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Thursday, March 18, 2010

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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): I'd like to call us to order, please.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a)(vi), matters relating to the election of members in the House of Commons, we are reviewing the supplementary estimates today and having a good discussion, I hope, with the Chief Electoral Officer.

Mr. Mayrand, it is always good to see you.

I will let you do an opening statement and introduce your guests, and then I'm sure we'll have some hard and pressing questions for you.

Mr. Marc Mayrand (Chief Electoral Officer, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer): I'm looking forward to it, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much. Again, I truly appreciate this opportunity to meet with your committee for the first time in this new session to discuss the supplementary estimates for Elections Canada.

I am accompanied today by Ms. Gisèle Côté, chief financial officer, also responsible for internal audit with Elections Canada; and by Mr. Rennie Molnar, deputy chief electoral officer, who is responsible for electoral events.

I will focus my remarks on the necessary costs that Elections Canada incurs to remain in constant readiness for an election.

As members of the committee know, Elections Canada operates under two funding authorities. The first is an administrative vote, which includes the salaries of indeterminate employees. Second, there is a statutory vote, which covers all other expenses of the office. This is where, for example, we find the costs for preparation and conduct of electoral events, be they elections, byelections, or referendums.

For 2009-10, an amount of \$25 million, to be drawn from the statutory authority, was included in the supplementary estimates by my office. This funding is required to prepare for the next general election and the conduct of the November 2009 byelections. Included in this amount is \$17 million for readiness activities, \$2.8 million for the 2009 byelections, \$4.2 million for upgrades to our information technology and field systems, and approximately \$1 million for accommodation costs.

After the 40th general election yielded another minority government, Elections Canada had to return to readiness quickly. Costs

associated with returning to a state of readiness include such expenses as printing and restocking of election supplies.

We have also made some targeted administrative improvements to respond to issues raised during the 40th general election. These improvements include changes to election officer training to include a train-the-trainer strategy and a focus on basic processes for deputy returning officers and poll clerks who would consult the central poll supervisors on exceptional cases; the provision of high-speed telecommunications and cellphones in the returning officer's office to improve communications and reduce office set-up time; and finally, the addition of advance polling districts, especially in rural areas, to improve accessibility.

These changes were successfully tested in the November 2009 byelections. For example, the use of cellphones meant that local Elections Canada offices could be set up without waiting for the installation of land lines. The results of the additional advance polling districts in two ridings were inconclusive and will require more data. With some fine-tuning, these improvements will be implemented in the next general election.

[Translation]

Our readiness activities also include just-in-time preparations that we must initiate whenever an election call is anticipated. These include such things as hiring and training staff to support Returning Officers and to respond to enquiries from the public.

Typically, in a minority government situation, these activities are undertaken twice a year—once in the early fall, and once in early spring. This illustrates how we use the statutory authority to respond to the unpredictability of the timing of electoral events.

Nonetheless, the ongoing necessity to be ready imposes strains on the Agency and its employees. It also limits the efforts we can expend towards making substantial improvements to the electoral process. Therefore, it is essential that we establish clear priorities and to do so, we are guided by the objectives of our strategic plan: Trust, Accessibility and Engagement.

In closing, I would like to mention some upcoming initiatives on which we hope to engage the Committee this spring. By March 31, I will submit to the Speaker of the House of Commons my statutory report on the November 2009 by-elections.

Before the House adjourns for the summer, I also intend to submit to the Speaker my recommendations report following the 2008 general election, for amendments to the Canada Elections Act.

Finally, I would like to engage the Committee on key strategic initiatives that my office is undertaking in the area of accessibility. These include: the development of an e-registration system to permit electors to confirm and update their voter registration information over the Internet; and the conduct of a pilot project in a future by-election, to test the use of technology that will assist voters with visual impairments and physical disabilities in casting their votes independently.

This pilot project is subject to the approval of the committees of both the House and the Senate, as specified in section 18.1 of the Canada Elections Act.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to discuss with the Committee the conclusions of a feasibility study on adding the voter information card to the list of pieces of identification authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer.

I would very much appreciate an opportunity to engage the Committee on these issues at a session at Elections Canada headquarters in Ottawa, later in June.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, that concludes my remarks. My colleagues and I will be happy to answer your questions.

Thank you.

• (1110)

[English]

The Chair: *Merci*, thank you.

Madam Jennings.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Mr. Mayrand.

On page 4 of the French version of your brief, in the first paragraph at the top of the page, you say, and I quote: “The results of the additional advance polling districts in two ridings were inconclusive and will require more data.”

What do you mean by that? What kind of conclusive results were you expecting?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: As you know, that was part of an exercise aimed at adding polling divisions, stations and places for advance polling in primarily rural ridings. We did in fact add a number of polling stations in two ridings during the by-elections.

Of course, the problem is that the voter turnout rate in by-elections is always lower. I am not sure this is a good measurement for comparison purposes. At the same time, we did register some additional votes in these new voting places. However, I cannot say that it resulted in a significant increase in the turnout rate.

In my opinion, that is primarily because these were by-elections. In a general election, we will be in a much better position to compare things that are truly comparable, if I can put it that way.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: That was my only question. My colleagues may have additional questions.

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

Good morning, Mr. Mayrand, Ms. Côté and Mr. Molnar. Welcome. Thank you, for attending our Committee meetings.

Since we are discussing the Supplementary Estimates, can you tell me whether the fact that the 2005-2006 election spending case, which was before the Federal Court and which prompted your appeal, is still pending is resulting in additional expenditures for you? It was commonly called the In and Out Case. Are you forced to maintain additional reserves for that reason?

I presume that the money you could be required to pay to candidates has already been identified and is being held in reserve.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: That money comes out of our statutory appropriations. It will therefore be available, depending on the outcome of the case before the courts.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Fine, but would those expenses appear in the accounts for the year of the election or the year when the payment—

• (1115)

Mr. Marc Mayrand: They will appear in the accounts for the year in which they are incurred. Every year, there is an expenditure item—not in the Supplementary Estimates—but we still have expenditures for the 38th and 39th Parliaments. There are still items to be closed off for the 38th and, of course, the 40th Parliament.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: So, at this time, you have no money set aside in anticipation of those potential expenditures.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: No. When the amount has been identified, we will either amend our Main Estimates, depending on exactly when that occurs, or add it to our Main Estimates or Supplementary Estimates, under statutory appropriations.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Great.

I'll go to Monsieur Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Thank you very much for being here.

You mentioned on page 4 of your statement that your strategic plan includes trust, accessibility, and engagement. You've lost two court decisions related to the so-called in-and-out matter in the last three months. How much have those court proceedings cost Elections Canada in terms of lawyers and awards that the court has decided?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: The first thing is that the two cases are being appealed right now.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Sorry; we have limited time, so perhaps we could just go right to the answer.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: For the GST case, it's \$84,000 so far; and for what's commonly referred to as the in-and-out case, it's \$253,000.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: All right.

How much money has Elections Canada spent on the investigation into that matter?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: This is ongoing, but it's several hundred thousand dollars. I can provide that figure more precisely to the committee.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Several hundred thousand; that's as precise as you can be here?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay. We've seen costs reported in the media as high as a million dollars. Would that be inaccurate?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: I think that's a little bit high from the last figures that were brought to my attention, but again, I can get back to the committee and confirm that number more precisely.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I have an *Ottawa Citizen* headline from December 8, 2008:

In-and-out Tory ad probe costs \$1 Million so far: Elections Canada invoices reveal investigation close to wrapping up.

That was close to wrapping up back in December of 2008. We're now over almost a year and a half later, and it's still ongoing, two court defeats later.

The cost of the investigation continues to mount. Elections Canada and Mr. Corbett's office have spent just more than \$1 million on professional fees and other expenses, the agency says.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: That combines the two costs, the civil case as well as the investigation case.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: That's what I was getting at, then.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Okay. The investigation case, which I thought was the question being asked, was less than a million dollars on its own. For the total, maybe combining the two, it's very possible that it would be around a million—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: This number of a million dollars dates back to December of 2008. Is the investigation still ongoing?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: And how much have you spent since then?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: I would have to get that information.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: When can we expect that from you in writing?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: I can provide that within 48 hours to the committee.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: So 48 hours. Okay.

What we're looking for, just to be precise, is the total cost of the elections commission's investigation, the total cost of legal fees Elections Canada has spent losing the two cases, one on GST, the other on in-and-out, and the total cost Elections Canada has spent on public relations matters related to these cases.

