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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): May I please call the meeting to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a)(iii), we're going to be talking about new technologies and their impact on House and committee proceedings.

Mr. Speaker, you did send some sort of statement for this committee to look at, so we thought the best person to have here today to come and speak on this issue was you. I understand you can't be with us for the full two hours today, but I'm hoping that just through a few rounds of questioning we can get a direction as to where this committee wants to head on this study.

Let's start off with you and Madam O'Brien, and introduce who you have brought with you today. I don't know if you have an opening statement, or will we just go to a round of questioning?

Hon. Peter Milliken (Speaker of the House of Commons): Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for the kind invitation. I don't have much of an opening statement. I really said it in the ruling on this issue that I made in the House a few weeks ago.

Louis Bard and Rob Walsh are with us, if you wish to ask them any questions. I'm sure you're familiar with their roles here in the House, and they'd be more than happy to discuss this issue with you.

[Translation]

As I mentioned, I made a ruling in the house with regard to the matter. It's an issue the committee might want to consider. That's what I suggested, with perhaps amending the Standing Orders of the House, if that is the desired outcome.

[English]

I don't know whether you want to make recommendations on this one or not.

My concern was that there was a complaint that members were reporting who was present and who wasn't. As was pointed out in the argument, a reporter could do that if the reporter were sitting in the gallery, but we don't see reporters in the gallery as often as we used to in the old days. They're not seeing who is present in the House and who isn't, so it doesn't get reported very often. But it's certainly something the press gallery could do. There is no offence against reporting it.

Members are not allowed to refer to a member's absence in the House, and that's fine. They may refer to that absence if they print a

note on their BlackBerry and send it out, saying a member is not there, which is not the same as saying it in the House. Our prohibition is on saying it in the House in the course of one's remarks.

As you know, lots of games are played to get around it, like welcoming a member back, or saying how nice it is to see the member's fresh face arrive in the House, and that sort of thing. These things happen from time to time. So without commenting on any of that... I'm not sure this is a matter of great importance, but because the issue was raised and I had to give a ruling on it, I thought you might want to look at it. If you want to make some statement, or ban this practice or do nothing, the committee would at least have studied it, and that was my purpose.

The Chair: Madam O'Brien, do you have anything on this, or shall we go to questions?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien (Clerk of the House of Commons, House of Commons): You can go to questions, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Great.

Madam Jennings, it is so good to have you back. We did miss you. It hasn't been the same without you. I'm certain you know that.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): On division.

The Chair: And we're going to let you start off today.

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

It's great to be back. And if you see my eye winking, I'm not winking at you. I think everyone who knows me well knows I'm not a winker.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the ruling you made, that it is not parliamentary and that it's not acceptable to comment on the absence of members in the House—and that's by any means—was quite clear. I think your statement again this morning was quite clear, and the ruling you made in the House was quite clear. It is not appropriate for a member to comment on the absence of another member in the House, whether it's done verbally, by e-mail, by Twitter, or by telephone. It's simply not appropriate. I'm going to leave my comments at that.

The Chair: Great.

Mr. Lukiwski.

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

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

I guess I'm going to go a little farther than Marlene did. I understand your ruling. I was hoping, frankly, that it would be—I don't want to use the word harsher—a little bit more direct than it was, because, and you mentioned this as well in part of your ruling, and you've said it so many times, you cannot do indirectly that which you cannot do directly. My feeling was that since Mr. Galipeau was actually Twittering from his seat in the House, it should have been ruled out of order.

I understand the background and the rationale for your ruling. What I've ascertained from the members who discussed this last week is that the majority, if not all, of the members here at this committee felt there should be a direction a little stronger than the one you gave. In other words, you encourage members not to do it, but I would frankly like to see a ruling that says you cannot and shall not do that again. I think that would be appropriate.

While it's true we are allowed to have computers, laptops, BlackBerrys, and electronic devices in the House, I think there could still be some pretty clear direction given from you, Speaker, saying that while we have access to these, let's not abuse it, and by that I mean thou shall not Twitter or Facebook or whatever, using electronic devices, and commenting on the presence of absence or members. I would have liked to have seen a bit of a stronger ruling, but that's my opinion.

Looking at the research provided from a researcher here on committee, some other jurisdictions allow electronic devices and some don't. Some allow them at certain times in the House but not in question period, for example. All of them seem to have the underlying premise that whatever devices should be allowed, or would be allowed, or are allowed, could only be allowed if they do not affect the decorum. I think that is the clear direction: that any member who brings in an electronic device should not be allowed to interrupt or disturb the procedures of the House or interrupt decorum.

In your experience, since you've seen the introduction of electronic devices in the House, have you noticed any real problems with their introduction into the House? Or do you see a trend, where more and more disruptions or protocol matters are being interrupted because of someone's use of an electronic device?

• (1110)

Hon. Peter Milliken: Frankly, no, I haven't. The clerk may have a different view. I'm not in the chair a whole lot of time during debate—more in question period and Standing Order 31 statements, not so much in debate—so perhaps I'm not a good person to ask this question of.

My impression is that members sit there doing things on their computers, which wasn't the case when I was first elected. You couldn't plug your computer into the House. There was no way of wiring it up. I'm not particularly good at computers anyway and I can't use one. There's one in front of me, but the clerks run it. I have no mouse or anything. I can't do a thing on it except look, and I point out errors, so that's about the extent of my stuff. I think other members are using them to read material, to correct letters and stuff that you used to get in binders that would come in, and you'd make the changes, signing, and so on. Now a lot of it is done online instead. I don't think it has made a big difference.

