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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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**Thursday, May 11, 2006**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Gary Goodyear**

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• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC)):** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I'll call the meeting to order.

I would like to advise members that this morning's meeting is in public. Once the witnesses have concluded and we have a vote, I would like to discuss future business for just a few moments.

I would like to introduce, not that an introduction is necessary, the Honourable Peter Milliken, Speaker of the House; and the Clerk of the House, Audrey O'Brien. It's good to see you again, Audrey. It seems as if you were just here.

Perhaps I could hand the floor to Your Honour, and you can introduce yourself and tell us a little bit and introduce any of your officials. Then we'll carry forward.

**Hon. Peter Milliken (Speaker of the House of Commons):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

It's a pleasure to be here to meet with colleagues and deal with the estimates of the House. This has been an annual feature. I can't remember if we did it last year, though. I might have missed; I can't recall. I feel it's been a long time since I've been here, in any event. It's a pleasure to be back and to have this chance to make some comments and then answer some questions. I have the Clerk with me, and between us I think we'll muddle through most of the questions.

Today I'll be presenting the 2006-2007 House of Commons main estimates. For reference purposes you've been given a document showing the year-over-year changes in the main estimates from 2005-2006 to 2006-2007. I'm confident you'll agree with me that the main estimates reflect the services that benefit and aptly represent the interests of members.

On October 31, 2005, the Board of Internal Economy approved the main estimates in the amount of \$400,323,895. This represents an increase of \$17,103,200 or 4.5% over the previous fiscal year.

[Translation]

To facilitate our discussion, I will be discussing the estimates along the following four themes: members' services, committees and associations, salaries and employer's obligations.

First of all, in order to provide additional budgetary flexibility within Members' Operating Budgets, the Board of Internal Economy decided to fund certain services centrally.

[English]

The board assigned approximately \$1.8 million to constituency office telephone and wireless device services to provide the members' main constituency office with a comprehensive package of services. In addition to giving more flexibility within MOBs, this arrangement allowed the House to capitalize on the benefits of centrally managing telephone and wireless device services. Besides permitting consolidated invoicing and streamlining processes, this arrangement has reduced inconsistencies in capacity and service levels, both among regions and in comparison between Hill and constituency offices.

Similarly, the main estimates also provide over \$1.7 million in permanent funding to the furniture and equipment improvement fund for constituency offices. As you know, prior to this initiative all furniture and equipment was purchased within members' operating budgets. The House administration has negotiated standing offers that bring about discounts, and members can charge up to \$5,000 a year to the central fund. Here again, members who purchase furniture and equipment against these standing offers will have more leeway within their operating budgets.

[Translation]

In addition to these two new funds, the Board of Internal Economy approved permanent funding of \$3.6 million to provide a 3 per cent increase to Members' Operating Budgets. This percentage allows members to cope with the rising costs of doing business.

The Main Estimates also provide an additional \$512,000 to the production of ten percenters. This will allow Printing Services to keep pace with the printing volume that has increased exponentially over the past 10 years.

• (1110)

[English]

Furthermore, following an in-depth review of the office of the Law Clerk and parliamentary counsel's administrative requirements, the estimates provide funding for three additional employees. The ultimate goal for this and other House administration service areas is to ensure that members continue to receive high levels of service.

Additionally, in response to the demographics of members and House officers' employees, the main estimates allot funds to your employees' retirement planning needs. Full-time employees aged 40 and over will be invited to a three-day retirement training session in Ottawa, and these sessions will be offered four times a year.

[Translation]

I want to turn now to the importance that the Main Estimates place on information management investments in sustaining the delivery of services to members. We will all agree that we — as members — rely heavily on technology in order to conduct our parliamentary functions. As a result, the Main Estimates assign \$3.2 million to this initiative.

[English]

The Board of Internal Economy has consistently supported the use of technology by providing funding to develop and sustain core information management business applications required to support members in their parliamentary functions.

Two applications you might be familiar with—PeopleSoft, our human and financial resource management system, and PRISM—both have upwards of 1,000 users each and provide the foundations for countless procedural, human resources, and financial services.

It is critical that the House administration continue to build capacity to respond to increasing requests for enhancements and conduct ongoing updates, maintenance, and testing for these indispensable applications. At the same time, we must ensure an effective transfer and retention of expertise, while identifying new technological opportunities and functionalities.

[Translation]

Most importantly, the House administration is committed to continuing to provide the high-quality information management support that members have come to expect.

[English]

The main estimates also reflect the need to support members in their roles as ambassadors of the Canadian parliamentary system, and as such the estimates provide \$1.5 million in funding to enable Canada to host three conferences in 2006-07: first the 52nd annual session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly; the 12th Asia-Pacific Parliamentarians conference on environment and development, which took place in Whistler about two weeks ago; and the 44th regional conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. This was the first time Canada has hosted the Asia-Pacific Parliamentarians conference, I should mention.

All of these conferences are funded according to the usual 30%-70% cost-sharing arrangement between the Senate and the House. We pay 70%; they pay 30%.

**The Chair:** How would that happen?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Well, they have one-third of the members, roughly. I guess that's the deal.

[Translation]

Resources are also provided to hire an additional employee who will be mostly dedicated to the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians. This person will help respond to the evolving requirements of the association.

[English]

In previous years the Board of Internal Economy has provided temporary funding to support new standing committees, an increased

level of interparliamentary activities, and the implementation of the modernization committee's recommendations, which included \$160,000 for technical consultant services. The main estimates show that this temporary funding is no longer required in 2006-07.

[Translation]

Let me turn now to the funding that the Main Estimates assign to salary increases and adjustments. The Board of Internal Economy approved \$2.7 million in additional funding for salaries for employees of the House Administration. These funding increases are in keeping with recent negotiated settlements in the public service.

[English]

Also, as you know, in accordance with Bill C-30, members' salaries and allowances were adjusted based on the average increase in base rate wages in Canada's private sector. The main estimates provide \$1.2 million for this increase.

You might also notice that there is an adjustment to the funding provided for employee benefit plans. These rates are managed and set annually by the Treasury Board of Canada, and the rates for 2006-07 have decreased. As a result, our contributions to employee benefit plans have been reduced by \$2.3 million.

● (1115)

[Translation]

Finally, the Main Estimates also assign funding to the House's obligations as an employer. Funding of \$2.6 million is required for other personnel costs in central budgets. This will cover upcoming expenses resulting from the growing number of employees who will soon be eligible for retirement.

[English]

In terms of employer's obligations, funding is also required for workplace safety and insurance board claims. This funding will help reflect the increased levels of expenditures since the budget was first established in 2000-01.

The additional spending on workplace safety and insurance board claims can be attributed to new types of claims that have only been approved since 2002-03 and to the economic increase in House employees' salaries and the aging demographics of the House's workforce.

I have now provided a brief overview of the 2006-07 estimates that were approved by the Board of Internal Economy. I remain confident that having heard this, you will agree with my original findings that these estimates are representative of our interests as members of Parliament and members of the House, and that they respond to today's requirements while providing strategic investments to meet evolving needs.