You can provide that information?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Absolutely.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: The public relations matters related to these cases: you can provide these costs.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Absolutely.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay.

How much are you prepared to spend on lawyers and public relations consultants to continue to pursue the matter on which Elections Canada has been twice defeated?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Again, unless there is another resolution, we'll have to continue to rely on the court to provide a decision.

The two cases raise very significant issues for the political financing regime. Without getting into the details, before bringing this matter for possible legislative changes, I think we need a decision from a higher court.

The two decisions, among other things, seem to be—

• (1120)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Can we have order, Chair?

Sir, I just can't hear you, because there's a lot of talking going on. It's not your fault.

Please continue.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: The two decisions raise important fundamental principles set out in the act regarding the whole concept of commercial value, and I believe we need a decision from a higher court.

I would also point out that with the in-and-out case there's a cross-appeal by the other party to the matter. So it suggests that both parties are not entirely satisfied with the decision.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: We're quite satisfied with the decision.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: I know, but again, it's between the parties in the litigation.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: We're quite satisfied with the decision, as it came down overwhelmingly in our favour. There's no reason not to be satisfied.

I'm getting some affirmation from my colleagues on the other side on that point.

On the matter at hand, on January 18, 2010, the court and the Honourable Mr. Justice Martineau recognized that Elections Canada's party handbook permitted candidates to spend funds on matters that promoted the party. Subsequent to that, you changed your handbook and attempted to apply your changes retroactively to an election that had already occurred. The court rightly found that this was not possible, and therefore the handbook was not applicable.

Do you believe, given Elections Canada's two defeats in civil proceedings where the burden of proof is much lower than in a criminal proceeding, there would be any chance of overcoming a much higher burden and succeeding in a higher burden setting?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Certainly, Mr. Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Mayrand will decide for himself, or you will decide for Mayrand, but I think the honourable member is using the wrong venue. I think he's pleading his case and that should be done at another venue—something they call “the courts”.

Some hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Marcel Proulx: So I wish you would look at the—

The Chair: That's not truly a point of order, but Mr. Poilievre, if you could—

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): I'd like to make a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Certainly, let's hear them all.

Mr. Scott Reid: I just note that the Liberals are taking a somewhat different tack from when they wanted to try this entire thing in the committee.

The Chair: That's true—

Mr. Scott Reid: They ground the whole thing to a halt and we couldn't have the committee meet for several months because they insisted on trying our party, with none of the normal rules of evidence, in this committee.

That's just a note that will be of interest to all concerned.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Had we done that at a meeting where we were looking at the supplementary estimates?

The Chair: If you'll allow me, I'll speak to that.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I apologize, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Poilievre, you have very limited time left. We are looking at the supplementary estimates. If you keep it to spending, that may help us.

Go ahead. You have about 15 seconds left.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: The relation, of course, is that this is a matter on which Elections Canada is spending an inordinate amount of money, and those moneys have to be approved by the estimates. It is therefore very appropriate for members to question how an agency has used taxpayers' dollars to lose awesomely in two different court cases and proposes to continue spending money at that rate. That is the link to the present-day estimates.

I'll conclude on that point. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: If I may, Mr. Chair, I'll just point out a few things.

First of all, we've been in defence on those cases. We did not launch those proceedings.

Second, the authority to spend comes from the statutory credit, not the appropriation.

The Chair: All right.

Madame DeBellefeuille.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome to the Committee. It is a pleasure to see you here today.

To begin with, I would just like to say that I very much appreciated the seminar you gave two months ago. I also was happy to hear from witnesses from across the globe who use new technologies to try and improve voter turnout. With Mr. Reid, I

attended part of the seminar that day and I found it extremely instructive in terms of the strengths and limitations of these technologies. Since you told us that it was in your cards—

Mr. Chairman, I am having a lot of trouble concentrating because people opposite are speaking very loudly. Perhaps they could go outside.

• (1125)

[*English*]

The Chair: I don't disagree, Madame DeBellefeuille. I have meetings going on all around.

I'd like to hear the testimony, so please let's keep it to questions and answers to the witness, and, if you could, have your little meetings outside.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I wanted to raise this with you, because we may have to take a position on these new technologies, in the short or medium term. I would have liked more of my colleagues to hear the excellent testimony provided by these experts from around the world.

I have a question about wages for election workers. You say that your difficulty finding election workers can be attributed to several different factors. It has been suggested that one of those factors may be wages, given that the hours are long, the work is demanding and the responsibilities are considerable. What are your current thoughts with respect to increased wages for election workers, and particularly, deputy returning officers?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: As I have mentioned a couple of times before the Committee, the expenditure restraint legislation imposes a wage freeze. That freeze applies to election workers' wages and extends over a three-year period.

In the recommendations report that I will be completing in the coming weeks, I intend to make that very point. I have mentioned to the Committee that it would be possible to amend the current legislation, but at the present time, a freeze is in place for the next three years.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: So a freeze is in place. However, it is important to have qualified and well-trained personnel. Wages are an important lever in terms of recruiting the right staff. I encourage you to convince the government to make an exception for workers hired by Elections Canada, because it is mainly in the rural areas that people have seasonal jobs, which means that for certain periods, they are on Employment Insurance or even welfare.

It is important for people to be able to work and be paid a fair wage.

There is also the matter of training. It seems you also mentioned that you would like to increase the number of hours of training they are given. However, if the workload and responsibilities of these workers increase—and we want them to be qualified—they will obviously have to be paid for that.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Once again, my upcoming recommendations report will provide a series of suggestions on possible amendments to the Canada Elections Act and other legislation, with a view to facilitating recruitment, ensuring better training and offering better compensation.

[English]

The Chair: Sure.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: My other question has to do with your pilot project on registering over the Internet. As a parliamentarian, there is one thing that concerns me—namely, security and management of confidential data. We know that maintaining and managing computer equipment is a very big job.

What action have you taken to assure voters and parliamentarians that everything is in place to ensure the proper security and management of personal information?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: We are still reviewing the project. I would just like to point out that online registration already exists in two provinces—Alberta and British Columbia. There is also a service available in Quebec, whereby voters can confirm their registration.

Of course, we are looking at a variety of technologies. We are currently analyzing and assessing the robustness of the systems used in the provinces and elsewhere in the world. There is no doubt that one of our central concerns is to ensure proper security and have a reliable way of authenticating the identity of people who want to register online.

Indeed, that is one of the issues I would like to address with the Committee at a session in the spring at Elections Canada's offices.

• (1130)

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Mayrand, I unfortunately missed your presentation. Please accept my apologies. It seems that the last time you appeared before us, you said that our returning officers and local directors would be re-working the list of polling stations, since we never know whether or not there is going to be another election. I believe you said that we would be asked to attend a meeting on this. I must admit I haven't had time to check that with people in my own organization, but I would like to know whether this was done or not.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: No, not yet. The exercise of reviewing polling stations and identifying new voting places is now completed. The next step is to validate that with parliamentarians or riding associations. That should occur in the next few months.

Mr. Michel Guimond: I have talked to you in the past about cases where people living in the north district of a city were required to vote in the south district, and vice versa. Yet in some cases, these individuals lived only 500 meters from the community centre which had been designated a polling station. You mentioned that there will be a review of polling stations. Does that include these kinds of situations?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes, that is one of the things that will be reviewed. First, the polling divisions and the geography related to those polling divisions. We want to be sure that polling stations are located as close as possible to the place of residence of people living in the area.

Mr. Michel Guimond: I would like to know when our returning officers intend to call us in. Are you willing to take a gamble by giving us a date now?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: It will be in the spring. In terms of giving you an exact date—

Mr. Michel Guimond: Spring begins next Saturday.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Well, it will obviously happen before the end of June. I am not in a position to tell you the exact date now.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Between the 20th—

Mr. Marc Mayrand: As soon as the date has been set, I will send you a notice.

Mr. Michel Guimond: So, it will be between March 20 and June 21.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes. You will obviously receive advance notice, so that you know what is coming up.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Monsieur Godin.

[Translation]

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

Good morning, Mr. Mayrand. I would also like to convey my greetings to the people who are with you today. Welcome to the Committee.