I have no idea whether members are sending messages to one another in the House. Of course, I wouldn't see that or know it. It's possible, but I'd be surprised, because you don't see a lot of members with their computers open and working on them during question period. They tend to be engaging in discussion much more.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: We have seen, though, a couple of instances—both, frankly, from the government side—where it's been discovered that members have either Twittered or tweeted about the proceedings going on, either during question period or in the House. I suppose not only would that potentially be a real concern—although the proceedings in question period and the House, of course, are on CPAC, so one can't say you're going to be infringing upon any confidential matters. But I do wonder about use of electronic devices from time to time in committee.

I don't think we've seen any infractions yet. There have been some infractions, I guess, with people speaking to the media about information that was contained at an in camera meeting. I think on both sides of the House members have had to stand up and apologize. I do have some concerns if electronic devices are going to be misused in committee, during matters that should be in camera; that's a problem that's going to have to be dealt with.

I don't have any solutions or suggestions here, but I just wonder if there may come a time where we do have a problem. My point is that I'd like to see those problems addressed before they become problems.

Hon. Peter Milliken: I stress that if a committee has its meeting in camera, it's an offence for the member to go out and talk about what happened in the meeting after or during. It doesn't matter when it is. If the thing is in camera, you're not supposed to disclose what happened in it.

So if you do it by running outside and saying, "So and so is in here now talking about this and that", blah, blah, blah...I don't know that there's a big difference between that and typing something on your electronic device and sending it somewhere else. They're both incorrect; they're offensive to the rules that govern our committees, and so on. So both are a problem.

In reference to the presence or absence of members in the House, members can go outside the House and say people weren't there. Our rules don't prohibit that. It's just making reference to their presence or absence in debate in the House. Is typing a note on Twitter, or tweeting—however you do that, I don't know—different from going outside and saying, "You know, I was sitting in there today and John Doe wasn't there. Imagine. In fact, there was a whole list of members of that party who weren't there. I can read you the list." That's my concern.

• (1115)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: But do you have to wait until an infraction takes place before you can make a ruling? Or would you be in a position to make some sort of preemptive rule, for example, in committees, just advising all committee members or all members of the House that even though it's an obvious thing, they shall not use electronic devices to comment on in camera proceedings?

Hon. Peter Milliken: I would think the committee—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Common sense dictates that it would.

Hon. Peter Milliken: A notice could be sent to the committee saying that's the case, that the rules are there that govern that. I'm sure that could be arranged.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Audrey, please.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Mr. Chairman, if I could, one of the reasons why the ruling was in certain ways equivocated is because it really isn't a question so much of the gadget, or whether there's a gadget used; it's a question of whether or not the courtesy has been infringed. That is where the difficulty is.

Presumably, if one were to go back in time, the business of not referring to a colleague's absence or presence was basically a collegial courtesy that you extended to members because you, as a member, knew that they might well be off on parliamentary business, in committees, or in the constituency, or whatever. And because there's someone you can appeal to.... If they do it out loud, if they stand up and say something, you can ask the Speaker to intervene on a point of order; then there's a corrective measure. There isn't a corrective measure if they say so outside.

The thing about the gadgets is, how do you police whether it was used while the member was in the chamber instead of outside or in the lobby? Then you start parsing geography, which is a problem.

With regard to committees, if I may just add one thing, I think the business of in camera disclosure has been a problem from the time there have been in camera meetings. That is to say that people have broken the trust of the committee, which is supposed to be meeting in camera, and have, in one way or another, divulged what went on. Whether they used an electronic gadget, as they can do today, and can arguably go further and faster because they're using the electronic communication device, nonetheless, that problem has been raised before, so it's nothing new.

What I think is new... There again, it comes into the development of a new kind of manners around the use of electronic devices. I think the smaller the group of parliamentarians that is at work, the more potential there is for things to go off the rails. I happened to see the other day a letter that went into a committee from witnesses who had been very offended when they appeared before a committee because everybody in the committee was actually paying way more attention to their BlackBerry than they were to the witnesses who were making the presentation. My feeling is that feeds into a negative atmosphere of people coming to make their point before Parliament.

I know members have a lot of different calls on their time, and it's important that they keep in touch, but I think that's one of the things we're seeing. It's more compelling to pay attention to the electronic master than it is to the person who's in front of you—if I may just have a small rant here.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: That's all I had to say.

A voice: Or do both at the same time.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Or do both at the same time.

The Chair: And very appropriate too. Thank you.

Monsieur Guimond.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Milliken, I carefully read the ruling you made in the case involving the member for Ottawa—Orleans.

From the outset, I would like to say that I am not surprised he was the subject of a point of order. I think we are all aware of how this member behaved when he unfortunately presided over House deliberations. He was a model of incompetence. I think his behaviour has not changed since then. If you want proof of this, ask yourself why he was replaced as Deputy Speaker of the House.

That being said, it is clear that no Standing Order currently addresses this issue. You repeated this a little earlier in response to a question asked by Ms. Jennings. You said that you would strongly recommend that the member stop engaging in such activity, and that you would refer the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which would study the ins and outs of the issue.

However, we will have another problem. I imagine that we will end up by amending the Standing Orders. Therefore, new technologies will have to be codified. Will we have to predict any potential consequences? Once in a while, when a member says something unparliamentary, you would ask him to apologize. I don't know whether the Standing Orders indicate that you can make this request three times, like in baseball, where it's three strikes and you're out. You could eject a member for the remainder of the sitting. It's all very well and good to tell members that they are not allowed to do something, but if there are no consequences, the punishment will only have moral implications. Therefore, should there be consequences?

You probably realize that we will also have to address the use of cell phones. More and more colleagues from all parties take calls on their cell phones with impunity. This happens in the House.

• (1120)

Hon. Peter Milliken: It's really because of the argument you are making that I referred this matter to the committee.

