to uphold the secrecy of the Board's proceedings and the ramifications of the motion before this committee.

In my view, the procedure employed by our colleague the Chief Government Whip amounts to calling for the decision already reached by the Board of Internal Economy to be reconsidered. The Board and its subcommittee have already ruled on this matter. I will dispense with the details as I don't want to be accused of contempt. I really don't see any reason to reopen this debate. This tool is accessible to all parliamentarians, regardless of party affiliation. We use it as we best see fit to communicate with our constituents.

Let me reiterate my position: this is neither a bridge club nor a religious order whose members are awaiting sainthood when their days on earth are over. We're here to practise politics. I won't repeat Mr. Hill's comments. Suffice to say that in government, ministers have various budgets, hidden as well as official, to advertise their programs and to inform the public about their department's budget and course of action. They liberally resort to using these budgets. In this case, I want to emphasize that ten percenters are a vehicle available to all colleagues.

I want to remind the Chief Government Whip that in the ridings represented by the Bloc Québécois, there have already been large-scale mailings from select members of the Liberal Party. I recall quite vividly the battle waged by the Bloc Québécois over the Guaranteed Income Supplement for the elderly. A mailing by the Liberal Party or a Liberal member had been left at every residence amounting to the sum of ten percent. Mention was made that the matter had been raised in the House of Commons thanks to the efforts of the Liberal Party caucus. Everyone knows that in reality, we have Marcel Gagnon, the Member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain, to thank for his hard work on this file.

Mr. Chairman, this government has no right to lecture us. This vehicle belongs to all members. They use it and ensure that the contents do not advocate anything immoral or contrary to the maintenance of public order. I hope the bridge club analogy isn't too difficult to grasp. Our role in opposition is to defend a political opinion. The government, on the other hand, defends its perceived achievements. I want you to know that we will be opposing once again the Government's Whip's attempt to have the issue of ten percenters reconsidered.

● (1125)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Guimond.

Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It's truly ironic to see the Liberals lecturing to us this morning and telling us to be careful about the public's money when we think about how they got caught in the sponsorship scandal.

Even though the Liberal Party has paid back the sum of \$1 million, the scandal has still cost taxpayers \$100 million. Had there not been a scandal, perhaps we would not have lost a program that was beneficial to Canadians. The Auditor General herself pointed out that the problem wasn't the actual program, but rather the way in which the program had been run.

Today, the Liberals want to be seen as saints. They claim that other members and political parties are being unreasonable, unlike the Liberals. They also maintain that since they are very good citizens with an eye to spending the taxpayers' money wisely, the Board's proceedings should no longer take place in camera.

We all share in this responsibility. The Liberals have no right to lecture us on this matter. We are capable of making our own decisions. The people of Acadie—Bathurst elected me to make decisions on their behalf. The people elected NDP members to make decisions, just as members of the Conservative, Bloc Québécois and Liberal parties were elected to do.

I don't see what right the Liberals have to lecture us this morning. I find this motion insulting. As our colleague Jay Hill pointed out, there is nothing on franked mail, a tool that is far more costly and that the Liberals have abused. They didn't get to the bottom of the problem, assuming there was one.

Just think about it! I, Yvon Godin, NDP employment insurance critic, would not be able to communicate with Canadians to give them the details of a bill or some other thing. The same would hold true for any political party in the House of Commons.

What has become of democracy? The Liberals want the power to silence everyone. They'll dispatch ministers on government Challenger jets to every riding. They see nothing wrong with travelling on taxpayers' money.

I cannot support a motion such as this one. Let's vote as quickly as possible and move on to other debates of greater benefit to the nation. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Let me know when you are ready to vote. In the meantime, the list of members wishing to speak is getting longer, not shorter. You'll decide on the opportune moment.

You're next, Mr. Simard.

● (1130)

[English]

**Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My colleague from Acadie—Bathurst obviously was not listening to Mrs. Redman. Karen was not talking about giving lessons to anybody. She actually said very clearly that every party was guilty of abusing this privilege, and I think that's very important.

With regard to Mr. Hill's comment that this report or this motion was tabled on the eve of an election, I'd like to remind my colleague that the election was anticipated to take place in the spring. In fact, she tabled this some weeks ago. So no, in fact, that wasn't the situation.

With regard to the Board of Internal Economy not being able to come up with a consensus on this issue, that is problematic. In fact, one of the main issues in the House of Commons that's coming up more and more is this whole issue of ten percenters and householders and people abusing them. If it can't be resolved at that level, well, then maybe our committee should look at it. It seems to me we are the appropriate committee to look at this kind of issue.