Mr. Mayrand, I heard everything you said this morning. Your comments relate to the Supplementary Estimates, which is the reason why we are here today. I hope the government's position doesn't scare you too much. They seem to be saying that this is costing too much and we will not get to the end of the process. In our legal system, someone can go before the courts, lose his case, appeal and then lose his case again. It could go as far as the Supreme Court. That is part of our democratic system which was enshrined by Parliament.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Absolutely. It is one of our fundamental values.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It's a little like telling people receiving Employment Insurance benefits that if they win their case in front of an arbitrator and it's unanimous, the government should not have to pay the airfare from Ottawa to Bathurst for the judge or arbitrator because it's too expensive. Even though the government believes it acted appropriately and that it was not mistaken when it refused Employment Insurance benefits to an unemployed worker—a \$150 cheque—it is going to cost \$5,000 or \$10,000 to recover that \$150. So the message seems to be that, because it's too expensive, justice will no longer be done and we will no longer rely on our judicial system. That is pretty much the message I am now hearing from them. Do you agree?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: That is always a delicate question. I will simply say that our compliance efforts overall focus more on education, on information dissemination and on prevention. Legal disputes do arise on occasion; however, they are fairly rare. When you consider the system as a whole, it is clear that there is very little litigation involving Elections Canada. On occasion, however, there are issues or disputes that may be perfectly legitimate, where the parties have completely different viewpoints, and which raise questions as to how the legislation should be interpreted. That is why we have a judicial system—to resolve just this kind of dispute.

Mr. Yvon Godin: In terms of expenses associated with our legal system, it will cost whatever it costs, because justice must be done. Otherwise, we may as well get rid of the Supreme Court. That, too, would cost us a lot less money.

With respect to Mr. Poilievre's question, these amounts have to be authorized by the House of Commons, since we are voting on the appropriations. Are you concerned that if Parliament votes on this, it may not give you money to go before the courts?

• (1135)

Mr. Marc Mayrand: As I mentioned earlier, the only amounts that must be approved by Parliament—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Poilievre says that would be a good idea.

Please continue, Mr. Mayrand. This is coming from someone who supports you.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: The only amounts to be approved by Parliament with respect to Elections Canada's budget are salaries for indeterminate employees.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I understand. I was worried about that.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: That is what the legislation states, and I believe that this is intended to provide guarantees of independence. The legislation grants statutory appropriations. Obviously, we are accountable for the expenditures that we make. However, expenditures related to the administration of the electoral process must not be subject to external factors.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am happy to hear that, because I would not like to see the Conservatives, with a majority government, voting on such a measure. I think this case would quickly have been dropped.

In any case, I would like to come back to page 3 of your brief, where you talk about advance polling and rural areas. I still have the same problem, Mr. Mayrand, and I'm not satisfied. There are workers out West living in camps that house almost 5,000 people. In the last election, representatives of Elections Canada said they went to these sites and put up signs. However, that is not what the workers have been saying.

Are you looking at this? Is there a team now preparing for a future election, to ensure that these citizens will have an opportunity to vote?

These workers came to see me, saying they did not have a chance to vote. Many of them stay there for two or three months and don't leave the site. That is the reality. What are you waiting for to do something about this?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Absolutely. We are making a sustained effort to get in touch with people who are working in these camps and who are often seasonal or casual workers.

Of course, that effort also depends on a great extent to the good will of the people who manage these centres. Some of them are very difficult to access. They certainly are not accessible to everyone. So, we have to make arrangements, which we are now trying to put in place, and that generally works well. There may be situations where authorities at a work camp have not necessarily cooperated in a satisfactory manner, but I can assure you—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Do you need legislation for that? I don't understand.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: We could look at the legislative provisions. However, in the electoral system, our work often depends on the good will of all kinds of third parties.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Well, as far as I have been told, the problem was not that people were refusing to let you go there, but rather that Elections Canada personnel just never went.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: We are there. I can assure you of that.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No, I can assure you that it is not what I am being told.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: All right, I can—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am talking about a lot of people. There are camps that house 5,000 people. There are camps that house 3,000 workers. And these camps are accessible, since the workers themselves have to get there in order to work. They do not go by helicopter. Furthermore, they are not seasonal workers.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: It depends on the specific situation, but they are accessible to the workers.

As I say, in general terms, we do have programs aimed specifically at work camps, particularly those in Western Canada, but also in the other regions of the country. They can also be mining camps. We stay in touch with the administrators and with company staff hired to manage these sites, to ensure that information gets to these voters.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like you to take another look at this, because I do not agree with what you have said. I am not trying to be mean, but I simply don't agree, because that is not what I have heard out in the field.

I fly out of Bathurst, and every morning when I am boarding the plane, it is full of people going to work out West for two or three months. Some of them don't leave the camps, and only come back for a month. But when there is an election, they don't have that opportunity, unless they go to Edmonton or somewhere like that, which is difficult for them.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: That probably would be helpful, as I say. I know we have a program and products, and that they are being delivered. However, if there is a particular site which is problematic, it would be helpful for us to know about it, so that we can go and find out exactly what occurred.

In general terms, however, we have a specific program aimed at voters who live in work camps across the country, which kicks in when there is an election. If there are particular sites that we did not get to, I would like to be made aware of that. We go on the boats that travel down the river and to other areas that are more difficult to access. So, we do have programs that are aimed specifically at these workers.

If there are one or more sites that are problematic, or perhaps a specific region, I would like to be given the exact information. I think that would be helpful so that we can follow up.

• (1140)

Mr. Yvon Godin: I will find out and pass that information on to you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to our second round.

Monsieur Proulx, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Mayrand, on page 6 of your brief, you say that you would appreciate an opportunity to engage the Committee, at some point, regarding the conclusions of a feasibility study on adding the voter information card to the list of pieces of identification authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer. As you know, there was some apprehension in that regard in the Committee, on all sides of the table. I am therefore very anxious to hear your recommendations.

Furthermore, with respect to that same suggestion or recommendation, I would like you to consider the problem that arises in seniors' homes, where they are required to show their health insurance card, even though, as a general rule, the people in charge of the home, as opposed to the seniors themselves, are the ones who have those cards in their possession. What happens is that on election day, the administrators often say that they don't have time to do it, that they are busy, that they have sick people to attend to, and so on. As a result, people are not able to vote easily or under the proper conditions.

So, as you are looking at the issue of voter information cards, you may want to consider the situation of these voters. In any case, I can tell you right now that I have a great deal of apprehension about these potential changes.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: That is a major point.

In every by-election and general election that has been held since the new provisions were introduced, the system has generally worked well. However, we are seeing that small groups of voters are having more difficulty—particularly Aboriginal Canadians, who generally have very few pieces of ID, other than their Registered Indian card, and who also have address-related issues. I am also thinking of seniors who live in homes, and who often do not have access to their own papers.

One example would be long-term care facilities. We do targeted reviews in these centres. We visit them a few days before the election. So, we know who the voters are; they are living in a closed

environment. But when we return to collect their ballots one week later, we don't recognize any of them. A solution must be found for that particular problem. We believe that, in these kinds of situations, the voter information card could be an appropriate item to present. The hospital or facility name band is already accepted.

Issues have been raised with respect to these voters groups.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: In terms of expenses, as you may recall, I have spoken to you on a number of occasions of an infamous practice at Elections Canada—namely, asking local returning officers to return the documents they have used, once the election is over, so that Elections Canada staff can, in their great wisdom, destroy these documents at head office. I suggested that you try and save money by allowing them to shred the documents locally in the ridings.

Would you please tell us when you will be meeting with us to discuss your recommendations?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Certainly. If you like, we can certainly discuss the why and the how of this process, and see whether something can be changed.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: It's related to election expenses which, it seems to me, are significant enough that we should have a look at this.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a series of questions, returning to the line of questioning that Mr. Poilievre was taking.

One of the issues where you have been in court fighting against the Conservative Party was on the subject of whether you ought or ought not to accept sales tax rebates—GST, HST, and I assume PST as well. What is the total number of dollars at issue in both the action against the Conservative Party—the money they are essentially refusing to collect from the Conservative Party—and what you would have to collect from the other parties vis-à-vis the most recent election and, I assume, several previous elections? What is the total of number of dollars at issue that Elections Canada is trying to not take back in terms of those rebates?

• (1145)

Mr. Marc Mayrand: In the matter at hand, I believe the amount is somewhere around \$550,000 for two elections. These are GST rebates that were received by the party.

I will just point out that Elections Canada has no objection to receiving the money for the benefit of the Receiver General. Our issue—and I think this is the issue that is in dispute before the courts—is how should the return be amended? I think that is where the central dispute is.

With respect to whether other parties would be subjected to the same approach, depending on the outcome from the court at the end, we would have to ask parties to disclose voluntarily which party is getting a GST rebate, for what period, and how much of that rebate accounts for electoral expenses that were reimbursed by Elections Canada.