What should the speaker do when a member is speaking on his cell phone? In the chamber, you cannot do so, but you can send messages. The Standing Orders say nothing about that. We decided to allow laptops into the House, and it is possible to send a message via laptops. Why should a member not be allowed to do so with a small electronic device? In my opinion, there is no problem with sending a written message.

However, as far as the content of a message is concerned, is it up the Speaker to decide what can be said? For example, should a member be prohibited from revealing that John Doe is not in the chamber, or that he has just left the chamber? What is the problem?

Mr. Michel Guimond: It's because—

Hon. Peter Milliken: During a debate, you cannot reveal whether an MP is in the House or not. During a debate, a message sent outside of the chamber is not part of the debate happening in the chamber. An MP can leave the chamber and reveal that some members were not there today. You can read a list to anyone who is outside the chamber. This is not prohibited in the Standing Orders, and that's the problem.

If you want to amend the Standing Orders to prohibit members from revealing this type of thing outside of the chamber, that's all very well and good, but that is not the case right now. It's only when there is a debate in the chamber that one is not allowed to do this. If a member transmits this information in a message, or when exiting the chamber, what is the problem? There is no violation of the Standing Orders. That's the problem which I had to deal with in this ruling, and that's why I referred it to this committee.

Mr. Michel Guimond: However, a principle in law says that you cannot do indirectly what is prohibited directly. If I get up during question period and I repeat, once again, for a third consecutive day, that the Prime Minister is not there to take our questions, I have just done directly what I am prohibited from doing.

Hon. Peter Milliken: Yes, but you can say that outside the chamber.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Yes.

• (1125)

Hon. Peter Milliken: There is nothing in the Standing Orders about that. So what is the difference between a situation where you see something outside of the chamber, that a message is received and read outside of the chamber, and another situation where you go outside the chamber to say something, and that whatever you say is heard?

Mr. Michel Guimond: I am technologically illiterate, or almost illiterate, but I know that when a posting goes up on Twitter, the time it goes up is indicated. So if you can prove that a member was in the chamber at six minutes past two, when he Twittered who was present and who was absent, you can say that he did so from the floor of the House, which is unacceptable. However, I agree with you that my assistant, who is responsible for press scrums, can indicate, for example, that for three consecutive days of the week, the Prime Minister or a certain minister were not in the House to take our questions.

Mr. Chair, I believe you meet fairly often with the speakers of other legislative assemblies and speakers of the assemblies of Commonwealth countries.

Without revealing any state secrets, can you tell us whether the issue of new technologies has been debated by these speakers? Our two researchers have done excellent work. We now know how four major democracies, including some Commonwealth members, deal with this issue. Further, last year, or two years ago, I believe, you visited Canada's provincial legislative assemblies. I remember that you visited the Quebec National Assembly. We know how four provinces have dealt with this issue. So have speakers debated this matter?

Hon. Peter Milliken: Yes, of course, there have been discussions, but not of the type we are having here today, regarding information sent from the floor of the chamber to Twitter. Some elected

representatives are not allowed to use their laptops in their legislative assembly, whereas in other legislative assemblies, there is a computer on every desk. I think the situation varies greatly from each legislative assembly in the Commonwealth to another. I believe there are presentations on this issue once a year when we meet. It certainly is an interesting subject, but I don't remember all the details.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): I don't want to discuss your decision, but I have to say that I completely disagree with it, with all due respect.

Mr. Lukiwski was talking about CPAC. For example, if a speech is broadcast on CPAC, it's public. When someone says that so and so is in the House, or not, the people who are in the House know this already. That's not the issue; it's that you cannot say so publicly. A member might have to leave the chamber to conduct some business, as has always been the case, and that's fine. A member might organize a scrum and state that so and so is absent that day. However, you cannot say so directly during a debate in the House, but you can do so indirectly. Mr. Guimond spoke to this issue, and I want to, as well. The time of a posting is indicated on Twitter. When members are in the chamber, not only can they send information through CPAC to all Canadians, that is, to those who get CPAC at home, but they can send it out to the entire world.

I think you could have made a different ruling, and it is up to us to clarify the situation, perhaps by way of a Standing Order. Members should not be allowed to use an electronic device to indicate that someone is in the chamber, be it on Facebook or Twitter, which indicates the time a posting is made. A member can be at his or her desk in the chamber for a couple of hours, but be working on a series of reports, or chatting with a colleague, or doing whatever. In my view, this shows a lack of politeness towards one's colleagues. But to send out an electronic message, revealing that someone is away from the chamber, is the same thing as standing up and saying so out loud. It does not interfere with the work of the House of Commons when someone reveals, for example, that Guy Lauzon is not present. Everyone who knows Guy Lauzon and who is in the House of Commons knows that he is not there. So I don't think that that was the purpose of that Standing Order. It was to prevent information from being sent outside the House.

Reporters are not members of Parliament. Reporters who use these devices don't have to account for their use of them. The Standing Orders apply to members of Parliament, not to reporters. Members of Parliament cannot use the same tools to tell the world that someone is not present in the chamber, and that a certain member should be there during an important debate. Say there is a debate on a bill, and that a certain association is interested in the matter, but then a member publicly reveals that the main interest party is absent. If you had ruled—which you did not—that members were prohibited from doing this, that is, that they are not allowed to use these devices because the time of a post appears on Twitter or Facebook, I think that would have been the end of the matter.

But now, your ruling compels us to amend or clarify the Standing Order.

•(1130)

Hon. Peter Milliken: In my opinion, you can do this, since it's the members who create the Standing Orders of the House. I am a servant of the House, as I have often said.

For example, you can send text messages via BlackBerry. Let's say I'm exchanging text messages with someone who is outside the chamber. This person asks me a question regarding Yvon Godin. I respond that he is not in the chamber today. I am not allowed to do this from the chamber, but can I do so from the lobby?