With regard to franked mail, as far as I'm concerned, and I'm sure my colleagues would concur, I think that is another issue we should look at seriously. Personally, on the whole idea of going outside our boundaries, I'm sure the original intent of these householders and ten percenters was to inform our own constituents, but it's gotten out of control, and basically people are one-upping each other.

In my personal case, I've been an MP for three and a half years now and I have always stayed within my riding until this year, because this stuff was coming into my riding all the time. I hate like hell to do it, to be honest with you. I don't think that was the original intent. I think the original intent was to inform our constituents in our ridings, not in everybody else's riding.

I find this is an appropriate committee to look at this issue. It is a huge problem on all sides—not on the opposition side only, we admit that. It is an issue that has to be resolved.

Monsieur Guimond speaks of *faire de la politique*. We don't want to be canonized, we're doing politics here, and I think that is exactly what adds to the skepticism of Canadians with regard to politicians. That it would be a negative thing to do politics, I think, is absolutely aberrant. I find this is an opportunity for us to look at this from all parties, and let's put forward the franking issue if it's something that the opposition wants to discuss. Let's not just throw this aside, because it'll go to Internal Economy again and there won't be a consensus. It is an issue that I think is out of control in this House and it should be looked at seriously.

Thank you.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Reid.

[English]

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I too have had a concern over this issue for some length of time. I was particularly struck during what we thought was going to be an election; as it turned out, there was no election in May, but there was a perception there would be. At that point printing services was inundated with requests, not for ten percenters—they may have had many of those, too—but for large amounts of addressed mail. We saw boxes and boxes of these things.

As a result of seeing that and as a result of seeing mailings popping up not in my own riding, which is not considered a contested riding, but in swing ridings such as Ottawa Centre, for example—large numbers of mailings that came out during what would have been the writ period, addressed mail under Liberal names, addressed as a message from Prime Minister Paul Martin—I was very concerned that there was de facto abuse of the franking privilege by the Liberal Party, something that I note is not addressed in this motion.

For that reason, I attempted to place a question on the order paper when the House resumed. I was told that this is actually better dealt with by the Board of Internal Economy. I submitted the letter to the Board of Internal Economy. I haven't received back a response.

This is what I asked in my letter. I said:

I am writing to you to request information that is within the purview of the Board of Internal Economy....

My question is the following:

Given that Householder and "Ten-Percenter" mailings are paid out of the operating budgets of the House of Commons rather than by the allowances of

individual Members, of those Householder and "Ten-Percenter" mailings sent between January and June of 2005 which contained either:

- a banner line entitled "A Message from Prime Minister Paul Martin"
- a banner line entitled "A Message from the Prime Minister" or
- a line featuring the website "www.pm.gc.ca"?

Please provide copies of each individual mailing, along with a detailed breakdown of the following information:

- those constituencies which received the householder or ten-percenter,
- the number of pieces sent into each constituency,
- the costs of each mailing, and
- the budgets from which each were paid.

**Then I go on and explain:** I should let you know that initially, I attempted to put a question on the Order Paper regarding this information...

The point I'm getting at here is that there was a preferred method used by the Liberal Party to engage in writ-period expenditures that wouldn't technically be considered writ-period expenditures, and they were highly partisan. Here's one that says, "Message from Prime Minister Paul Martin: Harper Turning Back Progress". It features an uncomplimentary picture of Stephen Harper on the outside, another one on the inside.

Given that this method was used at public expense during the last election, presumably to the tune of tens and perhaps hundreds of thousands of dollars, I must say I find it interesting, if nothing else, that we're dealing here with the ten percenter issue in this motion and not dealing at all with the addressed mail issue.

Would the government whip like to come back to us with something that addresses both these issues, with information on how much of this information was sent out and how much of it went to swing ridings as opposed to other areas? My own experience has been that when my riding was considered a swing riding, I had Liberal MPs who were exquisitely concerned with informing my constituents about how well the government was doing, and as soon as it became a safe Conservative riding, they lost all interest. I get no more mailings from Joe Fontana, who seems to be the guy who was assigned to my riding.

Given this, perhaps we ought not to pursue the ten percenter issue without pursuing the preferred Liberal method of sending in partisan mailings at the first part of a writ period.

• (1135)

**The Chair:** Colleagues—

**An hon. member:** Well said.

**The Chair:** I'm not commenting on how well said or not so well said anything is.

I don't know if we're meeting Thursday. I'm in a bit of a difficult situation this morning. It may be the last committee meeting I ever chair in my life.