Mr. Scott Reid: So you haven't done any calculations?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: I don't have any authority.

Sorry, the simple answer—

Mr. Scott Reid: No, no, that's the answer to the question. You've answered it.

So \$550,000 from the Conservatives alone, then, essentially is—

Mr. Marc Mayrand: For two elections.

Mr. Scott Reid: For the last two elections.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: So essentially this goes back two elections. It wouldn't go back to a previous election beyond that.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: At this point in time, we're only seized with this matter that goes back to two elections.

Mr. Scott Reid: All right.

How many dollars worth of court costs have you been required to repay to the Conservative Party? I understand they were awarded costs.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Well, again, since there has been an appeal, no amount has been set.

Mr. Scott Reid: So the number hasn't been set.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: It won't be set until the appeal is settled one way or the other.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'd like a confirmation that no number was set. If you can send that in writing stating that no number was set, I would appreciate it.

In the event you go to the higher courts and on one or both of the appeals you lose, is it your intention to then appeal beyond that until you run out of avenues of appeal?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Again, that's not something I can determine today. It will depend on the decision.

Whether I lose, if...depending on what will be the impact of the decision on the general administration of the Canada Elections Act and what principles are being raised by the court.

Mr. Scott Reid: How many man-hours or person-hours of time have been devoted by Elections Canada employees and contractors, and lawyers working on your behalf who have been billed out by Elections Canada and by the Commissioner of Canada Elections, in pursuit of these two court actions and the general issue of the materials that were seized from the Conservative Party, all of that family of legal issues?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: That's reflected in the amount that was mentioned earlier. All external expenses are reflected in those amounts. What's not reflected in those expenses is permanent Elections Canada staff.

Mr. Scott Reid: Would you be able to give us the man-hours or person-hours of Elections Canada staff, the Commissioner of Elections people, people who have been contracted in, lawyers who billed you, and all that stuff? I assume you'd be able to dig that up for us and submit it to us?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Notionally, yes; I guess for contractors, disbursement to third parties, no problem—

Mr. Scott Reid: It's the hours I'm after, not the dollars.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you very much, Mr. Mayrand.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, the member made a request for information. It's not clear whether or not he achieved consent from the witness to provide that information. Let us be clear on the exact information that we are seeking. In his answer, he changed the information that he was going to provide from the question that was put forward by the member.

So perhaps we could keep it fairly precise.

The Chair: Mr. Reid, very quickly ask what you were asking for so that we can get a yes or no.

Mr. Scott Reid: It was the person-hours for Elections Canada staff, both permanent and otherwise, staff who come from the Commissioner of Elections, and anybody who was contracted, including lawyers but also including any other external persons who were contracted.

• (1150)

The Chair: Mr. Mayrand, will you be able to do that?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: I will provide you the cost for external lawyers—

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Scott Reid: No, no, actually, he's got a point; sorry, he's got a point.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: May I complete the answer?

Ms. Marlene Jennings: I think the witness should be able to complete his answer.

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, he has a point there.

The Chair: Let's get the whole answer and then we'll distribute when it's needed.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: I will provide detailed information on external costs at Elections Canada. On internal costs, it will have to be notional on that. I prefer to tell you right away that I cannot give you the exact number of hours each one has spent on the case over a period of three years now.

Mr. Scott Reid: We'll simply appreciate it if you do your best. I understand why you're saying external people. You get the bills for dollars instead of hours, so that's a reasonable point to make.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Moving on, Monsieur Guimond is next on my list.

We're going to be out of time.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: I would like to make one preliminary comment, in light of what Mr. Reid has just said. Since prorogation, we have known that democracy is a problem for the Conservatives. But given the kind of questions Mr. Reid has just asked—unfortunately I missed Mr. Poilievre's masterpiece a little earlier, because I was dealing with an issue in my capacity as whip—we now have confirmation that justice and the legal system in Canada are a problem for the Conservatives.

Legal proceedings were brought against the Chief Electoral Officer.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Michel Guimond: Proceedings were brought against him, he defended himself, he lost, but he has 30 days to appeal, and he has decided to appeal. Mr. Mayrand, you gave very appropriate answers to all the questions you were asked. You work within a budgetary shell. You are not required to provide any justification for a particular lawyer in your legal service having worked up to 12.3 hours last week on this case. You do not have to disclose that information, and your answer was most appropriate. That was my introduction.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Michel Guimond: Now I am going to ask my question. Mr. Mayrand, we know that your prerogatives as a guardian of democracy... I would just like to say in passing, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, that you continue to enjoy our full confidence. How fortunate we are to have a Chief Electoral Officer who can put the parties back on the straight and narrow. Parties may make unacceptable expenditures, and it is your role as the watchdog of democracy to tell them to stop, that this is not the way the system works, and to give them a rap on the knuckles. And you are using the refund to make the point that this expense is illegal and inadmissible. That is what you are going to do.

I would like to know whether, in the next election, you will wait for the Court of Appeal to render a decision. Also, I would just like to mention in passing that you have the right—and I am certainly not the one giving you permission—to take this case to the Supreme Court if you do not accept the Appeal Court ruling, just as the Conservative Party can. That is what our legal system is all about. So, in the next election, which rules will you be applying?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: The current regime—the one that applied in the 2006 and 2008 elections. It continues to apply until such time as there are clearer decisions handed down by the courts or until the legislation is amended.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have no further questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Godin, do you have a point?

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: What you are really saying is that you can't use the back door to try and do what is not allowed through the front

door. There is only so much money that can be spent, and it is not acceptable to do things by going through the back door. That is perfectly normal.

I am sure you know that I fully agree with my colleague, Mr. Guimond, when he says that you are the watchdog of democracy in Canada. You are completely independent. If we make a mistake—

I remember that Elections Canada, with respect to signs I had not returned... I don't remember what the cost was, because I never asked. But you were fully entitled to know whether I had returned my signs or not. Even if my signs had cost \$1,800 and there were \$10,000 worth still to return, that taught me that, the next time around, I had to return the old signs that I had put up in order to save the environment.

When that happened, I don't remember hearing the Conservatives crying wolf, and saying that Elections Canada staff were going to Bathurst to count signs and find out whether they were old signs or not. I didn't hear anything like that. Apparently the money was well spent that time. I remember they all had big smiles on their faces.

I certainly hope so, because this is a public meeting. I think what they're trying to do is tell Canadians that these people are spending money at Elections Canada, because they are going after us. In my opinion, when you do it that way, it is an attack on democracy. They are the ones who will pay the price.

Those are my only comments, Mr. Mayrand. Thank you.

• (1155)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

That concludes that round. We'll be excusing our witnesses.

Yes, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, I just want to point out that I think Mr. Mayrand stated something that is incorrect. I don't believe that he is legally permitted to apply a rule that has been struck down by a court of law on the theory that an appeal might uphold an overturning of that decision.

I think in the event that no appeal has taken place, I believe that the law—as interpreted by the last court at which the matter was dealt with—is in fact, in practice, the law at that time.

Mr. Mayrand, if I can encourage you, I'd want to ask your lawyers whether that is the case, because you would want to, of course, be in compliance with what the actual law is. You might just want to check into that.

An hon. member: And how many hours they have to work on it—

The Chair: Through the chair, please.

Thank you.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: We will, and in response to the committee on the...we'll put our position on that matter; I'm sure it will clear up confusion.

The Chair: We still do need to vote on the supplementaries that we were here to vote on.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, I wonder if the witness would consent to some more questioning.

The Chair: It would take unanimous consent of this committee to stay on this topic instead of moving to our next topic.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Given that we're all open to this discussion, I'm sure you would have no problem obtaining the consent of our friends in the coalition parties to agree to that.

The Chair: I hear "no", so apparently I do not have consent. I hear "no" in my left ear.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: All right.

The Chair: Order, please. Respect at least the position.

There's a point of order.

Excuse me, please.

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would just like to add that the coalition is part of democracy, whereas imposing prorogation may sometimes be an abuse of democracy.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for the point. It's great to hear it.

Monsieur Mayrand, you asked us a couple of things in your opening comments, about our perhaps touring Elections Canada again, or your being able to show us some other things that you have in the way of accessibility. On behalf of the committee, I will take on that we will endeavour to do that as we can, before the end of June.

I look forward to your statutory report coming out on March 31. I was wondering what I was going to do over Easter. I apparently will have some reading.