I don't want to make that decision. If the committee wants to amend the Standing Orders to prohibit a member from texting in the chamber, so be it.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The question is not whether it is done within the House or not. Let us say there is a discussion, a debate underway on a given issue, and someone sends a message over the Twitter network to an organization, indicating that such and such a member is not in the House. I think that is the issue we are dealing with. If not, you might as well strike the other rule and allow people who are in the House to comment on the members' presence or absence. The rule doesn't have much of an impact any more.

Hon. Peter Milliken: It certainly does have an impact. In my view, it isn't up to the Speaker to decide. However, if the committee wishes to change the Standing Orders so that members cannot refer to another member's presence over Twitter, using a computer—

Mr. Yvon Godin: —when you are sitting in the House of Commons!

Hon. Peter Milliken: Yes, but that is difficult to enforce. For example, if you write a message and only send it once you are in the lobby, is that permitted?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes.

Some voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Yvon Godin: This isn't a laughing matter.

Now suppose that I am sitting in the House of Commons, that I note someone's absence and keep that in mind. At present, it is legal to transmit that information once I have exited the House. Who is to say that the message cannot be sent from within the House? When he took his BlackBerry, wrote a message and Twittered it, he was sitting in the House. Besides, the hour is indicated on the message. He did that on the spot, as if he had exited the House and said so publicly. That goes against the Standing Orders. He makes accusations while sitting in the House. If he is in the House of Commons and makes those accusations during debate, it is as if he had gotten up and said so publicly.

Hon. Peter Milliken: If I were to tell the member that he did so in the House, because the message was sent at 11:16—

Mr. Yvon Godin: —and you were sitting in the chair—

Hon. Peter Milliken: —and he answers that he was sitting in the lobby and having a coffee at that time and that he sent the message from the lobby, what am I to say? I do not know.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Mr. Godin, I think that you are putting the emphasis on the location from which the person was sending the message—

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, because that tells us at what time he sent the message.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: —whereas the Speaker is placing the emphasis on the people who receive the message.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, because that shows us at what time he sent the message. According to our Standing Orders as they are now worded, if I am sitting in the House of Commons then I cannot rise and say such a thing in public, but I can leave to go get a coffee and then say the same thing in public.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: In that case, you are no longer in the House, as the Speaker has indicated. If you decide to move to the lobby or go up to the gallery to greet guests—

•(1135)

Mr. Yvon Godin: My thinking, rather, is that others are watching Twitter, and the member knows that for a fact. He then rises and makes a point of order. For example, he points out to the Speaker that Mr. Godin has just sent something out over Twitter while sitting in the House, not while drinking coffee and eating cookies in the lobby. What should be done in such a case?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I think that the issue is to what extent we should rely on the Speaker to insist that colleagues extend a collegial courtesy to one another. There will always be ways to get around the rule stating that members cannot refer to another's absence or presence in the House. That is not part of a specific Standing Order. It is House practice, and I think it comes from the notion of courtesy towards one's colleagues. A member can call on the Speaker when he or she feels wronged by another member. The issue has been raised as to the use of electronic devices in the House. Clearly, I think the Speaker discourages such behaviour, without going so far as prohibiting it.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Ah, "the Speaker has closed his eyes and nodded off": now that would be a great Twitt.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, but I just have to finish my Twitter that Mr. Cuzner left the meeting today.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Just kidding.

That was the seven-minute round. We'll move to five minutes in just a second. If you don't mind, I have one question that I'd like to ask of Mr. Walsh.

Where does a member's privilege carry over on electronic devices? If I say it in the House, am I covered by privilege even if I've said it on my electronic device? I don't take many questions as the chair, but I thought of that one, and I had some help from our researchers. If I say it on my BlackBerry, am I still covered?

Mr. Rob Walsh (Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, House of Commons): No.

The Chair: But I'm sitting in the House.

Mr. Rob Walsh: You can do all kinds of things in the House and not be covered.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Rob Walsh: It's the base that is covered; it's the proceedings of the House that are covered. I'm not yet aware that the Speaker has made a ruling that Twittering or Facebooking or communicating on a BlackBerry constitute part of the proceedings of the House. I stand to be corrected, of course, in the presence of the Speaker, but I'm not aware of that.

Hon. Peter Milliken: Just as writing a letter is not.

The Chair: Okay. Even if I did it in my role as an MP and did it in—

Hon. Peter Milliken: On letterhead and everything, yes.

The Chair: Right. Okay. Super.

Mr. Pacetti, welcome today. It's good to have you here.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you.

I might as well admit that I am a BlackBerry-carrying member, so I can put that disclaimer out.

I'm not going to belabour the point, but I agree with all of this—that's my personal opinion—in regard to what you can do directly. What you do directly, you can't do indirectly. I don't know how the committee is going to wade into that, but I'm more looking at what Mr. Guimond brought up before, the sanctions.

So before you expel us or prevent us from using a BlackBerry, I would like to perhaps warn you that we are very addicted to them. I don't know how you would implement a sanction. You're going to be punishing the innocent, because probably 99.9% of us are good parliamentarians and won't disclose that another member is not in the House, but I'm sure you're going to want to sanction the members who are continuously or chronically avoiding or circumventing the rules.

If we are going to look at perhaps limiting access to these electronic devices, as you were saying, Ms. O'Brien...I'm a regular member of the finance committee and we get screamed at regularly for looking at our BlackBerrys. When the witness screams at us, we all put our BlackBerrys down, and when the next witness speaks, we all pick them up again. So it is a huge problem, but it is one that I think has to be looked at not only in the House but in all committees and at all functions. But we need them.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: We lived without them before.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Yes, but it's not the same as it used to be.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Mr. Dryden, would you like to share Mr. Pacetti's time?