Between us, the Clerk and I will be glad to answer any questions you may have concerning these matters.

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

Our round of questioning has been going fairly well, so we'll continue with that format. We'll have seven minutes on the first round, and that will give us time for a second and possibly a third round, if necessary.

Is there anybody from the official opposition who would like to start the questioning?

Monsieur Simard, please.

**Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.):** Mr. Chairman, one of the questions I have is with regard to the employee benefits plan and the fact that it was reduced.

**The Chair:** Order, please.

My apologies.

**Hon. Raymond Simard:** With regard to the employee benefits plan—and it's indicated very clearly that it's based on the Treasury Board of Canada—what is that based on exactly, and why is it reduced this year?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I'll invite the director general of corporate services to give a more detailed answer to that question.

Mr. Desroches.

**Mr. Luc Desroches (Director General, Corporate Services, House of Commons):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The employee benefits plans are the employer's share of unemployment insurance, CPP, superannuation, dental plans, etc. All these plans are administered by Treasury Board, who's the employer of the public service. We piggyback on all of these plans. The Treasury Board makes the payments to all these insurance companies, etc., and they estimate the contribution for employee benefit plans as a percentage of salaries. Last year it was set, I believe, at 21% of salaries. That is what every department, including ourselves, the House of Commons, has to contribute to the pot. The Treasury Board manages that pot to pay these insurance companies, and once in a while they readjust. This year they said 20% of salary base should be enough to pay for these benefit plans, so that's why it's decreased. There's been no decrease in terms of coverage, etc.

**Hon. Raymond Simard:** I also noticed that many of the increases are for new technology, and that would make sense in this day and age. As we know, we probably spent a considerable amount of money in the House of Commons to accommodate computers. Do we foresee any other major expenses in that regard in the House for the next little while, for improvements?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien (Clerk of the House of Commons):** Mr. Chairman, one of the things that's very important to realize is that the investments we make in technology always have to be kept up, in terms of being maintained, but also, as is the nature of technology, they have to be revisited from time to time, so that they can be brought up to date with the newer technology that's constantly being developed.

I have nothing really to put before you right now. One of the things we're trying to do, as we did last year, when we presented cases to the Board of Internal Economy, is to present a House-wide strategy with regard to technological innovation. Some of that is going to be enhancements of what we've already got in order to create a greater capacity and leverage the investment we already have there, and in some instances we're going to be asking for new money to take advantage of new developments in technology.

It's one of those things for which we don't have any specific plans at the moment, specific things that we'd like to try to market to you,

if you will, at this opportunity, but I think the idea is that it represents a continuing investment. I think the people who told us that you invest in technology and then you reap huge benefits forgot that you have to keep investing. And that's an important message to get across, so thank you for the opportunity.

• (1120)

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Another aspect of that issue will be dealt with in the course of the year. Because of changing technologies, a change will have to be made to the video stuff we have in our offices. We're going to have to switch to DVD at some point. Whether that's going to happen in this financial year or not, it's something that's going to happen. Members want to watch one another's speeches, I know, and doing it on video is going to be increasingly difficult because they're going to stop making those things, I'm told, and we're going to have to switch to DVD. It will be a space-saver. Maybe you'll be able to get more of your friends' speeches on one DVD.

**Hon. Raymond Simard:** One of the situations I have run into lately is with regard to the \$5,000 allowance for furniture and equipment. If I'm not mistaken, a deal was negotiated with two national organizations, I believe Grand & Toy and another firm—I'm not sure exactly which one—that prevents us, basically, from buying locally in a lot of cases. I'd just like to know if the deals that were made provide us with substantial discounts, because I was not able to buy in my riding. As a matter of fact, I believe there was one organization in Winnipeg, and I can imagine that the people who are in rural areas are certainly limited by this fact. Was it worthwhile organizing this deal with these two organizations?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** The subject has been discussed in the board. I can say that much.

Luc will have something to say about that.

**Mr. Luc Desroches:** Thank you.

We have negotiated substantial discounts with Grand & Toy and Corporate Express. They have national stores across Canada and warehouses in rural areas. The prices in the catalogues that we provided to the members show that there are some significant discounts that have been negotiated. Other organizations, other large employers, have also negotiated very large discounts with these firms. I know somebody recently compared our catalogue with the catalogue that somebody else had, and they had some discounts. We have the bigger discounts. We have that in our contract with Corporate Express.

There is another savings also. When members buy locally, they pay provincial sales tax. The House of Commons does not pay provincial sales tax, so automatically there is a saving—except in Alberta, naturally—of provincial sales tax of 7% to 8% across the country. That's a minimum, because members, if purchasing with their member's operating budget funds, would have to pay provincial sales tax. There are significant discounts.

[Translation]

**Hon. Raymond Simard:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Simard, you have 40 seconds left.

I wonder if I can just clarify. Are you suggesting that when we order through this \$5,000 House furniture allowance, the local Grand & Toy in my riding or Mr. Simard's riding is benefiting from that purchase?

**Mr. Luc Desroches:** You put your order through Grand & Toy, and obviously Grand & Toy will decide who will ship it to you, but if there is somebody that is closer to you, I would think that Grand & Toy would make that decision.

**Hon. Raymond Simard:** What happens, in fact, is that a local Winnipeg supplier like Cunningham's, a family store, is completely eliminated from even bidding on this, which is a little bit frustrating. That was the point.

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

Mr. Hill.

**Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC):** Thank you.

I have a couple of questions, and if I have any time left, I will share it with my colleague, Mr. Preston.

The estimates here are for just over \$400 million. Can you explain where you draw the line? Is that for all employees on Parliament Hill—the gardeners, for example, the people who drive the little buses, everybody?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Yes. It wouldn't include the Public Works of Canada employees who work on the Hill, but all the employees of the House of Commons—not the Senate, of course—all members and all members' operating budgets, which would include all their staff.

• (1125)

**Hon. Jay Hill:** Of that \$400 million, can you explain what the breakdown is with respect to the ongoing maintenance of, for example, the infrastructure to the buildings and stuff? Is any of that under this budget, or is all that under Public Works? How is that done?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** It's all under Public Works. We would maintain things like the equipment on the Hill that is owned by the House—computer stuff, wiring, and that sort of thing—but the Department of Public Works maintains this building.

**Hon. Jay Hill:** Physical infrastructure, then. So if I have any complaints that the buildings are falling down, I have to take them to Public Works, not to you.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Yes, or you can go to see the minister or his parliamentary secretary.

**Hon. Jay Hill:** Mr. Preston.

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Just to follow up, are security costs included in that, or is that above and beyond?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** The House of Commons security, not Senate security, yes.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** The House of Commons security.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** And not RCMP outside the building, only inside the building.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** So there is a bit of a shared costing in that piece too.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Yes, that's correct.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** I do thank you for the reporting. I have been on a bit of a personal crusade over the last year or two about estimates and how lacking in detail they are. Your last page of detail at least breaks it down so we can see what's going into what pot. I continue to say that if a comptroller in my company had handed me financial details like this he wouldn't hand them in twice. There just doesn't seem to be much on some of these things.