We thank you for your candid information today. You've made us a promise of some information coming back to the committee in the fairly short term. We'll get that out to the members as soon as you can do that.

I thank you and your guests for coming today, and I think we'll see you again soon if we have a report coming to the House.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'll suspend for five minutes while we change our witnesses and go on to the Speaker and the Clerk.

• _____ (Pause) _____

•

• (1200)

The Chair: I'd like to call the meeting to order, please.

We're here, pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), to consider the supplementary estimates (C) for 2009-10, vote 5c, House of Commons, under Parliament, which was referred to the committee on Wednesday, March 3, 2010.

It's always great to see you, Speaker and Madam Clerk. It's always good to have you at our meetings.

I will allow you to give us a bit of an opening statement, if you would like, and tell us anything you'd like to. Let's carry on from there and then we'll ask you some really hard and hitting questions and see what you have to say.

Mr. Speaker, it's up to you.

Hon. Peter Milliken (Speaker of the House of Commons): You're too kind, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much.

Good morning—or afternoon, whatever it now is; I guess we're into the afternoon.

[*Translation*]

Today I will be presenting the House of Commons Supplementary Estimates (C) for Fiscal Year 2009-2010.

The proposed Supplementary Estimates (C) for the House of Commons total \$9,872,988. I would like to stress at the outset of this discussion that all items in the House of Commons Supplementary Estimates (C) were presented to, and approved by, the Board of Internal Economy.

For reference purposes, you have been given a document showing the voted appropriations and statutory appropriations that are included in the Supplementary Estimates (C). To facilitate today's discussion, I will provide a brief overview of each item in the order that they have been presented.

• (1205)

[*English*]

First of all, the supplementary estimates (C) provide \$5.1 million in additional funding for the production of ten percenters.

This funding is required due to an anticipated significant increase in the demand for individual ten percenter products. Based on the first six months of operation in 2009-10, we expected an increase of 87% in volume. According to the members' allowances and services manual, members may request an unlimited number of ten percenters, provided that the content has a 50% difference from other ten percenters that are produced.

However, due to the anticipated increase in ten percenter volumes and the related costs, the Board of Internal Economy decided at its meeting on December 7, 2009, to impose an upper limit to the number of impressions for the remainder of the fiscal year, divided according to party proportionality.

The funds that are provided in the supplementary estimates will cover the required funding for these new printing allocations as approved by the board.

[*Translation*]

Next, the Supplementary Estimates (C) allocate \$628,000 to cover collective agreements and salary adjustments for House of Commons employees, specifically employees working in the Technical Group, lawyers and senior managers. The economic increases of 1.5% are in accordance with the Expenditure Restraint Act and were approved by the Board of Internal Economy.

[English]

You will also note that the supplementary estimates (C) include \$100,000 for members' resettlement provisions. As you may be aware, following a general election, members who are not re-elected are entitled to certain resettlement provisions, which can cover such services as financial counselling, retirement counselling, and education costs. There is no permanent budget for the resettlement provisions. Rather, funding is sought following a general election and is strictly based on the reimbursement of allowable expenses to former members.

Following the October 14, 2008, general election, the board approved this temporary funding in 2009-10 through supplementary estimates (C).

Furthermore, the supplementary estimates (C) reflect a re-profiling of funds in the amount of \$115,000. This funding is for the implementation of an integrated procurement and contract management module in order to automate the procurement and materiel management process. The project was launched as planned in October 2009; however, difficulties in obtaining the required external resources have led to a delay in the project schedule. As a result, the funds will lapse in 2009-10 and will be requested for 2010-11.

The modernization of materiel and contract management continues to be a priority, and work on the integrated procurement and contract management module is progressing with other phases of the project.

Additionally, the supplementary estimates (C) allocate \$2.7 million to the travel points system. The current budget for the travel points system had remain unchanged at \$18.6 million since 2005-06; however, travel expenditures charged to the travel points system have increased in recent years, reaching a point where the current budget is insufficient to meet resource requirements. The increases in travel costs are attributable to rising prices in the travel industry, which can be explained in part by a capacity constraint among airlines, competition between leisure and business travel, surtaxes on airline charges, and increases in ground transportation costs. As per the Parliament of Canada Act, the travel point system ensures that all members have access to the same transportation resources regardless of where their constituency is located.

The supplementary estimates (C) also allocate \$860,000 to the new service-level agreement for the provision of high-speed constituency communication network services. The contract for this service was renewed in June 2007, which presented an opportunity to review requirements based on members' feedback.

[Translation]

The additional funding will allow for the delivery of enhanced services to Members in their constituency offices and will enable access to Members' Ottawa office data from constituency offices. Enhanced services will also include a higher level of security, uniform services for all Members and shorter timeframes for network installations.

•(1210)

[English]

As with the travel points system, the constituency communication network is a statutory item as per the Parliament of Canada Act.

Finally, the supplementary estimates (C) allocate \$600,000 for a pension adjustment to the members of Parliament retirement compensation arrangements account. The cost to the House of Commons for contributions to members' pension plans is determined and managed by Treasury Board based on actuarial calculations. The Treasury Board has estimated a \$3.2 million deficit in the retirement compensation arrangements account as of March 31, 2009. Pursuant to the related legislation, the president of the Treasury Board has determined that the deficit should be amortized with interest in six instalments over a seven-year period beginning with the 2008-09 fiscal year. An annual amount of \$600,000 is therefore required until the 2013-14 fiscal year.

Similar to the travel points system and the constituency communications network, the members' retirement compensation arrangements account is also a statutory item.

[Translation]

I have now provided you with an overview of the House of Commons Supplementary Estimates (C) for the Fiscal year 2009-2010.

At this time, the Clerk and I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Peter, for your overview.

Madam Jennings.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your succinct and clear presentation. I do have a couple of questions.

On the second page of the document that is signed off by Ms. O'Brien, the very last item before the total says, "Utilities materials and supplies". Does that amount represent \$3,393,000?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien (Clerk of the House of Commons, House of Commons): Yes.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Okay.

Does "Utilities materials and supplies" include ten percenters?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Then I'd like to go to this other sheet that we have, the supplementary estimates summary. It breaks it down to "Voted Appropriations", with a subtotal, then "Statutory Appropriations". I see that the very first item listed as a voted appropriation is "Additional Funding for the Production of Ten Percenters", at \$5,100,000.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: That's correct.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: What will be the total amount for ten percenters for the fiscal year 2009-10 with this \$5,100,000 included?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Let me explain about the source of this \$5,100,000.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Please.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Under normal circumstances, we had been able to cover the costs of ten percenters in the general printing budget for the House of Commons. But by virtue of increasing volume and increasing use of the ten percenter as a communication tool, we found ourselves in a deficit situation as of the end of June.

So when we went back to the Board of Internal Economy, we predicated our request on the volumes that we had been facing in that first six months and asked for another \$2.5 million to \$2.6 million to cover us until the end of this year.

I'll ask Louis Bard, who is the head of the Information Services Directorate and responsible for printing services, to tell us about the total costs for ten percenters.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Yes, please.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: The difficulty with ten percenters is that they're not a separate item from the printing budget.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: I understand.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: They've just taken on a life of their own in recent months, but Louis can tell you—

Hon. Marlene Jennings: I understand, but my question is simple. Within the accounting that's done for the general printing costs, is it possible to break out the actual amount of costs for the ten percenters? If the answer is yes, what's the total amount, including this appropriation of an additional \$5,100,000 specifically for ten percenters?

•(1215)

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: It is possible to do that, and Louis will do it right now.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Okay. While he's checking the numbers, I'd also like to know if it's possible to give us with precision, to date, not including the additional \$5,100,000 specifically for ten percenters to the end of the fiscal year, how much each party has cost in printing for ten percenters.

Mr. Louis Bard (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons): The overall budget for printing this year in terms of ten percenters and other products is around \$10.5 million. And 73% of that budget is for individual ten percenters. Around 5% is for the regrouped ten percenters.

That gives you good reference numbers.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Okay. So that means 78% of the \$10.5 million is directly...?

Mr. Louis Bard: To ten percenters.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Yes, 78%. It's 73% for individual ten percenters and 5% for regrouped.

Mr. Louis Bard: Absolutely.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Simple math, as our colleague Mr. Poilievre would say.

The Chair: Through the chair, please.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Through the chair: simple math, as our colleague Poilievre would say.

So it would be that 78% of the \$10.5 million is a direct cost for ten percenters.

Mr. Louis Bard: Yes.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Thank you.

Now, are you able to break that number down by party?