Welcome to you, today.

• (1140)

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you.

From the comments you made, I mostly heard that even if the instrument is different, what we are doing is not much different, if at all, directly and indirectly. In fact we have been doing lots of things of a sort indirectly for a long time. This is another way of doing it; I'm just not sure it ends up being any different.

Certainly if the point is disruption of the House, I don't think so. I don't see how it further disrupts the House, especially in the context of all the things that do disrupt the House. I think it is looking at something that is very, very minor in the context of something that is very, very major.

It goes to the point the clerk was making earlier and that Massimo brought up a bit. We are all used to being in situations where somebody is reading a newspaper or writing a letter or looking at their BlackBerry. We're used to that.

I remember the first couple of weeks I was here being so stunned by that—in our caucus meetings and so on—and then it became very normal and very explainable. We live 24-hour days that have 36 hours worth of things to do, so we do things at the same time.

I can explain it, but it's very difficult to explain to somebody whose experience is different. Somebody who arrives at a committee hearing or is sitting up in the gallery is somebody for whom coming to Ottawa is a big deal. Testifying before a committee is a big deal. They have prepared for it. They are here. They have taken it seriously. They feel the seriousness of the surroundings, and all of a sudden they experience something where their understanding is that they're not being taken seriously.

We have our own perspective on it and our own sets of experiences, but we're also dealing with a much larger audience who react in a very different way because their experiences are very different. It doesn't do us any good in terms of our reputation. It really does considerable harm.

This is slightly beyond the technology part, but I would like to use the opportunity to say it. It goes to that sense of disruption in the House. We do not do ourselves any favours by what we look and sound like in the House and in question period. It's all normal to us; it's explicable. But anybody watching at home may only have an impression, a visual experience, with an MP on the 10 o'clock news. In the course of a year it's not likely that you're going to knock on their door. It's not likely that you're going to be at an event. Their experience of you, or anybody like you, is going to be the clip from question period on the news.

We do not do ourselves any favours. We may have all kinds of explanations of why it is that way—and there are sound explanations—but the end result is that we are much more disrespected.

I would say two things in terms of the context of all that. One is that what we are used to in terms of dealing with ourselves is one thing. In terms of dealing with the public, it's quite different, and we don't do ourselves any favours in that way. Second, in terms of the extent to which what we're talking about today has an impact on the House, to me, it's extremely minor in the context of something that is a lot more major than that.

• (1145)

Hon. Peter Milliken: Could I just throw something in?

Suppose, for example, Mr. Chairman, you were sitting in the House working away, and Mr. Reid came over to your office and said, "I've got a point of order I want to make in the House. Is the Speaker in the chair, or is it somebody else?" Your staff say, "We'll find out", and send you an e-mail or a text message saying, "Is the Speaker in the chair or not?" You write back, "No, it's the Deputy Speaker."

It was sent from the House. It says I'm not there. Imagine. Is this something that shouldn't happen?

That is part of the thing. You can send these messages and get information. You can text a member sitting in the House and ask if so-and-so is there because you want to talk to so-and-so. The person says he's not there, and you're suddenly in trouble. If he's there, you're fine, but if he isn't there, technically you've breached our rules, because you can't refer to the absence of a member.

You're asking the Speaker to decide when this is an offence and when it is not, without there being a rule in place that governs it. The rule is that in debate you can't. My point in my ruling was that a text message isn't a debate. Yes, it isn't good to be sending that kind of information out, but if we want to stop it, it is going to be tough to stop unless we eliminate the machine issue, I think. Do you know what I'm saying?

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Albrecht, or Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I'll take my entire time.

The Chair: I'm being very liberal with the time today, and I would like you all to recognize it.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I would like to thank the Speaker and Ms. O'Brien for being here today, and I think the Speaker has done a great job of showing the complexity of this issue, not just by his comments but by his body language. Can we record that somehow?

The Chair: Let's get that out. We could get one of those cameras in here.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Madam O'Brien, you mentioned the electronic master at the committee and the disrespect we show to our witnesses. From the way you worded that comment, I am certain you were speaking to my wife as well, because this often comes up.

Because I am feeling so guilty, I am going to take a different approach to a different question.

With regard to cameras in the House, it says clearly that those are not permitted, but on a number of occasions since I've been here we've had special guests—maybe international prime ministers—or the apology for the residential schools situation or even the Olympic torch. It was obvious there were dozens and dozens of cameras being used. Are there different rules when the House is formally in session? When do you decide if it's approved or not? Is it a judgment call, or is there a rule somewhere that would cover that sort of thing?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I think Mr. Speaker summed it up well when he murmured to me just now, "What cameras?"

I think we've crossed over a border. We now find that cameras are really ubiquitous, because anybody who has a smart phone has a camera. That wasn't the case before, so it was much more intrusive,

if you will, than it is now, but I think a certain common sense prevails. If it's an occasion on which people are taking mementoes of a very special day—the apology, for instance, for the residential schools, the Olympic torch, and so forth—I think nobody would object, because pretty well everybody is taking part. That doesn't mean that it's different.

I think the original intention, going back to first principles, was the idea that you weren't to disrespect colleagues by taking pictures of them, say, reading newspapers, having a doze, or doing other things that would not be easily explicable to the outside world. A picture of someone who's particularly hardworking and tired—

Hon. Peter Milliken: Or someone who is particularly bored—

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Or an entire empty side—

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Well, yes, it could be that kind of thing.

I think the Standing Orders are based on common law. You don't try to codify every instance of misbehaviour.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): I thank my colleague, and I thank you for being here.