I thank you for the general reporting and the specific parts you've added, but as a Conservative I need to also say we are talking about a 4.5% increase here. Could you enlighten me, since I was not here last year, what last year's increase was?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** In the members' operating budget, last year's increase was....

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** It went from \$346 million to \$383 million. This year it's only going up \$17 million instead of almost \$40 million. We cut it almost in half.

**A voice:** That's more than half.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** It's good that we cut the increase. I understand, and each thing we've added seems as if it was needed—new technology, changes to the members' operating budget—but at some point I'm not sure we can continue to grow at these levels of increases. At what point do we tell the rest of the world we can live within the same means as they do?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** The board tries to be responsive to the demands that members are making, so I guess it's a matter of convincing members that further demands for funding for MOB's or additional services are unnecessary. That's not an easy job. I know that the whips work at this persistently in caucus meetings, from the rumours I hear, but I'm sure it's very difficult for them, because once you start providing a service, even a minimal service, members ask why they're not getting it as well as someone else is getting it elsewhere. You start with maybe a thing like wireless telephone service, and people want better ones and better ones. We've got quite good ones now, but I'm sure it's costing more than it cost when we first allowed members to buy a cell phone out of their members' office budgets. But then they're getting better quality service too.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** I agree, and of course next year there will be a new technology that will need to be there too.

That's really the only point I wanted to make. Thank you.

**The Chair:** There are two minutes left on the government's side.

Mr. Reid.

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Just very briefly, are there any other plans to transfer expenses from members' office budgets to the House budget in addition to what you've discussed—for example, rental costs for constituent offices and that kind of thing?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** No, not at the moment. There are continuing discussions, needless to say, but at the moment there are no plans.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Guimond.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank you for testifying before us, Speaker Milliken and Ms. O'Brien. When the Speaker comes to testify, his entourage is quite considerable. I would also like to extend greetings to these individuals whom we often meet in the course of our work. I see Mr. Desroches, Mr. Bard, the head of security, Mr. Denis, Ms. Lajoie and Mr. St-Louis.

Mr. Chairman, my training was in human resources and I am not good with figures. We must remember that there are human beings behind all these figures, human beings who are of concern to us. There is something that has been bothering me for a long time and that I would like to talk about with you, because I think this is the right place to do that.

Do you have a succession planning program in place? I'm asking the question of the Speaker and to my colleagues, the members of the committee. Do you think it is reasonable and acceptable that the House failed to plan for a successor to Major-General Cloutier, the former Sergeant-at-Arms, who died of cancer at the age of 72? I should say that this is not a trick question that Ms. O'Brien asked me to ask you. I am not in league with her to that extent. Did you think that Major-General Cloutier would live forever? Did he think he would live forever? May God rest his soul. I'm afraid of ghosts and I hope he won't come back to haunt me. Is there a succession planning program in place?

When I worked in human resources, we were told that organizations should have a succession planning program not only for cases where people die of cancer, but to cover all departures, cases where people leave for whatever reason. If Ms. O'Brien is appointed as ethics commissioner, we will have an acting clerk. I know that there are some young wolves behind her who would love to see her leave. I'm not naming any names, but I know that there are some young wolves out there, and perhaps some she-wolves as well.

More seriously, do you have a succession planning program? If so, I would like you to send it to the committee clerk so that we can review it.

• (1130)

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** That is a good question, Mr. Guimond.

There is a program of this type for many House Administration positions. We have hired many young people as table officers in the House the last few years in order to do exactly what you are talking about. Of course, the employees in some of the groups in the House Administration are aging. We do make personnel changes from time to time and we hire new employees who receive the training required from experienced staff.

There is a problem in the case of the positions you mentioned. The Sergeant-at-Arms and the Clerk are appointed by the Governor in Council. These appointments are not made by the Speaker or House employees, but rather by cabinet. It is difficult to prepare someone for the position of Sergeant-at-Arms or Clerk of the House when the appointment is not made by the House.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** All right, let us forget about those two positions.

Let's say that Mr. Desroches is appointed Executive Vice-President of Finance at Nortel and suddenly resigns.

I do not mean to be impolite, Mr. Chairman, but I must say that it is pleasant to roast witnesses. This is great fun. Do not give me a politician's answer. Is there a written program? If so, I would like to receive a copy of it from the clerk. Is there a succession planning program written down in black and white somewhere?

• (1135)

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I am going to ask the Clerk to answer this part of the question.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I hope my answer will not be helpful to the many people out there who are hoping that I will leave.

We do in fact have a succession planning program, but we have no document that would show you how these things are going to happen. I know that my predecessor, Mr. Corbett, was very interested in this issue, as am I. After Mr. Marleau left, Mr. Corbett and I saw the torch being passed to a new generation. Now, we no longer expect people to remain in their positions for decades.

I think it is now more urgent than ever before to see to it that steps are taken to ensure that we can choose and train the people around us with a view to their replacing the senior officers of the House some day. Thanks to the work done by Mr. Marleau and Mr. Corbett, the procedure service is in a very good position today. I have come back to my first love: I came from the procedure service and I am therefore very familiar with it.

I think we have made considerable progress in other areas as well. In January, I had the honour to chair what is known as the Clerk's Forum. It was a retreat for all House officers, and the theme was succession planning. As Clerk, one of my objectives is to ensure that each service has a plan in place to identify and train key individuals, and I am making sure that this is being done. As you were saying, in today's context, we should not only be expecting people to retire; they may also resign or decide to take a sabbatical. There are now all sorts of circumstances that may not have existed in Major-General Cloutier's day.

[*English*]

He was more of an icon

[*Translation*]

than an ordinary public servant. I see every day that we need new energy to train the officials we have and to recruit people who could replace them. There is a whole wave of people who will be reaching retirement age at about the same time. We do not have a plan that we could possibly apply to everyone. There are people who spend their whole career in procedure, while there is a great deal of mobility between Mr. Desroches' service or Mr. Bard's and the public service or the private sector, because the people who work in finance, human resources and technology are in demand everywhere. The options in procedure, however, are rather more limited.

So we share your concerns with respect to the importance of being...

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

Mr. Godin.

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

I would like to welcome all of our witnesses as well.

I have a few questions I would like to ask. It is all very well to award national contracts for office supplies, but people in the regions we represent say that they are taxpayers as well. There may be just one province that is getting the 7 per cent benefit, but that is part of life in Canada. We have provinces and we have a country. The provinces collect taxes...

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** A great country.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Yes, a great country, Michel. If you would visit it, you would like it a lot.

I'm talking about money that benefits the region. However, the people in our region say that they elect their member of Parliament and send him to Ottawa to represent them, and the little companies say that they too want to receive some benefits from their income taxes. I wanted to tell you that this is what people in the regions think. I'm sure that a number of members of Parliament think the same way.

I would like to hear what you have to say about translation. Do you get any complaints about translation? I am not talking about the quality of translation in the House of Commons. I want to know whether it is possible to meet the demand, because the House does have a responsibility to provide translation services to members of Parliament.