Mr. Louis Bard: Yes.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Can you provide us with that information now? The numbers that you have to date...?

Hon. Peter Milliken: We don't normally do that. We can if the committee wants it.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Please. I've just requested it, so I'd like you to do that. It's pertinent.

Mr. Louis Bard: I will give it in percentages, in terms of volumes.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: So will you give us percentages for the individual ten percenters by party?

Mr. Louis Bard: The regroupings are very standard. Every party is allowed one regroup per month. That number is very stable in terms of volumes and contributions. There's no issue there, really. It's almost the same for every party.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Okay, so then individual.

Mr. Louis Bard: In terms of individual, the Liberals represent 13%, the Bloc represents 7%, the NDP 11%, and the Conservatives 69%.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Thank you.

Would it be possible for you to...? I know it will represent a little bit of work, but I think it would be interesting to see the change that has occurred with the use of ten percenters over the last, say, 10 years. Is that possible?

Mr. Louis Bard: I can answer this partially for you today. The big deviation really started in 2007-08. This is where there was a departure from what we call our base budget.

We saw in 2006-07 some light increase in ten percenters, from maybe 100 million to 172 million. But in 2007-08 and in 2008-09, there was a major increase. We went from, again, 100 million to 172 million, and then in 2009 to 229 million. This year we will be forecasting 402 million ten percenters.

A voice: Printed.

Mr. Louis Bard: *Impression*, yes.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: With regard to the number, the 402 million, that's single sheets, not dollars.

Mr. Louis Bard: Yes.

When I say *impression*, in the printing world it's one page. The ten percenter is a two-page document, printed on both sides of one page.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Thank you.

The Chair: All right.

There'll be another round, if you'd like to get some more questions in.

Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for coming here this afternoon.

I was just thinking here, in reading *The Hill Times* this week, Mr. Speaker, you had a few comments about Public Works and “speedity”, and things like that. I was just looking at the estimates, and I was just thinking, “Is there anything in there for tow ropes?”

Hon. Peter Milliken: For which?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Tow ropes.

• (1220)

Hon. Peter Milliken: Not that I'm aware of.

Mr. Randy Hoback: That may be a little humorous, but there is some seriousness to it. I don't know, I must be a slow runner, but whenever I run out of the justice building, the two buses have already left in tandem towards the House. It's just a little frustration for some of us over in the justice building. The service in 2006 was phenomenal. The drivers are phenomenal, but for some reason now it seems to be if you don't make the first bus, the second bus is two minutes behind it, and the third bus is 40 minutes behind it. This is just to make you aware of that.

But I will go to something a little more serious to do with budgets and members' budgets. We had a situation in Mississauga—Erindale a couple of months ago where one of our member's staff was hurt putting out a fire. His office was totally destroyed. So he's in a situation now where he's trying to re-establish an office and he's finding it very frustrating trying to do that. In the meantime, his constituents are not having access to his services.

I was talking to him last night, and he says right now he has to go and borrow chairs and tables from the local library to set up his office. He still hasn't got approval on Internet access. He still doesn't know where he stands on furniture, if he has to rent or buy furniture. He said the committee, which was established here to help him address that, has met for a couple of weeks, but still really hasn't come up with answers.

It's something that's probably new to you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make you aware of that. We MPs outside of Ottawa sometimes face a lot of frustration in dealing here in Ottawa for services.

I use the example of my own office. When we were setting it up we had to basically do some internal walls in our offices, and our IT people were trying to get the IT people who were hired to put in the IT system to come and do it, which involved running some wires that any electrician could do, but of course they wouldn't let us do that.

We had to wait for six weeks. We finally got frustrated, said enough's enough, and went to put the walls up, put the Gyproc in. We thought, “Well, we'll do what we have to do when they decide to come”. And then somebody finally had the brainstorm that we could

go with a wireless router in their office, and all of a sudden we don't need all this wiring.

It seemed to me, as a new member, there was a lot of confusion with staff in setting up MPs' offices and what they could or couldn't do. Again, it's just something that I'll highlight here and make you aware of.

As far as questions go, getting back to Mr. Dechert's situation, what process do you have in place for a situation like that, where a member's office gets destroyed, whether it's a fire or flood, or something like that? What is the proper process they're supposed to follow, and then which budget does it come out of?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: These are, of course, extremely unfortunate events. The usual thing would be to advise me and to advise the chief financial officer.

Just to come back to your IT frustrations, one of the things that was addressed in here with this additional money for the CCN network is, in fact, to address those ridiculous delays of six weeks that we were stuck with initially. We are hoping that will improve things.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Great.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: In the case of Mr. Dechert, I'm not sure exactly what has transpired with him. It ought not to be the case that he's borrowing chairs from the library, and committees are meeting even as he's standing on the sidewalk trying to deal with his constituents. That's not to make light of a very difficult situation; I will pursue that with him this very afternoon, and we'll take it from there.

Perhaps I could ask the chief financial officer, Claire Kennedy, who might have more information to give us on this particular case, to comment.

Ms. Claire Kennedy (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): Thank you.

In answer to the question, I spoke personally with the member once we were contacted by his office a number of weeks ago. I provided the contact that the member gave us with different options in terms of rental of equipment. At the time, the member could not re-enter the facility because it was not deemed safe by the fire department, so relocated across the street. We provided options to the member, as I said, in terms of rental.

As well, we had assembled a team to assist him with regard to IT equipment, laptops and so on, at the time. We did some follow-up. At the time, some employees had their own laptops. We were in contact with the member to arrange to provide him with the equipment until it was deemed safe to re-enter the building where he was previously.

• (1225)

Mr. Randy Hoback: That's great. I'm glad to hear that.

The question I have that comes from this, though, is that in this scenario, now this member has to get his office up like any other MP's office. Does that come out of his MOB, member's office budget, or where does that funding come from? To establish an office isn't cheap. It can be \$15,000, \$20,000, \$30,000, a one-time hit. Who should pay for that?

Ms. Claire Kennedy: Most members usually do have insurance as well. There are some damages that are covered.

As well, once we have the police report or fire department report on an exception basis, because the equipment will need to be replaced, the House is, per se, self-insured, if you wish, in terms of its assets. It would be so costly otherwise to provide insurance for all constituency office assets and equipment that it was determined that it was a much cheaper option, for unfortunate events like this that occur, to create a provision to assist the member in the replacement of the equipment.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Guimond.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm sorry; I had to leave the room briefly to attend to my duties as whip.

You may already have answered this question. If I am off topic, the Chair will certainly rein me in; the absent party is always to blame.

You referred to "additional operating costs for services to Members, as well as economic increase for employees" in the amount of \$5.713 million.

Is the economic increase not optional? In the Speech from the Throne, the government talked about freezing salaries. There is reference here to negotiated collective agreements. But how is that going to work? Have you answered that?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: The collective agreements which have been ratified and which you see in the Supplementary Estimates are collective agreements which go back a certain amount of time and were negotiated based on the former Expenditure Restraint Act, which kept wage increases at 1.5%. That was negotiated until the end of 2009-2010. The Board must now make a decision with respect to 2008-2009, in terms of retroactive payments under collective agreements.

With respect to 2009-2010, the Treasury Board has already announced that the 1.5% salary increases that were negotiated under collective agreements are still a legal responsibility. However, the affected entities—departments, Crown corporations and agencies or the House of Commons—will have to absorb that 1.5% within their internal budget. So, we will have to find the money to pay that 1.5% to people in 2009-2010. The decision has not yet been made by the Board. That will be duly discussed to determine how the Board intends to respond to what the Minister of Finance is asking, namely that it be subject to the same parameters as those put in place by the Minister for the public service.

• (1230)

Mr. Michel Guimond: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chairman?

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Ms. O'Brien, Mr. Milliken, I have a brief question. If there is any time remaining in the next round, perhaps I will have an opportunity to go into more detail.

Mr. Milliken, what has been happening with the advisory committee of senior officers? Since becoming Assistant Whip, I have been designated to sit on that Committee. If memory serves me, the Committee has met twice. The last time was at an informal dinner which took place in your office. I am surprised, because as a parliamentarian who sits on the Committee, I don't have the impression I am receiving any information. I am not sure what the future holds for that advisory committee, which brings together information commissioners. Ms. Marlene Jennings is also a member of that Committee.