I have a few questions. Do the existing rules, the way they are now, accommodate new technologies? Are we able to interpret the spirit of the rule with the new technology, or do we have some hurdles in the existing rules that make it hard to rule on new technologies as they come forward?

• (1150)

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: From the point of view of someone who worked on the second edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, I don't think the new technology poses singular difficulties. It's obviously something where things work faster and further afield, and so forth, but I don't think it interferes with the basis of the principles that are in place. So I don't think it requires a whole new set of rules.

Mr. Randy Hoback: You don't need a new set of rules.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No.

I do think, for example, though, the whole business of the use of the BlackBerry in committees, just in terms of the courtesies that are extended to other colleagues and to witnesses, is something that is being worked out in all kinds of forums. People are finding that they're having meetings and the forum itself is just not being given the attention it deserves. So some meetings will insist that people surrender their BlackBerry. It's kind of like going cold turkey for half an hour, something like that. But that's a different thing. That's really just a way of proceeding. It's not a procedural principle in any way.

Mr. Randy Hoback: What about the rules in the House for outside people who aren't members, reporters or people coming to visit and watching the proceedings? Do you think there needs to be some modification in the rules?

We could have a reporter sitting up in the lobby twittering who's here and who's not here. That's instantaneous; it's gone. So if a reporter is doing it, how do we deal with that situation?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: There was no rule against it. They could have been taking notes and eventually putting it in their newspaper. There has never been any rule against that.

There are instances where there are people who are live blogging from various events, and that doesn't appear to have posed a problem.

Mr. Randy Hoback: In my personal situation, I had a blogger blog incorrectly that I was out of the riding during the prorogation period, when I was actually in my office. We all know, once it's blogged and on the Internet, we're found guilty, convicted, and there's no recourse, because we have no control over that microphone.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: That's the thing, and of course we would have no control over that either.

Mr. Randy Hoback: One other question I want to ask you about concerns the new technology for MPs. There is database technology that would allow me to share files back and forth with my office, that would make things a lot easier for me to do my job, but I'm having problems trying to work through our own IT department to get that technology through our security. We've approached different avenues to see if we could accommodate the security, but they seem to be fairly closed-minded on that.

Is there any way we can look at that again?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I know we're looking at the whole question of file sharing with constituency offices. One of the things we have to be extremely careful about is the whole question of security. We've had instances of cyber attacks that have been quite serious, and we've been able to withstand that by virtue of the threshold of security that we insist on maintaining. But certainly I'd be happy to follow up with the CIO on that for you.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I have one quick question, and it's really a quick question.

Do you think the decorum of the House would improve if the cameras were removed—or is that not a quick question?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: If the cameras were removed?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Yes, during QP, the television cameras.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I wouldn't venture a guess.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I do.

The Chair: Madame DeBellefeuille.

[*Translation*]

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

While listening to my colleagues debate the issue as well as your thoughts on the matter, I realized that this isn't a debate on a Standing Order, or on the compliance or non-compliance with a Standing Order. The decisions we will come to, whether to amend the rules or not, have more to do with the atmosphere and decorum we want to see prevail in the House.

If I understand your ruling correctly, you trust that members will have a minimum of respect and decorum when using devices such as BlackBerrys in order to make partisan comments on Twitter or elsewhere. You don't accuse a member of another party of being absent without partisan intent. Such behaviour does not respect the decorum that Parliament has strived to maintain over the years. I think that is clear.

However, I know that the speed of the technology is very fast. I can ask a question, and a minute later it is up on Facebook, because my assistant has recorded the image. Using a computer, you make a video, record it and post it on Facebook. I can even have the minister's response. Or I can take an excerpt from the minister's response. Things are moving so quickly, and I understand your challenges in terms of circumscribing the use of technology in the House, because this is all becoming complex. Each situation has to be assessed individually, and that can become very complex.

We have the choice. You can give even stricter indications, so that members properly understand that such behaviour is not to be accepted. You can also take the opposite approach: amend the Standing Order and decide that members can no longer use such devices, for example, during question period or debates. The choice is between trusting that members will behave properly and ensure decorum in the House, and, on the contrary, completely changing the rules and prohibiting the use of those technologies, despite the fact that we use them as work tools. Most members use them to do their work, and there have been very few cases like the ones we have seen.

My concern is that if you do not report back to the House and affirm your will as the Speaker more firmly, then we will see an increase in such misuse, because your ruling will not have been forceful enough. That is my personal opinion, with all due respect. The message has to be clear enough in order to discourage such behaviour, otherwise, I fear that there will be increasing misuse of our work tools for partisan purposes.

Let us take a very specific example. If I were to use Twitter and say things that I knew were false, and those falsehoods made it to the media, then they could have a field day with that information by publishing things that were completely false. I think that an MP's privileges could be breached, and he could say that he was in the House and saw the member use Twitter from his or her seat. How could we deal with a case where a member's privilege has been breached, where he or she was falsely accused by another member through the use of such technology?

There will be other rulings for you to make if, in my view, you are not more firm in deterring such behaviour. I would tend to trust members, and if there is abuse, indicate that measures would have to be taken to prohibit the use of technology during question period, for example. I think that the message members need to hear has to be much clearer than what you said in the House.

● (1155)

Hon. Peter Milliken: I thank you for your opinion. In my view, the problem comes from the fact that the House of Commons decided to allow members to use the technology in the House. As you have mentioned, we could change the Standing Orders in order, for example, to prohibit members from sending messages from within the chamber. They could say things, receive messages, but not send any.

It's very easy to leave the House.

[*The witness rises from his seat and then sits back down.*]

Hon. Peter Milliken: There you have it, I am back. Where's the problem? I think the problem comes if we change the rules, for example, to prohibit members from sending messages. Members can simply draft them and then send them from the lobby. There's nothing anyone can do about that. You can look into the House while sending a message from the lobby. Where's the difference?