● (1140)

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I'm told that translators are not employees of the House of Commons, but rather of the Department of Public Works. That came as a surprise to me, but that is the situation. You should perhaps ask the Department of Public Works this question.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Mr. Chairman, I could add that there is a group within the Translation Bureau that works only for Parliament. Mr. Bard, the person in charge of information services, handles liaison with the Translation Bureau.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I would like a description of what these people do and I would like to know whether there are any complaints. I'm not talking about the quality of the work. When I get complaints about quality, these are cases when translation software has been used, which does not provide a proper translation. I hope you are not heading in that direction, because I would be 300 per cent against it. I'm talking about the service we have here in the House of Commons.

We are at a disadvantage. Let me give you an example of what I mean. I come from a bilingual region and we always have to send out our documents in both official languages. When someone represents a unilingual region, he or she needs the translation service less. The material we want to send out often arrives late from translation, because the people there are very busy. They do their

best, but... I would like to know what is being done to improve this situation.

**Mr. Louis Bard (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons):** Mr. Chairman, there are 300 Translation Bureau employees who work just for Parliament — both for Senate and the House of Commons, as well as other parliamentary activities. This includes the interpreters. There is a hierarchy of priorities for translation. Clearly, when Parliament is sitting, the debates are the first priority. We have a commitment that the proceedings of the House will be available as of 6 a.m. on the Internet and at 8 a.m. in the paper version. This is a huge machine that operates when Parliament is sitting. Next, there is committee work, and the next priority is work for members. All of this is seasonal and cyclical. It all depends on what is going on in the House of Commons.

Last year, during the period when there were over 100 million ten percenters, the translation volume was enormous. From time to time, we do daily reviews of translation volumes. We calculate what is delayed. We review the service standards. We try to improve the work tools as much as possible so that we can hire translators working in remote locations, not just in Ottawa. Many new initiatives are underway to increase the number of translators and interpreters we have.

If you have complaints all the time or if there are services you find inadequate because of the delay, you should bring this to our attention. At that time, we will review the situation and work on much more concrete things than we do in our daily evaluations of the translation volumes. This is an ongoing concern. There is also a link as well between the activities of the Senate and those of the House of Commons. When the Senate is sitting, some of its work has the priority. There is a whole decision-making procedure, but I can tell you that these people work only for Parliament and try to meet members' needs in the best possible way.

● (1145)

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** You mention that there are priorities. We know when the House of Commons sits, because there is a calendar. When it sits, there are individuals doing the simultaneous translation. There are also people working on the text of Hansard for the next morning. And there is the service for members of Parliament. If the House of Commons is busier, does that mean that the service for members of Parliament suffers? Members of Parliament are supposed to be providing services to the people of Canada. We should not forget that we are here for them. If a member of Parliament comes from a bilingual region, he or she wants to try to have material just as quickly as an MP from a unilingual region. As members of Parliament, we want to provide equally fast service for our constituents.

**Mr. Louis Bard:** That is a very good question, Mr. Chairman. The service to members continues at all times. It all depends on the volume they receive on a particular day. In the House of Commons, more English than French may be spoken on a given day. The same is true in the case of documents. There may be more documents in French to translate or vice versa. It all depends on what is happening.

The important thing for me is the trend. I note your concern: you have seen deterioration in the translation service for members of Parliament. I will pay particular attention to this matter.



**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I would like to raise a point. All I am saying is that sometimes we need a document translated quickly. We submit our request, but sometimes we have to wait until the evening before we get what we need.

**Mr. Louis Bard:** If your translation request is urgent, it is important to specify that.

[English]

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

We'll move to round two, colleagues. There will be five minutes per questioner. We'll start with Mrs. Redman.

Mrs. Redman, you're splitting your time, if there's any left, with Mr. Proulx.

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Yes. Thank you.

**The Chair:** And I have Mr. Allison and Monsieur Guimond, and we'll go back to Monsieur Godin.

Mrs. Redman, please.

**Hon. Karen Redman:** Thank you.

I have a comment and a couple of questions.

I know my colleague, Mr. Preston, was saying that being Conservative, he was worried about the increases, but I would have to tell you, I think these are very prudent increases that have had much discussion at the Board of Internal Economy.

I look at the 3% increase in members' operating budgets and would underscore that's service to Canadians. There is nothing going into the pockets of any members of Parliament; indeed, the increase goes to give decent salaries to hard-working constituency and Hill staff. I'm glad to see that we're able to fill in some of the demands on constituency offices.

I want to ask a question about the main estimates—the increase of \$512,000 for the production of the ten percenters. I know from the text that's the year-over-year increase, but you say that it has exponentially increased over the last ten years. Can we assume that graph will continue to go up and it will continue to be an increase in our annual expenditure?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** We don't know whether to assume that or not. The number of ten percenters being produced has increased very dramatically. In the last financial year there were 111 million pieces printed by House of Commons printing services for members. That 111 million includes ten percenters only and not the householders.

I don't have the figure for the previous year at my fingertips, but it's a significant increase and it has been going out for some time. We're assuming it will either continue to increase or stay at that kind of level. It's a lot of printing.

**Hon. Karen Redman:** I don't want to take up all of Mr. Proulx's time, but I would be interested in knowing what percentage of members of Parliament use their full allocation. I realize there's actually no limit, but in one month if I send out ten percenters enough to cover my riding, there must be a ceiling, and I know there's not right now. I wonder if maybe that's something we should look at in the future, because it seems to be going up and up. I don't know if you want to answer that.

Under employers' obligations I want to point out that there is an increase, but that also covers parental leave. I want to say how pleased I am to see that we are able to afford families with children that kind of flexibility.

Have there been any initiatives or studies...? I realize this is more of a policy rather than a dollars-and-cents-alone initiative. We used to talk about family-friendly workplaces, whether it was flexible hours or.... I know that parental leave and leave for people to look after sick and infirm relatives were brought in by the previous government. Are there any initiatives going on within the bureaucracy to look at whether or not this is a family-friendly place to be employed?

● (1150)

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Yes, Mr. Chairman, one of the things we have worked at very energetically is the whole idea of presenting to employees the most reasonable and accommodating approach in terms of the responsibilities they have vis-à-vis their families. For example, one of the things that's going on now is we're studying the elaboration of a new policy on the duty to accommodate, the whole idea of being able to accommodate exceptional circumstances, whether they are for family or whether they are.... They don't even have to be exceptional circumstances, but what do we do to accommodate families? We're looking at that again to see whether or not there are revisions we need to put in place.

We have flexible hours. We have very generous maternity and paternity benefits and leave. We're seeing more and more young fathers taking paternity leave. That's one of the things that I think is very appealing to employees here. I would say, generally speaking, we're an employer of choice with regard to family matters and support to wellness in that regard.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Thank you.

Mr. Allison.