**Mr. Jay Hill:** You're doing a great job.

**The Chair:** I don't know about that.

Anyway, never mind.

[Translation]

You're up next, Mr. Guimond.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Mr. Chairman, I'm curious about who René Berthiaume is.

**The Chair:** He's my successor.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** The reason I'm wondering is because...

**The Chair:** I sent you my calendar.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** We're witnessing a boomerang effect. Three boomerangs will be coming back to you. Let me give you an example. The Chair won't appreciate this, but since this is one of the last committee meetings that he'll be attending, he won't be able to get back at me. I have here the calendar, thousands of copies of which were mailed out by our colleague, committee Chairman Don Boudria. How many copies are we talking about in total? Is it 40,000, or 42,000?

**The Chair:** I don't know.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** How many households are there in your riding? You have no idea?

• (1140)

**The Chair:** Approximately 39,000.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Neither the word "liberal" nor the party logo appear anywhere. In March, Don Boudria is seen congratulating René Berthiaume. The August page shows the 2005 convention at which his successor was chosen. The citizens of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell receive this calendar and see the former member with his successor. Moving on, I'll spare you the month of February where we have a photograph of Mr. Boudria at two years of age. I'll refrain from commenting, as there are no political connotations associated with this photograph. There is no caption indicating "Liberal candidate" at the bottom of the photograph where Don Boudria is seen congratulating René Berthiaume. Thirty-nine thousand households will be receiving a copy of this calendar. If this material is distributed during the election campaign, then to my mind, this is election advertising. But that's another story. Moving right along, the calendar shows Mr. Boudria with David Peterson on the day of his wedding to Mary Ann Morris, and in September, with the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien. In November, he is seen in the company of the Right Honourable Paul Martin, the Leader of the Liberal Party heading into the upcoming election and candidate for the position of Prime Minister. It's all very subtle. December is the icing on the cake. Mr. Boudria is photographed with the mayors of Hawkesbury and Grenville in a major advertisement. He is a passenger in a vehicle making his first trip across the new bridge. The words Turpin Autos Limited, 640 Main Street West, Hawkesbury, 632-2764 are clearly visible. This is a violation of the Board of Internal Economy rules. This mailing contains advertising for Turpin Autos Limited.

People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. I'd like to tell Mr. Berthiaume that the Bloc Québécois is fielding a candidate in the riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, but I'm convinced my Conservative and New Democratic colleagues will look at which of chalking this calendar up as an election expense, since the outgoing member is depicted with the new candidate. This publication was printed and distributed by the House of Commons.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Leblanc.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We seem to be in a holiday mood. No doubt there will be a vote. Michel pointed out some interesting features in our chairman's calendar. I for one always knew that our chairman, a long-time MP, had excellent political judgment and a very subtle approach to politics, as Michel so noted.

You neglected to mention this, Michel, but his keen sense of strategy led him to choose the month of March to display a photograph of himself with his party's candidate, perhaps because he thought there would be an election at that time. With the events expected to unfold over the next few days, we may not see a March election. As a parting gift to the committee chair, perhaps we could arrange to have the calendar reprinted. This photograph should have appeared in the month of January, the probable time frame for an election campaign. March may be a little too late for those who will have put it on their mail box.

I'm kidding, of course, to emphasize Karen and Raymond's comments. No political party or MP should claim never to have used, for political purposes, either the ten percenter, franked mail privileges or householders.

[English]

The only point I would make seriously...and I don't want to repeat everything Raymond Simard and Karen said, but I agree with them on this issue. Increasingly, in all parties we're using these ten percenters for very partisan purposes, and if the mailing privilege that Jay and others raised is an issue, then I think we should look at that too.

In the same vein, I understand from our chairman that the origin of these ten percenters was the idea that in a period of electoral boundary adjustment...if you think of the purpose of why you could send ten percenters.... Householders were sent to your own constituency. Maybe the opposition whip might remember this. It's anecdotal, but I was told that it was around the time of an electoral boundary change. If a certain portion of someone else's riding were added to yours, maybe you would want to be able to send a ten percenter to cover the new part of a constituency that would, after a subsequent general election, become part of your riding.

My only point is that I do think this needs to be looked at, because I think every party, including our own, as the whip said, has been increasingly using these ten percenters for something other than communicating policies or legislative initiatives with one's constituents.