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: A first step would be to prohibit BlackBerry use during question period, as has been done in other parliaments. If members make the effort to get up and go to the lobby, and that becomes widespread, then we would have to change the rule. It's somewhat like with children. Parents will begin by imposing one form of punishment as a result of bad behaviour, and if that fails, will impose another. I don't think we should get too caught up in all this.

Your example is quite striking, but if each member left their seat to use their BlackBerry in the lobby, there would be no one left in the House. It would be just as well to suspend the sitting. I cannot help but think of the consequences of such a situation. If there was a prohibition and people went out into the lobby to send their messages, then that would lead to operational problems.

• (1200)

Hon. Peter Milliken: Perhaps, but the problem for me is to find out, for example, when and from where a message was sent. I have no way of really knowing when a member is in the House, the lobby or elsewhere.

I believe that this is an issue for the committee to consider. Should BlackBerrys be allowed in the House or not? If a message like the one sent by our colleague is so objectionable as to warrant a prohibition, then change the rules and prohibit BlackBerry use in the House.

Without such a rule, it is very difficult for the Speaker to figure out who sent what from where. That is very important to keep in mind, because a member who is outside the House can refer to a colleague's absence from the Chamber. That is not contrary to our rules. The prohibition against such references only applies during debates in the House.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Godin, I know you've been itching to get a couple more in.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: With regard to what Mr. Hoback was talking about earlier, i.e., the use of cameras inside the House, when we are in committee of the whole, it isn't as if we were sitting as a Parliament. The House is then deemed to be sitting as a committee of the whole, otherwise we could not enter the House to take pictures. Cameras were used as we were sitting as a committee of the whole. Parliament was not sitting during the presentation of the Olympic torch.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No, you were in committee of the whole. You are correct. Camera use is also restricted in committee. You are right, members were not assembled as the House, but rather as a committee of the whole.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Prior to a sitting, as members are entering, some people can be seen taking pictures. I have already noticed that. I have never seen any rule prohibiting that behaviour.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: However, once the work gets underway...

Mr. Yvon Godin: There is something else, and, once again, it's a bit like flogging a dead horse. The problem isn't in sending a message to your office saying that so and so is not in the House. If I send a message to my office saying that such and such a minister isn't in the House, that does not cause a problem. Even without the technology, we can do so today through the pages. A note can be sent to the House of Commons asking whether a given minister is in attendance or not. It's the same thing [Editor's Note: *Inaudible*] Rather, the problem arises when that information is posted to Twitter or Facebook, for everyone to see.

There is no problem when the information is used to carry out our work. It is a very different situation when I need to know whether the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is in the House of Commons or not, and I ask the question of one of my colleagues because I would like to confer with her about crab quotas. However, if debate is underway and a member indicates on Twitter that the Minister of Fisheries did not think fit to attend—I am using an example, it could be the Minister of Transport—then that is of some importance to a greater community.

Hon. Peter Milliken: I do not use it. That is why I am not very familiar with all that.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That is where I see a difference: the moment in which a person is doing something. There is a reason why it is prohibited to mention a member's absence or presence in the House. CPAC, for example, does not give a general view of the House of Commons, which would allow people to note members' presences and absences. The people who debate are those who rise and speak. We can tell if they are there or not. If a person is debating an issue, then he or she is present. The goal is to prevent members from saying who is present and who is not.

In any case, that is how I distinguish the two situations. Nothing prevents a member, in the course of his or her work, from mentioning the presence of another member. There is a difference between contacting a member's office and staff and reporting who is present or not. In my view, the reason why a member would fool around with his BlackBerry is because he isn't much interested in the issue under debate. And members can use their BlackBerrys, laptops, Twitter or other networks to report on what is going on. That member should be paid as an official reporter. That's the problem. It shows a lack of respect toward the House and his colleagues.

Hon. Peter Milliken: You can certainly recommend a change to the rules, by prohibiting the use of computers or BlackBerrys to send messages from the House to Twitter, Facebook or other networks. The issue is submitted to the committee.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I think that is where the problem lies, not anywhere else.

Hon. Peter Milliken: I do not know all the details; I am definitely not an expert.

• (1205)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Lauzon.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair. I find this very interesting.

I'll defer to your experience and your love of history. I wonder if these regulations and rules were put in place before the advent of television and monitors. I can understand why they would have a rule saying you cannot say Mr. Godin is not in the House, because up until the time of televised debates, that was breaking a confidence. Quite frankly, now I'm not breaking any confidences if I say Mr. Godin is not in the House because that's available in so many other ways.

I just wonder if we're not trying to enforce a rule that is almost unenforceable at this juncture. What the heck is the difference whether in this day and age I say Mr. Godin is not in the House? Is that as damaging today as it was when this rule was incorporated?

[*Translation*]

Is it so serious?

[*English*]

I'm not sure. That's why I'm asking that question. I guess that's the question I would ask: is it as damaging?

I think we're trying to get the Speaker to enforce a moral code of sorts of our conduct as parliamentarians, that we should respect each other and that kind of thing. I don't know that we're going to have a whole lot of luck in putting in a whole bunch of regulations and rules, etc., that are going to be terribly hard to administer.

This business of Facebook and Twitter and all that...I could Twitter to one of my staff and they could get it out there. If we really want to do something, we're going to be able to do it. As Mr. Dryden said, in the overall scheme of things, how significant is it? I'm just asking the question; I'm not making a comment.

I'd like to hear your comments on that.

Hon. Peter Milliken: I'm sure the rule was here before television came along. I'm not advocating getting rid of the rule: I think it helps maintain order in the House if members don't refer to the absence of members. If that rule weren't there, we'd hear a lot more of it.