[English]

**Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to our witnesses today.

I have one quick comment and then three very quick questions. I just want to say, from my point of view, I'm glad to see that the \$5,000 for furniture has become permanent. In 2004, when I was elected, I inherited Sheila Copps' furniture, and the most impressive piece of furniture was the paper shredder. I'm being dead serious. I had never seen a paper shredder so big, although the other equipment was in need of repair, should I say, in terms of desks and things. Without actually going out and replacing all the equipment, this \$5,000 will certainly enable me over the years to replace desk and chairs, so I do appreciate it becoming a permanent part of the allocation.

In terms of technology, I know we talk about information technology investments and the same delivery of services to members. Would that include things such as the upgrades to the House in terms of the technology with speakers and things like that? Okay. That makes some sense.

I also think it makes a lot of sense if we maintain some consistent level. The challenge I have is we're just sitting in here not knowing the historical categories. We look at an increase of 11% to 12% last year or the year before, but we don't really know how to compare it to where we're going to be even next year.

It's hard to look into the future and know what's going to pop up and what isn't. Do you anticipate that as we start to fund some things so we don't have big hits and big flows, we will be looking at modest increases like 4% to 5% a year, or are you able to tell that at this point in time?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Are you referring to the technology or to the overall budget?

**Mr. Dean Allison:** The overall budget.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** I think it's very difficult to predict where members will be feeling the pressure with regard to their own budgets. I thought you were referring to technology, because in that regard I was going to say that I think the campus-wide infrastructure we've put into place and the foresight the board has shown with regard to those investments will serve us well in the sense that it is intended for the long term. It's an investment that we will continue to leverage.

**Mr. Dean Allison:** I think that makes some sense.

My other question is with regard to the committees and associations. Again, not having sat, or not having some historical perspective, I wonder, is that something that happens every year or is that just on a case-by-case basis? I realize that committees or the associations won't change, although there could be some different ones, but is this expected? Do we have an opportunity to host associations, perhaps two or three per year?

• (1155)

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** It varies. For example, we had a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association meeting of the speakers here a couple of years ago. That won't happen again for quite a long time. So it's a matter of moving these things around. The NATO one, I'm sure, rotates among the various member countries fairly significantly. We wouldn't get that one very often either.

The Commonwealth one referred to is a regional one. It's basically the provinces and Ottawa and the territories. That rotates among all the provinces and the territories. Again, that should only happen every 13 years or so.

So it's that kind of thing. This year we just happened to get three, and extra money was required. Obviously, money might be required for a really large one, when one of those falls in, but it's not an annual thing by any stretch of the imagination. It just happened to come this year.

**Mr. Dean Allison:** Those are all the questions I have.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Guimond.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to ask another question about succession planning.

I would like to tell the Clerk that I find her answer both satisfactory and disappointing at the same time. I see that she is concerned about succession planning, but that there is no written program or official exercise in place.

I do not want to play the grandfather with you, but my modest 16-year experience in human resources tells me that it might be a good idea to have a written program. They are called succession charts. That would be extremely helpful.

Since we have to take witnesses as they are, I must accept your answer, even though it disappoints me slightly.

I would like to make a comment directed at my colleagues. Earlier, we talked about a centralized fund for purchasing furniture, and Mr. Desroches mentioned discounts of 46 per cent. When you go to a clothing store on Boxing Day and see signs advertising discounts of 50 per cent and 75 per cent — and Scott Reid's family is involved in this sector — I hope you don't think that companies are really taking a loss. It is easy to give a 46 per cent discount on an article when the price is inflated. In another forum, I had demonstrated in black and white that the prices were inflated.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Desroches will probably answer my next question at the appropriate time and place. Transportation costs need to be taken into account as well. The distribution centre for Grand & Toy, which is located in Toronto, ships a photocopier or a conference table to Gaspé or Sept-Îles. How much would the transportation cost be? We could buy this merchandise from our local supplier. Mr. Desroches need not answer my question about transportation costs immediately. He could give us that answer in a different forum. I cannot talk about what is said in that other forum, because I've taken an oath of secrecy. It is somewhat the same as when we talk about the other place.

You are a member of Parliament, Mr. Speaker. I would like to raise a sensitive matter. Can we trust members of Parliament to manage their budget? Is it thought that members of Parliament are wheelers and dealers who try to play games to get discounts or rebates? When you are told that you have \$5,000 to buy furniture but that you cannot buy it from your local supplier, that is a polite way of saying that you are not trustworthy.

Mr. Speaker, when your advertising costs are set at 10 per cent of your budget, that means that someone does not trust you to manage your budget. You're not supposed to use 20 per cent or 28 per cent of your budget for advertising costs. However, a member of Parliament may decide not to have a riding office. When I visited members of Parliament in Scotland, they had their riding office in their home, in their private residence. They did not have a riding office. Some members of Parliament could decide that their riding office was the trunk of their car. They could decide to keep all their files there. They would simply have to open their trunk, take out their files and go to meet with their constituents at Tim Hortons — just to please Sheila Copps — or wherever. However, people will judge them and decide that they are not good members of Parliament because they do not have a real riding office, because their office is the trunk of their car.

So, my question is rhetorical, admittedly. However, it does concern the level of confidence that we should enjoy as members of parliament.

• (1200)

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Mr. Guimond, you have been a member of the Board of Internal Economy for a long time. The board decided to increase the members' budget without giving them money. This was done through the creation of a fund that allows members to buy furniture or other equipment. Therefore, this is a fund that is centrally administered by the House of Commons, which is not part of the member's budget.

The member still has a budget to buy anything for his riding office, anywhere in Canada. These moneys are available for that. We created this fund in order to allow members to save money, if they wish to do so. But if they do not wish to do so, or if they wish to eliminate a position or reduce an employee's salary, they are free to do so.

Furthermore, it is the responsibility of each of us here to administer the budget. This is another opportunity to save money, if you will. However, if we wish to buy something at a higher or lower price, we may also do so. One is not obliged to buy equipment with money from this fund. The member's budget is available for that.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Godin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I remember at one time I had wanted to buy a laptop computer in Bathurst. I was advised to buy it in Ottawa, and I refused. I was not elected in Ottawa. People at home have the right to earn a living there, as do people elsewhere. I am not there to support Ottawa businesses. In my opinion, it is the capital, period. As for the rest, what is important is where we come from. Still, some people bring pressures to bear. In this case, for example, I was told that if I bought my computer in Bathurst, the maintenance and repairs would not be done here, in Ottawa. We constantly have to fight for these kinds of things, and I find that unacceptable. After all, their role is to provide services.

I would like to come back to the comment made by our Conservative colleague, who thought it appropriate to specify that he is a Conservative. With all due respect, I would point out to him that we were aware of that fact.

Today, we are in the presence of two chairs, that is to say the Speaker of the House of Commons and the chair of the committee. I must emphasize the fact that the budget passed today has been passed by the four political parties. Otherwise, it would not exist. The expenses were authorized by the Board of Internal Economy. The political parties are all present and the expenditures have been allocated.