I can say that from time to time our research bureau and others would ask if I wanted to send a ten percenter, or a regrouping or some other publication, for example, into a riding neighbouring mine in New Brunswick, including a Conservative one, Rob Moore's riding. I've always declined to do that, and Rob has done the same thing. We've had the same discussion, Yvon and I. I personally don't want to use this, because I don't want to invite Yvon, then, to send one into my riding. It becomes a chicken-and-egg problem. Once you start doing that amongst colleagues in a small province like New Brunswick, then you'll find that the whole thing gets flooded.

So far we've been able to avoid that, I think, and my personal position is that it doesn't reflect well on anybody, including me if I were to do that.



So I think this may not be the time, for a whole bunch of reasons, but I do think that the whip is right.

•(1145)

[*Translation*]

We need to understand why these householders have become so partisan.

[*English*]

And I think we can all find a way, perhaps, to put a bit of balance back into it. No party is without sin, but the current pattern, I think, is not particularly helpful for anyone.

That would be my view.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Would someone like to raise a point of order?

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I'd like to correct a statement that was made. Mr. Leblanc should know that we never had this discussion.

**The Chair:** There is one other person who would like to speak. Do you wish to vote on this matter, or continue the discussion? It's up to you.

Mr. Nicholson.

[*English*]

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I was very interested in a number of the comments that were made around the table. I particularly enjoyed Monsieur Guimond's discussion of the partisan nature or lack thereof of your...

He missed the best picture of all, which is of you and *Sa Majesté la Reine*. That is absolutely non-partisan, because as you know, the Queen is above politics. So it's very appropriate that it would grace your householder. Certainly I'd like to see that in all householders, if we could make that available.

**Ms. Karen Redman:** Starting with the Bloc.

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Starting with the Bloc.

Monsieur Guimond, you use that and I'll never accuse you of partisan politics on that.

But with respect to the tone of this conversation, Mr. Speaker, I take a slightly different view. I didn't get the feeling I was getting a morality lecture from Ms. Redman that didn't include all members of Parliament and all parties. I don't think she was trying to single us out, or those of us in the opposition in particular.

I guess I share at least one thing with her, which is that I hope some of the nastiness that seems to pervade some of the discussions and perhaps may pervade the next coming election doesn't happen. I hope there are no lies in this election about anybody or any party. I hope there's a more civil tone in the upcoming election. But we shall all see.

With respect to the question of ten percenters, I guess any discussion of this has to get into the whole discussion of franked mail. I think Mr. Reid has made a good point. I guess all of us have had thousands of letters come into our riding under the frank from someone other than our own political party. So I actually do like the

idea of having a look at this and making sure there are some boundaries and some rules.

I can tell you that I know for certain that a couple of these ten percenters have been turned down, just within the last week, because they were interpreted to be electioneering or election platform promotion. So I know there are some rules. Whether there should be other rules I think actually is a pretty good topic.

But the problem is—and I think you've heard it, Mr. Chairman, again and again—what are we supposed to do at this point in time, send these back to the Board of Internal Economy? How many more meetings do we have, one? It's a bit of challenge, and trying to revamp the rules on this or adding something else just isn't going to work. Quite frankly, I would actually have more sympathy for having a look at something like this if we were at the beginning of the Parliament, as opposed to what most people would conclude are the dying days of this Parliament.

Those are my comments.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Ms. Redman.

[*English*]

**Hon. Karen Redman:** Obviously, Mr. Chair, Mr. Nicholson and I speak more in the House than in committee, and that's why we keep referring to you as Mr. Speaker. I apologize for doing that.

I would ask for a recorded vote, and I'd be happy if I could make a few concluding remarks. I think people have pretty much staked out the territory.

This has been an ongoing irritant. It has been brought to my attention, as whip, constantly by our members—and again, I thank Mr. Nicholson for his observation, which has been made by others as well. I don't think our party has abused these rules any more than anyone else.

I was very hopeful that the Board of Internal Economy could have dealt with this, because I do believe that was the appropriate place for it to be dealt with. That's why the wording of my motion asked for the procedure and House affairs committee to request the House to direct the board, because I do believe that is the one way to effect the change in the Board of Internal Economy.

There certainly has been some tracking done. I don't think the breakdown has been quite as precise as maybe some people would like to see to have the tracking, but I would present to you that I tried to find some way to put some limits or some fences around this. Householders are only named for partisan logos because you cannot redirect a householder to somebody else's riding, unless it's put in an envelope. I quite frankly—pardon the pun—thought the franking privilege.... I would be happy to discuss that at a future date as well.