Hon. Peter Milliken: The Treasury Board has made no request in relation to that group in recent months. That group normally meets when a request comes from the Treasury Board or officers of Parliament, but we have received no such request from either one.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: At the meeting I attended and at which Ms. Jennings was also present, I had understood there were questions from senior officers. They were wondering whether there could be discussion of the future of the constitution. Would it not be possible to change or enhance the mandate of that Committee? If Ms. Jennings recalls the discussions that took place, those questions were raised by both government and opposition members. Following that, the House was prorogued.

Should we wait to meet again to discuss this? You said you would call a meeting to discuss that issue.

Hon. Peter Milliken: We can certainly do that. I have heard nothing about changes to the order governing that advisory board. Absolutely nothing. I believe things will continue as they have in the past—at least, for the time being. If there are changes, someone will have to announce them—either the government or officers of Parliament. In my opinion, things will remain the same for now.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: The government has announced that departmental budgets are frozen. I imagine that also applies to the budgets of the Information Commissioner and all other senior officers.

Hon. Peter Milliken: Salaries have, yes.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: As a Member of Parliament, I am very interested in the impact on every position, on behalf of the people of Quebec and Canada. Will we experience negative impacts from this? I would be interested in hearing your opinion. Indeed, I believe a number of other colleagues around the table were also interested in such a meeting.

Hon. Peter Milliken: We can certainly have a meeting. I will organize it soon. However, I have received no complaints from any officer of Parliament with respect to their budget—absolutely nothing.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: They have made no request to you.

Hon. Peter Milliken: No.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Do I have any time remaining?

[*English*]

The Chair: You still have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: I would like to talk about computer expenses. I will have lots of questions for Mr. Bard, when my second turn comes around. There is something wrong with the way acquisitions are authorized for computer equipment. You are offering us equipment that is too expensive and which is all provided by the same company. There is no reason why we should be refused permission to install equipment of equal quality, that is less costly, but does not appear on your list. In times of economic crisis, everybody has to do their share. For example, I consider that \$300 for a scanner is an outrageous price.

[English]

The Chair: Let's save the example for the next round. That would be great.

Mr. Godin.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, Mr. Milliken, Ms. O'Brien, I have a few questions for you. There was an incident on Parliament Hill. People climbed up onto the Parliament buildings. The RCMP has since improved security. We see there are more officers now in different locations. From which budget is the money to cover that coming?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: It comes out of the RCMP budget.

• (1235)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Money does not grow on trees. The RCMP does not have a machine to print money. Does that money come from the government or the Department of Justice?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I thought you were asking whether it was coming out of our budget or the RCMP's budget. It is the RCMP's budget. I have no doubt—

Mr. Yvon Godin: So, this would be coming out of the budget of the Department of Justice, or something like that.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I believe the RCMP has its own budget, which is independent of the Department of Justice's budget. I have no doubt that this is causing some difficulty, but it is necessary all the same; we all saw what happened when there was inadequate staff.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Are the repairs to the West Block and the Wellington Building being funded using money from these budgets?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No, that does not come out of these budgets. We are pursuing our discussions with the Department of Public Works and Government Services with respect to the long-term plan for renovating the Parliamentary precinct.

I have to say that it is nevertheless quite frustrating. The fact that these are heritage buildings is causing problems. Delays have meant that this is now the worst time, in terms of the economy, to be requesting funding for a project of this magnitude.

However, as far as I know or according to what I have been told, there are still plans to close the West Block in September and move MPs to the Promenade Building at 151 Sparks Street. As regards committee rooms in the West Block, the Board of Internal Economy has agreed that they also be closed and that committee work be conducted elsewhere, so that renovations to the West Block can begin as soon as possible.

Mr. Yvon Godin: And that is not addressed in these budgets.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No, that comes under the budget of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It comes under the budget of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: We—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I have been here for 13 years and we have been talking about this for 13 years. When they said it was going to take 15 years, I thought it was a joke, but it has almost been that long.

A voice: Long-term vision.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I believe these buildings have to be repaired, whether they are heritage or not. The longer we wait, the more it is going to cost.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: This is the heritage of all Canadians. We all hope the money can be found to implement the plan.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The longer we wait, the more this is going to cost.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Exactly.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Can you give me any further explanation regarding insurance for offices? Mr. Hoback talked about the office that had burned down. You say that some Members of Parliament have taken out insurance. What happens if an MP does not do that?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Some Members may want to buy personal insurance if their office contains works of art or that sort of thing. Perhaps Ms. Kennedy could explain how things work when such a terrible thing occurs, like the fire that broke out in M. Dechert's office.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'm talking about equipment that really belongs to Parliament.

Ms. Claire Kennedy: Normally, any insurance taken out by MPs covers bodily harm to their visitors or employees, as well as any damage to the building. Everything is not covered by the owner.

However, as a general rule, the capital assets inside, such as chairs, desks and other equipment, are not covered. It is covered for some MPs, but not for others.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It is covered by the House.

Ms. Claire Kennedy: Yes, exactly.

It is really for situations where there is bodily harm—for example, if someone injures himself and then sues; for those cases, we encourage MPs to secure insurance.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I have one last question—I have raised it here at previous meetings. It has to do with people who work on the Hill—for example, at the restaurant on the sixth floor.

I see a real problem there: we aren't in a position to find work for them. In a way, with prorogation having occurred a few times and elections—

A voice: Oh, oh!

•(1240)

[English]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Well, my friend, you get paid when there's prorogation, but the working people here don't get paid when you have prorogation. That's what my question is.

My question is to the witnesses, not to you.

[Translation]

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I can tell you that during the period the House was prorogued—something that was unexpected—we took advantage of the extra time to organize briefing sessions with restaurant personnel—because there are a number of changes being made to the way food and meals are to be produced in the new building that has been built, and that is part of the long-term plan.

Mr. Yvon Godin: If I am not mistaken, Ms. O'Brien, other employees can be given work elsewhere; but people working at the restaurant on the sixth floor do not have the same opportunity.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I will pursue the issue. I will look into this. I know this is something that you feel strongly about. Sometimes people think that special arrangements are being made for others, even though they do not have the same advantages. What they imagine to be true is not necessarily the case.

However, I will look into these special cases with you, because we would not like to see any unfairness or arrangements being made for some staff and not for others.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Cuzner, do you have one before Mr. Proulx?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): No.

The Chair: Mr. Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to call Mr. Bard back to the table, if possible, so we can get some clarification.

In the meantime, for Randy, I think Mrs. Kennedy cleared it up, in the sense that we as members have no insurable interest in the furniture and equipment that belongs to the House of Commons, so there's no sense in wasting money on insurance premiums. However, as individuals we need liability coverage. That's what we have to buy. Madam Kennedy was right in her second intervention. My background is insurance, so if I can help....

[Translation]

Good afternoon, Mr. Bard. How are you?

My colleague asked a question earlier about the breakdown for ten-percenters, and I think one aspect was overlooked when we were talking about percentages.

Are you in a position to tell us how many individual ten-percenters were sent out to the respective ridings of Members of Parliament, compared to those sent outside their respective ridings?

Mr. Louis Bard: Yes.

We know that in the last quarter, approximately 43% were sent outside of their riding.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: So it is 43% overall. Can that 43% be shared equally across the percentages you mentioned earlier?

In other words, for the Liberal Party, the usage was 13%. Can we therefore say that 43% of that 13% went outside? Does it vary according to costs? I imagine it must have varied.

Mr. Louis Bard: It can vary somewhat, but the figure is nevertheless very close.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: All right. Then it is proportional?

Mr. Louis Bard: It is fairly proportional. There are variations, but

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): I really wasn't planning to ask a question on this particularly, but Mr. Proulx mentioned the insurance question.

I don't know if you want to come back to the table, Ms. Kennedy.

Is there a place where we could easily find direction in terms of what is and what is not covered for a constituency office? I'm sure there is. I haven't gone on the website.

Ms. Claire Kennedy: Yes, actually, there is the members' allocation and services manual. I could provide the exact reference, but basically, looking under constituency offices, it indicates that a member may charge to the member's office budget the liability insurance. We don't indicate, however, that the House itself is self-insured for its assets.

•(1245)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: So furniture and things placed in my office by the House of Commons are covered.

Ms. Claire Kennedy: That's correct.

Hon. Peter Milliken: Or that you've acquired with your office budget that belong to the House.

Ms. Claire Kennedy: Yes.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Okay. I will see if I can find that information.

Would you have a ballpark figure as to what the recommendations are for an MP in terms of liability coverage? Is there a general rule of thumb?

Ms. Claire Kennedy: I think we do recommend approximately \$2 million for the liability insurance.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Okay, thank you.