Furthermore, in every office in the Justice Building, employees have an alarm button. If there is an emergency, they need only press that button in order for security services to intervene. In our party, we have a collective agreement in which there are provisions dealing with occupational health and safety. Employees in all of the riding

offices should be covered by these. The House of Commons should perhaps defray the costs of these kinds of services for employees working in the ridings. These safety measures should be mandatory.

Here, we are surrounded by security guards — and I congratulate them for their work — members of the RCMP and city of Ottawa police. These people are all around the building. In the ridings, on the other hand, some people work alone. In some cases, that is where problems start. Let me give you an example. In my area, the unemployment rate is 20 per cent. Some people, who live in poverty, have frustrations. I do not mean to say by that that poor people cause problems. There are all kinds of people and all kinds of things happen. I do not believe I am the only one to express such fears. We need only think about what sometimes goes on in urban centres, amongst others. In any case, I believe that all employees of riding offices should enjoy some kind of occupational safety measures. This system should offer each and every one of them the same protection.

I would like to thank you for coming to our meeting.

• (1205)

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Mr. Chairman, we could certainly take that under consideration. However, it raises certain difficulties, one of which is the fact that members choose the locations in their ridings and in these areas, it would concern the local police forces. Nevertheless, we could study...

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Chairman, I was referring to equipment. For example, were an employee to press the button, the call would be transferred to a call system in Moncton and then forwarded to the police in Bathurst. Within three minutes, the police would be on the premises, that is to say at the offices.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** We could continue this discussion after the meeting.

[*English*]

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

I have Mr. Proulx next and then I have no more names. If anybody would like to ask a question, please get your name to me.

Mr. Proulx, five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker and Madam Clerk. I also say hello to your assistants, who are the ones who actually do the work, in reality.

Ms. O'Brien, you are accompanied by Mr. Bard, and that suits me. Do not worry, Mr. Bard, I will not be talking to you about technology.

I want to come back to the issue of translation and interpretation. I know these employees do not report directly to the House. I presume that the departments sell the services they offer to the House. In any case, that is not the subject of my comment.

I would like you to explain to us what quality-control mechanisms exist. I have the advantage or disadvantage of being bilingual. When I listen to the interpretation in the House or at committees, I sometimes perceive that there are differences between what the Speaker has said and the interpretation. This only happens very rarely, but only a single person need interpret incorrectly for the whole system to become tainted.

There is also the issue of texts that we have translated from our offices using the services provided by the House. The service is fast and well documented, but I would like to know what process the House uses to control quality.

**Mr. Louis Bard:** Mr. Proulx, you are asking me a question that I would have trouble answering today. I am not aware of the internal workings of the parliamentary translation bureau nor of the ways in which a translator is assessed, nor how quality standards are maintained. However, these are issues that concern us because we do receive a certain number of complaints.

You know that interpreters and translators are human beings. It all depends on the person who is there and on how things are working on a given day. Also, these people acquire a certain independence. They are very proud of the services they offer and they use many specialized tools. There is often a relationship to the volume of work. If there is a significant amount of work, that can present certain difficulties. If there is more French spoken in the House one day, that can cause complications because there are rules, standards to be followed, etc.

If this is so apparent to you, we should be able to discuss more specific issues with these people, with whom we meet regularly to share our concerns. That is the only way in which we can improve the system.

I could get back to the committee with a more detailed report on the way in which quality is controlled.

•(1210)

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Mr. Chairman, I would like to know if there is any monitoring done, whether it is in the area of interpretation or in translation. In the great majority of cases, these people are absolutely impeccably professional.

I come back to the fact that a single weak link in the chain can taint the system. Two years ago, I sat on a committee where the interpretation, unfortunately, was far from perfect. This can have very serious consequences. If a person answers a question in French with a “yes” and a “no” in English, or vice versa, that could be quite dangerous.

Ms. O'Brien, I must insist that we be made aware of how the quality is controlled.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer you my congratulations. Having worked in different spheres and with all kinds of people, I can say that at the House of Commons, the services we receive from your staff are absolutely extraordinary. I do not know what you put in the water or in the coffee in the morning, but whether we are talking about maintenance staff, trucking services, technical staff or security people, they are all very attentive and very polite. I do not know if you offer them courses or what you

do, but you should perhaps patent your methods, because there is a lot of money to be made with that. Therefore, I congratulate you.

Madam Clerk and Mr. Speaker, I hope you will extend my congratulations to these people, because they are quite outstanding. Thank you.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I agree with you. Your commendations will be passed along.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** There are many residents of the Hull—Aylmer riding amongst them. And I don't mean that in a partisan way.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Order.

I certainly don't want to be the one to interrupt a good compliment in full flight, but we're going to have to move on.

I do not have any more speakers on my list. Is there any more discussion?

Seeing no further discussion, if you could hold on for one moment, please, Mr. Speaker, I would like to dispose of the estimates and report them back to the House.

First of all, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your coming and your affording us some time today.

Thanks as well to the Clerk of the House and all of the other officials and witnesses.

Members, in front of you is vote 5, Parliament:

**PARLIAMENT**

House of Commons

Vote 5— Program expenditures.....\$256,312,000

(Vote 5 agreed to)

•(1215)

**The Chair:** As well, I would like to report to the House by noon tomorrow, if we can.

Shall I report the main estimates to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and the Clerk of the House. I appreciate your coming out.

We will take a short recess, members, and then we'll talk about future business.

• \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

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**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

I believe Mr. Reid wants to propose a motion for members of the committee to have a look at.

Have you distributed the motion to the members?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I believe the clerk has distributed it. It's in both official languages.

This motion, Mr. Chairman, is intended to deal with an issue that arose when the Ethics Commissioner was here. I'm not sure if it's appropriate to simply treat this as a notice of motion so that people can deal with this at a later point in time or to ask for the consent of members of the committee. Obviously, I'm at the disposal of the committee as to what is the appropriate course of action.

**The Chair:** Has everybody had an opportunity to read this motion from Mr. Reid? Are there any concerns with it, or shall we just carry it and send it out?

Mr. Godin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Chairman, I do not know if Mr. Reid is better informed than I am, but I do not recall mentioning where my daughter was working when I filled in the forms. Is that the case? Do we have to state where our children work?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** If I may, I can vouch for that. I have a 19-year-old daughter, and it did ask where she worked. Members may remember that we had a situation here in Ottawa where a young lady left a Wendy's and was accosted. I don't think information about where my children work is necessary.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** That is my first question.

I do not recall indicating where my daughter worked. I'm sorry, but I will always refuse to state that, this being for the safety of my children. People will never know where my girls work.

Secondly, is this the procedure? Is this the way to do things? Are we to pass a motion in committee and send it to the commissioner? Does the Commissioner have the power to change that? A parliamentary committee passes a motion and sends it to the commissioner. Imagine the power we would have over the Ethics Commissioner. We could pass all kinds of motions and send them on to the commissioner, who would have to do our bidding.

[*English*]

**Hon. Jay Hill:** We do have that power.

**The Chair:** If I could respond to that, the committee does have that power.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I was asking the question.

[*English*]

I'm not going against what Scott has done, I'm just asking, do we have that power?