I looked at something that was a first step, that could rein in some of the abuse that I felt was happening on all sides of the House. We're asking people in the mailroom to make some of these judgment calls, and I would agree with Mr. Nicholson. I know Liberal research bureaus had some ten percenters turned back as well, but because ten percenters are the only piece of mail you can send to somebody's riding other than your own and the only piece of mailing that currently can go through the redistribution centrally, which every party does every month.... On a monthly basis they take 10% of their entire constituency number and redirect that mail. That's been happening, I think, for the entire life of this Parliament.

I felt this was something that needed to have some parameters put around it, which is why, albeit this is not dealing with the franking privilege, it does at least take a step toward stemming some of the abuse that I feel, as a member of Parliament, is indefensible and, quite frankly, I think constituents often find quite repugnant.

● (1150)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Before we proceed to vote, I'd like to make it clear that as a general rule, the chairman only asks the witnesses to answer. I don't tend to give my opinion on matters, except in response to what a witness says. However, if members do not think it inappropriate and have no objections, I would like to express my opinion on this subject.

[*English*]

Would that be all right? Merci.

I've been around here longer than most—at least on my side of the House, I'm the dean—and we didn't have these instruments some years ago. They developed as a result of a redistribution. There was a redistribution some years ago, and as a result, there was a decision made by the board that we could send 10% of our usual number of householders to the neighbouring constituency in order to make a transition, so that the people in the other constituency would know, because they would be within the new boundaries after the election.

Not long after that, this changed. They said, well, if you can send it to the next riding, what's the difference between that and the riding on the other side? And people said, well, okay, we can send them here and we can send them there; it's all the same. And that's how we got into ten percenters.

I remember the days when as an MP, if you put your party's logo or your party's name or anything like that, it was rejected right away. I think Mr. Nicholson may have been a member at the time when that was the case around here.

I've always taken the position that my householder material, if it is partisan at all—and there, maybe Mr. Guimond would think it was—had to be partisan very lightly, and never, never use—

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Light, but partisan!

**The Chair:** Well, that's the position that I took when—

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Tell me why. Tell me why it's partisan.

**The Chair:** The position that I always took—and you can agree or disagree with me—is that the partisan things I did in the House,

and that was the end of them. In terms of sending material to another member's riding, unless another person was on my Christmas card list, or something like that, it was zero. I never agreed to send a ten percenter elsewhere, because I didn't think it was my business.

Members are free to do it whichever way they like. All I can tell you is that the way I've done it has kept me around here for 29 years. I hope that the next Parliament—because it's obvious this is probably not going to change today—reviews the whole thing about mailing. It should do that.

I agree with Mr. Hill that putting it into an envelope doesn't legitimize anything; it's the same whether it has an envelope around it or no envelope around it. It's the same thing. What's right is not wrong because it's in or not in an envelope. It's right or it's wrong, period.

So that's the way I've approached these things. I don't think it's a very effective tool. I think, overall, we overuse that kind of mailing, or all of it combined, whether it's in an envelope, outside an envelope, a ten percenter, or so on. I've always restricted myself to the four mailings a year, and two or three ten percenters in my own constituency—never elsewhere, unless the people are on a short list of 10 or 20 people, or something like that, such as friends who want to hear about a particular subject.

That's what I wanted to say about that.

● (1155)

[*Translation*]

Of course, I won't be around to react in the future. After today's vote, I'd like you to stay behind and let me know if you want to have a meeting on Thursday. The decision rests with committee members. Perhaps we can conclude on this note and take a minute to discuss this possibility. Otherwise, I have something to say on another subject by way of concluding.

Are members prepared to vote?

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I'd like to make a brief comment.

I have no wish to belabour the point, but there's a reason why members should avoid including free advertising in their householders. For instance, if an MP is photographed standing in front of a Tim Hortons, a Dunkin' Donuts franchise could protest that they didn't get equal time. That's what I find odd about the December 2006 photograph. Free advertising for Turpin Autos Limited is going out to 39,000 households in your riding. If I owned Guimond Chrysler Products, I'd be wondering why other auto dealerships were not getting the same deal.

I realize that you were taking part in the inaugural bridge parade, but it would have been more prudent for you to block out the name, so as not to give the dealership in question free publicity. To my mind, this is a violation of the Board of Internal Economy rules.

**The Chair:** Shall I now call the vote?

[*English*]

**Hon. Karen Redman:** A recorded vote.

**The Chair:** A recorded vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

**The Chair:** Colleagues, did you wish to have a meeting this Thursday?

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Chair:** That being the case, it is my last meeting, perhaps. It's not only my last meeting as chair of this committee, which I've enjoyed enormously, but maybe my last committee meeting in my life.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you everyone. That concludes our meeting.

We are adjourned.

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