Now, just on another topic, we talked about preserving the heritage buildings that we occupy. Certainly, every time we have constituents here, they marvel at the great architecture and the way they're maintained. There are some deficiencies, as we all know, in terms of maintenance.

I'm wondering if anyone has ever raised the question of possibly replacing the ice shelters that adorn the doors of the Centre Block, and at other buildings as well. Those little ice shelters look like temporary huts. I think they actually devalue the overall splendour of our buildings.

I know it would cost something, and this is probably not the time to do it, but at some point I think it's something that I would like to consider addressing.

I don't know if there's any response to this.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I couldn't agree with you more. I've been fighting so long on other issues that I haven't paid enough attention to the ice huts. You are absolutely right, they are pretty grim.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: It's further down the list. I think we're so accustomed to it, but when visitors do come, it is one thing that has been mentioned.

Hon. Peter Milliken: Raise it with the Minister of Public Works; they're on the outside of the building.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I could do that.

Hon. Peter Milliken: She'd love to hear from you.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I think it was in your opening comments that you mentioned the increases to the estimates (C), statutory appropriations. About halfway down the page, you talked about additional funding for the travel points system. You mentioned, if I heard you correctly, that this is the first time since 2005-06 that there's been any increase to this particular allotment.

Could you give us a percentage figure, maybe per year or even from that one big jump? What does the \$2.7 million represent in terms of percentage increase, and is this in line with the growing costs over the years?

If you don't have that material today, you can send it later on, but I'd be interested in knowing what that would be.

Hon. Peter Milliken: I think Ms. Kennedy will have some figures that she could enlighten you with in terms of the amount that was there before, and how much is spent in each of the years.

In fact, I can list the expenditures if you'd like to hear them. For 2005-06 it was \$17,455,000. To go to 2009-10, it's estimated at \$21,317,000.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Percentage-wise, we're looking at what?

Hon. Peter Milliken: That I don't have calculated on this sheet.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Is it maybe ten percent? I guess my point is that it doesn't seem like an inordinate yearly increase in terms of the overall travel points budget system. It's not out of line with what we could expect.

Hon. Peter Milliken: No, not at all. In fact, if you factor in elections and so on, the figures haven't gone up that much at all. Certainly in election years there's usually less travel because you're restricted to one trip to Ottawa. Most people don't even bother doing that during that time, so there's considerable restriction there.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski, you're next on my list.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Ms. O'Brien, for being here.

My question—when I get to the question—might be considered slightly out of order here, but I think it's a question all of us here have a great deal of interest in having answered, so I preface my remarks by saying that. It has to do with ten percenters, so it does have some relationship to the reasons you're here.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, yesterday there was a motion passed through the House to stop the regrouping or the mailing of ten percenters outside of our own ridings. That issue is mainly within the purview of the Board of Internal Economy, which you chair. Subsequent to that, the Liberals have indicated they would be voluntarily stopping those mailings, but they would want a review to see if other parties complied with the motion.

The Conservative Party said we would stop mailing outside of our own ridings if all of the other parties did as well, so if all parties said that was good, and we all agreed, then fine, and it would be a done deal. The cost of ten percenters would go down. That would be a good thing.

My question—and this is where we might be just fringing on whether or not this is in order—is what happens if you do not get unanimous consent amongst all parties to stop mailing ten percenters outside of our own ridings? Is the BOIE compelled to follow the wishes of the House, based on the motion that was carried, or does it have a certain autonomy on that issue of ten percenters?

Again, Mr. Speaker, I don't know whether you're in a position to answer or not, but I think everyone here would love to get your take on that.

• (1250)

The Chair: If you tread carefully, I'll allow you to, if you would like.

Hon. Peter Milliken: Oh, I'm so keen.

Voices: Oh! Oh!

Hon. Peter Milliken: Obviously it's a matter for the board to decide, but I point out that the board is a statutory body, not a committee of the House. So whether the House order binds it or not, I don't know, but then if the order was not complied with by the board, would there be claims that the board was in contempt of the House? I don't know.

I think the possibilities of argument here are substantial and possibly endless. The board will be meeting soon. I believe our next meeting is on Monday. We'll see what happens if and when this issue is raised at the meeting. I suspect it might be, given the resolution of the House, and given the statements that have been made by parties.

We'll see what happens at the board meeting. Maybe there'll be a motion to end them, and if so, the bylaws will be amended accordingly. I will see.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I won't, Mr. Speaker, burden you with offering an opinion on this—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: —but I thank you for your candour. We'll see what happens.

The Chair: Madame DeBellefeuille.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Chairman, I would like to come back to my earlier question. Mr. Bard may be in the best position to give me the information I am seeking. Many times the purchase of computer equipment is problematic if we want to buy equipment that is not on the list recommended by the Information Technology Operations Service. I must say that sometimes, even though we may not be thinking bad thoughts, it is difficult not to conclude that one company is receiving preferential treatment, to the detriment of another.

One example would be digitizers. The only company you suggest we purchase from is Hewlett-Packard. Their price for a scanner ranges from \$243 to \$300. I personally bought a Cannon for \$89. We are not talking about a local brand here; this is Cannon. IT technicians tend to refuse to install it for me if it is not on the list.

So this is what I am asking: if you want us to purchase equipment that is on your list—because you test these products and then make recommendations—you have to offer us a competitive price range. We can buy a good scanner with an extended warranty for less than \$100. There is no reason why I should devote \$300 from my budget to that. That is my first point. I referred to scanners, but the same applies to computers and all the other accessories.

Please answer that question, and if I still have time left, I will address one to Ms. Kennedy.

Mr. Louis Bard: Thank you for your question.

There is obviously a distinction to be made between equipment purchased for your riding office, as opposed to your office on the Hill. For your riding office, as a Member of Parliament, you have all the necessary latitude, except if you make use of your MP improvement fund; in that case, you must follow House of Commons standards. In that case, if the MP has equivalent equipment that meets the standards, is cheaper and provides the same service, he can purchase it. Where we do make a major distinction is with respect to equipment used on Parliament Hill. The primary reason for that, as you know—and this is good news—is that the systems on the Hill are highly integrated, which means that there has to be a certain discipline and rigour applied to equipment that we authorize and install in MPs' offices.

The difference, for example, when you buy a recommended scanner—in other words, the only one you are authorized to purchase for your office on the Hill—is that we provide a total guarantee: you do not have to purchase any maintenance contract. We have what is called the Depot Service and we are the local provider representing the company. We give you the assurance that you will never be left to deal with equipment on your own and that we will provide cutting edge service. We understand how important the work of MPs is. My role is, first and foremost, to ensure that

Members of Parliament can perform their parliamentary duties. In no case would I want them to be distracted by deficient technology, to be unable to access the network, to have a dysfunctional schedule, to be unable to go to the House, to not receive a copy of debates, and so on. Security considerations are huge at the House of Commons, because of the impact—there are cyber attacks on the scale of the entire campus—it's huge!

Having said that, we provide quality service which includes support and this flexibility. Every piece of equipment has its own characteristics, in terms of the microcomputer chip and what are called drivers. It is very difficult for us to guarantee quality service if we are dealing with 25 different companies that produce scanners, printers, computers, and so on. It's a little like a garage mechanic saying that he repairs every imaginable make of car.

• (1255)

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: We are not talking about 50 companies; you only have one.

Mr. Louis Bard: Just to complete my point with respect to standing offers; in fact, why do we choose this or that piece of equipment? The fact is that the House of Commons regularly renews its standing offers, and we always choose the best price when the purchase is made. That is pretty much the approach.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Cuzner, if you have a really quick yes-or-no kind of question, I'll take it.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: It's quick. It's in conjunction with Mr. Lukiwski's line of questioning. I don't know whether or not the question is in order.

Am I to assume from the response we got from the last one that there hasn't been a precedent-setting case on either side of the argument with regard to the motion? Have any precedents been referred to?

The Chair: A motion of the House to the Board of Internal Economy; I believe that's the question.

A voice: Has there been any precedent?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No, not that I'm aware of.

The Chair: Then I look forward to the board meeting.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: As do I.

The Chair: We are finished with that today, but we still have to vote: this is vote 5c of the House of Commons under Parliament.

PARLIAMENT

House of Commons

Vote 5c—Program expenditures.....\$5,712,988

(Vote 5c agreed to)

The Chair: Shall the chair report vote 5c of the House of Commons under Parliament to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I thank you all for your help.

Is there anything else for the good of the committee today?

Seeing nothing, we are adjourned.

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