[*Translation*]

When we send it to the commissioner, does he have the power to change that or does it have to be done through a ministerial rule change, or rather in the House?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Reid, would you like to respond to that?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Scott Reid:** In subsection 30(2) of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons, it says: Any rules approved by the Committee shall be reported to the House and shall come into effect when the report is concurred in by the House.

[*English*]

It's intended that all the rules and administration of the code will be supervised by the committee. When the commissioner was here, I specifically asked him why he was requiring the public reporting of this kind of information. It's hard to see how this kind of information would help to ensure that public scrutiny will prevent conflicts of interest from occurring.

He said that the reason he was doing it was that he had been told by this committee. Frankly, I don't recall him being told that. But in response to a specific question, he said that's why he's doing it.

I then asked him, if we recommend that you stop doing this, would you consider that to be a countermand to the previous instruction that you believe you received? He said yes. So I'm simply following through on that.

I do note also that in the summaries made available to the public, there's quite a long section of the code, section 24, where it says, in the relevant part of this, that "any other asset, liability or source of income that the Ethics Commissioner determines should not be disclosed" can be left out if the information is "not relevant to the purposes of this Code"—and I don't think this information is relevant to the purposes of the code—or if it is "a departure from the general principle of public disclosure" to release this information.

Again, I think this departs from the general principle regarding public disclosure. This would allow us to simply bring the application of the code better into conformity with the purposes of the code.

● (1220)

**The Chair:** Mr. Simard.

**Hon. Raymond Simard:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

If I have a concern here, it's that I do believe we have the power to make these adjustments and make these changes, but I also believe we have the responsibility to look at the whole code. I don't believe these were the only issues brought up with the commissioner the other day. Several issues were brought up. Some people mentioned a spouse's credit card balance, which is absolutely ridiculous.

I'm not sure if we're going to be speaking to future business, but I think one thing we should do is review the whole code and make some recommendations, as opposed to just cherry-picking and identifying these issues as being the major issues. I would probably agree with this in principle, but I think we have a responsibility to review the whole thing.

**The Chair:** Mr. Hill, please.

**Hon. Jay Hill:** I think all of us would agree with that, given the problems we've had over the past year or two with the ethics commissioner's—I'll put it this way—perception of the code and how he has to administer his duties in relation to the code. He himself, as Mr. Simard suggests, has brought forward some concerns about some of the, for lack of a better term, grey areas, that we can perhaps assist him or any future ethics commissioner in tightening things up.

I'm not opposed to that; I don't think any of the members of the committee are opposed to having a look at that. My only concern would be that this might be something that's going to take a while. While I agree with Mr. Simard—his term was cherry-picking—we don't want to do this piecemeal. We want to make sure that whatever changes all of us can suggest and reach consensus on, we will go forward in a more comprehensive manner.

I'm just a little concerned that we might have a situation in the meantime where information is released about family members that is irrelevant. If it's going to take, I don't know, several months or whatever to do a proper review of the code, if we're all in agreement that the information shouldn't be released, then why wouldn't we just do it?

As well, I would agree with Mr. Simard that we immediately consider a thorough review.

**The Chair:** Mr. Simard, and then Mr. Godin.

**Hon. Raymond Simard:** Yes, I think we're very close. For instance, in this motion here, I probably would agree that we should take the children's names off that list, but maybe we want to keep our spouses there, where they work and all that. I do believe we have to have that discussion. I just think this is premature. I would think that if you were to indicate children instead of relatives, it would probably pass today. I think that's the major concern, if I'm not mistaking Mr. Reid.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I can respond or just wait until later on.

**The Chair:** Would you just hold, because I want to go to Mr. Godin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Earlier on, I simply wanted some information so as to know whether we were going in the right direction.

I'm prepared to support this motion. Whether it has to do with relatives or children, the public does not need to know their place of work. That is a safety issue. I'm prepared to vote on this motion today.

With respect to the code, we will have time to deal with it. We could do so according to established standards.

In this case, we are dealing with the safety of parents and children. Perhaps I missed something, but I can assure you that I would never publicly mention the place of work of my children, for the safety of my family.

•(1225)

**The Chair:** Mr. Guimond.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I would like to suggest a compromise. We could study the ins and outs of spousal relationships. I should say

that I am rather more in favour of this motion than against it. However, spouses should not serve as a front for questionable activities.

When it comes to ethics — that was one of the key issues of the last election campaign — the prerequisite should be transparency. If we've got nothing to hide, let's go. Personally, I think we should seriously consider the issue of spouses. I share Mr. Godin's concerns about children. Actually, we are looking to further protect children.

I would suggest the following compromise. On the issue of children, we could continue along the same vein, and then do a more thorough assessment of the issue of spouses. I'm not going to disclose any caucus secrets, but some colleagues say that our spouses collaborate with us and support us during the election campaign, but they are not members of Parliament nor did they run as candidates. Our spouses ask us to respect them. My spouse has nothing to do with this. Why should she have to open up all of her drawers?

Are we currently sitting in camera? No? All right.

So I would suggest this compromise. Let's go ahead with the children and do a more thorough examination of spouses. When we introduced the notion of spouses, some of my colleagues...

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Order, please, colleagues.

It sounds to me like we'd have a consensus if the motion were changed to “children”, defining “children” as under twenty.

Is everybody okay with that?

Are you okay, Mr. Reid, with changing the motion to “dependent children”?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Actually, I'm fine with that.

I'd just ask the question, what's the preference? I guess I'd ask you if you would ask the committee that. Is the preference to make that change and pass it now, or would it be preferable to just wait and perhaps ask our researcher to take a look at that and give people a chance to go back and chat with their colleagues and find out if there are other concerns? That might be the best way to do it.

**The Chair:** Then we will prepare a report for Tuesday? We have all of that on record.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** But the minimum idea would be to go with “dependent children”, right?

**The Chair:** Yes, that would be the intent of this particular motion.

Agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Great. Then we will get that report prepared for next Tuesday's meeting.

Second on my list of future business is the subcommittee on Parliament Hill security, a subcommittee that we set up the other day.

Monsieur Guimond, you were volunteered for that committee, and I want to thank you very much. Are you happy with that?

[Translation]

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Precisely, Mr. Chairman, I know you would appreciate my insight, but unfortunately, my duties prohibit me from sitting on such a subcommittee.

The colleague who was replacing me suggested my name in good faith. I gave him \$20. But seriously, the member for the Bloc Québécois will be Mr. Gérard Asselin, the member for Manicouagan. Once again, there may be a change. Subject to the subcommittee's agenda, I could suggest another candidate.

• (1230)

[English]

**The Chair:** That's acceptable to me. Does anybody have a concern?

Then what I would like to propose is that the first subcommittee meeting be next Tuesday morning at ten.

I see that doesn't work for Monsieur Proulx. All right, we will then leave it up to our clerk to set up a meeting. So that's carried.

Just as a reminder, the next meeting, on May 16, is on electoral reform. I was hoping not to have witnesses at that meeting; it would be a round-table discussion. So could we approach our colleagues and get ideas on what concerns they have, and we will have a discussion at that meeting as to what concerns we have with respect to electoral reform? Then we may want to decide on what other witnesses we want to call. Does that make sense to everybody?

**Hon. Raymond Simard:** Is that the whole meeting, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** It likely will be the whole meeting. I'm recommending that it be in camera, but that's up to the will of the committee.

Mr. Godin.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Chairman, should we not strike a subcommittee on electoral reform? Last year, the committee spent a great deal of time studying electoral reform. We had the feeling that this was no longer the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs but rather the Committee on Electoral Reform. I personally would rather have another member from my party study electoral reform.

The problem is that if, for instance, the committee sits on Thursdays and part of the meeting has to do with electoral reform and the other part has to do with the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regular business, we will have to change the members mid-way.

I've given you my opinion, and I would like you to consider it.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Hill.

**Hon. Jay Hill:** Just on that, I would agree, Mr. Chair, with your suggestion that we devote that first meeting to developing—hopefully through consensus—what our objectives are on that topic and on how we proceed or go forward. Obviously it could be part of the discussion as to whether the most effective way would be to have a subcommittee that would be ongoing and what the mandate of that

subcommittee would be, because it would be looking for direction from this group, obviously.

In that light, I'm not sure that everyone currently sitting on the procedure and House affairs committee has reviewed the report that was prepared in the last Parliament, following our trips overseas when we were looking at different electoral systems. Perhaps that could be dug out of the archives and be circulated to everyone prior to that meeting.

**The Chair:** Do you remember what report that was, Mr. Hill?

**Hon. Jay Hill:** I'm sure Jamie can find it. I don't remember the title.

**Mr. James Robertson (Committee Researcher):** We will circulate that report this afternoon. That was a report on the process for reforming—reviewing—the electoral system, primarily the question of whether Canada should look at a proportional representation type of system and the process for making that kind of change.

This particular proposal of the chair was to look at the legislative changes for the Canada Elections Act that have been recommended by Mr. Kingsley in the past and that various other members have raised, both at this committee and elsewhere—changes to the existing Canada Elections Act that there's a certain urgency to make, given that this is a minority Parliament. The idea would be to try to get some of those changes reported by this committee to the House and to the minister in a timely way so that if legislative changes were to be introduced, they could be done so in a short period of time, and the changes could be implemented at the earliest opportunity.

But we will ensure that all of these materials are put forward to the members of the committee this afternoon.

• (1235)

**The Chair:** Including the summary.

**Mr. James Robertson:** We have a summary of the changes that have been recommended by Mr. Kingsley.

We have a background paper on the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, which Mr. Proulx, Mr. Godin, and Mr. Guimond have all indicated should be addressed at some point in the near future. We will also circulate the report from this committee from the last Parliament.

**The Chair:** Mr. Hill, please.

**Hon. Jay Hill:** Mr. Chair, as a whip, there's another issue I know about that a number of colleagues have approached me with, and I'm sure I've had discussions with the other whips on it. It's the whole issue of renaming and the different constituencies. I would hope that's part of our discussion as well, how we'll proceed with that issue, whether we can reach some sort of consensus on a process to proceed with that. Could we throw that in the mix?

**The Chair:** Do you mean versus using a private member's bill?

**Hon. Jay Hill:** Exactly. Because if we have a number of people who want to consider that, we should have a process that everybody's agreed to, rather than have 12 private member's bills or something.

**The Chair:** I'm going to go to Mr. Reid now. Did you have something?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** With regard to the electoral redistribution, I think one of the factors that needs to be taken into consideration is that we have to deal with the court case that Monsieur Godin participated in, which related to the adjustment of the boundaries of his constituency. There was a court ruling that I think has some bearing. Presumably, we would have to take into account what the court ruled, so I was hoping our researcher could provide us with a copy of the judgment.

If it's one of those judgments that is hard to read—because unfortunately, good writing skills are not necessarily a requirement to serve on the Canadian bench—he might be able to give us a little summary of it. In particular, I think the question here is whether certain indicators of community of interest, language in particular, are now regarded by the courts as being privileged over other considerations. If they are, then we have to take that into account in how we deal with this legislation.

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I just wanted to add that I think we should probably have the report that we wrote up on the whole issue of distribution and the recommendation. We did lots of work. This committee formed a subcommittee, and we spent week after week on it.

We had a good report, and I think that report should come back and they should be able to look at it. If we all agree to support it, we can send it back to the House and ask the government to pass a bill on it, if it's what needs to be done.

**The Chair:** I would have to agree with that. So I'm assuming we're going to get all these reports to all members.

The good news is it sounds like we have work that we will get done. The bad news is it sounds like it's a lot of work. But let's make sure we're all prepared to be here on Tuesday to discuss that issue. And again, speak with your other colleagues to see if they have any concerns. Let's get this thing done.

I have one last note. May 18 is the Australian Prime Minister's visit. Does the committee wish to cancel that meeting? Question period has in fact been moved up, I believe, to 11:15. So are we just going to cancel the meeting?

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** All committee meetings will be cancelled.

**The Chair:** That's good. We're the first to do everything on this committee. I'm going to assume there's consensus that the meeting be cancelled.

Please, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I'm not sure if we should cancel all meetings. Let's think about it. He's going to speak at three o'clock in the afternoon.

**The Chair:** We're not cancelling all meetings, Mr. Godin, just our meeting for May 18. I'm sorry, I may have misled you. We're just

deciding on cancelling our procedures and House affairs committee meeting for that day.

Are we okay?

Please, Monsieur Guimond.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I would like to suggest to my colleague Jay that he canvass our liberal colleague as well as Yvon. Pursuant to the motion which has been adopted, the House will be sitting from 9 a.m. to 11 on that day. Question period will be from 11 to 12 and the House will resume from 12 to 3 p.m. Prime Minister Howard will be delivering a speech from 3 p.m. to approximately 4 p.m., and then the House will adjourn.

I would like to ask the government whip whether it would be wise to consider cancelling committee hearings on that day. The House will be sitting from 9 to 11, at 11 we will have question period and moreover, there will be committees sitting from 9 to 11. We may have some difficulty getting replaced, etc.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Hill, please.

**Hon. Jay Hill:** Certainly I'm supportive of Monsieur Guimond's suggestion. I guess I'm a bit taken aback by Monsieur Godin, because I was trying to understand if he was maybe proposing that we cancel question period instead, and have committee meetings instead of question period.

• (1240)

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** No.

**Hon. Jay Hill:** I'd certainly be open to considering that, Mr. Godin.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I know you'd wish.

**The Chair:** Are we all clear then that the meeting on May 18 will not take place because of the Australian Prime Minister's visit?

May I just move back to one piece of business?

Can we confirm that you've removed your motion or given notice of it?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I haven't moved it yet; that's correct.

**The Chair:** Is everybody clear on everything?

Then the next meeting will be Tuesday, May 16, when we will be dealing with legislative changes to the Canada Elections Act. Agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.









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