I can just imagine in question period, say, when a minister is saying he can see why the member from so-and-so is asking this question because his colleague isn't here, and name the victim, and the member saying he wants to ask a question of the Minister of Public Works and she's not here, so he'll have to direct it to somebody else. It would happen every time—it would be just great. So I think we're better off with the rules we have in that respect.

How much difference does it make to order when things are happening in other ways? As I've said, it's never been improper for reporters to say who's there or not. You'll frequently read in news accounts—not that I read these every day—the minister of such-and-such answered the questions in the absence of the Prime Minister or the Minister of Justice, whoever wasn't there. Big deal. This happens. It's just part of the way Parliament functions. In my view, it's quite normal that everyone is not there every day. We all have lots of other things to do.

So I think that because it isn't out of order for them to do it, it's a question of how much members can say when they're not in the chamber, and that's been my point throughout this thing. Does typing it on a machine and sending it out mean you're doing it in the chamber? That's the other side of it.

As I say, I think you can consider whether you want to limit it, but as you point out—and this is what I don't know a lot about—if you send something on Twitter to one person only, and then that person disseminates it, then bingo, it's out. I don't know how that system works. As I say, I'm not using it. On the other hand, you could send the e-mail to your staff and they could copy it to everybody on your mailing list, I suppose.

I don't know; it's a tough one. That's why I thought having a discussion in the committee would be useful from the point of view of settling what members would like. It may be that the committee simply makes a recommendation that members not do certain things in order to protect the institution or protect its reputation, and then hope that members comply without having a strict rule that is then enforced by some punishment if the member doesn't.

• (1210)

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Based on your last comment, Mr. Speaker, I very respectfully disagree with you in one sense.

I think we have to come to two things here. One is to determine whether we think there is a problem or a potential for difficulties in the future. If we think there could be, and I personally think there could be future abuses of this, then we have to take some sort of preemptive action. It's always been my experience that if you have recommendations as opposed to strict rules, and if the recommendations have no real consequences to them, then the frequency of the abuse becomes greater and greater. I think that's what the potential is here. I'm not suggesting there should be a ruling from the Speaker; I'm suggesting that probably something should come out of this committee, either a very strong recommendation or perhaps a change of the rules and how we operate.

With the prevalence of the electronic devices that we have now—and who knows what we're going to have five years from now by way of devices we can't even imagine today—I think the temptation will be there. The potential for abuse is there because we have no real consequence. No one has said, "You can't do this." We have rules stating that you can't say something in public in debate, but there's nothing to say what you can and can't do on your BlackBerry. As one of my colleagues pointed out—and it's absolutely true, and I think we all know this—if someone were to stand up in debate and say, "I would like to ask a question of the Minister of Finance, but since he's not here I'm going to ask his colleague", that's going to be recorded in Hansard. But if you Twitter it, who knows?

If we want to comply with the rules as written today, then we have to look at electronic devices and how we deal with them, and we have to give some strong direction to members, for example, stating that you can't do on electronic devices what you're not allowed to do by speaking. I think that's a matter for a full discussion by this committee. I don't have any ready solutions for it, but I think it's something the committee should deal with.

If I'm reading the committee correctly, I think everyone has identified some problems, but really no one has come up with any solutions. Rather than trying to put the onus on you, Mr. Speaker, it's something this committee should deal with. I think we should give some very serious reflection to it. I'm concerned probably as much for what may happen five years down the road with the devices we can't even imagine today. If there are no consequences, we're going to see the examples of some people tweeting or Twittering information that will be considered to be confidential. And there are no consequences for the member to be held accountable by.

I think this committee has to deal with this. I agree with Ken. I don't think it's really a major problem in the House right now, in terms of disruption, protocol, or decorum. It's very minimal, because no one knows—you're not shouting out; you're not heckling. Perhaps if everyone were using their BlackBerrys to heckle, as opposed to just yelling out, it might be a little easier place for you.

But I think there is potential for abuse, and big-time potential for abuse in the future. It's something this committee should consider very carefully.

The Chair: I have no one else on my speakers' list. Is there anyone who has a one-off question?

Monsieur Godin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like to come back to Mr. Lauzon's comment. Perhaps the rule was brought in after the arrival of television in the House of Commons. Prior to that time, members could say that someone was there when in fact that was not the case, because Canadians had no way of knowing. That would be interesting to know, because the rule does not appear in the Standing Orders. I think that, with the advent of television cameras, some members would rise and point out that other members were not in the House. Before that, no one listened anyways.

[*English*]

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Mr. Chairman, let me just comment, through you, on Mr. Lukiwski's comments.

One way the committee might want to consider proceeding is to come up with a recommendation that is generally phrased concerning the appropriate use of electronic devices, with the idea that you would return to it if and when particular problems were to manifest themselves. One of the difficulties that happens, if you try to codify offences, is that you just feed the imagination trying to find clever ways around it. That is my sad experience speaking.

•(1215)

The Chair: We'll hear Randy and then Massimo, please.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I'm just throwing this out as a question. Have you looked at new technology to solve some of these

problems? I can remember being in a movie theatre in the U.K. I walked into the movie theatre and all of a sudden my BlackBerry didn't work; it had no signal. But it worked when you walked outside.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I'm sure if I talked to the CIO, there would be a dizzying array of technological solutions. Somebody yesterday was telling me about a spy store that existed on Bronson Avenue, but we won't get that into that.

What we try to do is make everything as accessible and as open as possible, so that members have real liberty of action, and it's up to them to decide how to proceed.

I'm still reeling from the notion that "tweet" is now a verb that's associated with adults, but never mind.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I'm the wrong person to ask.

An hon. member: It's not just birds.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No, it's not just birds.

The Chair: Mr. Pacetti.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Just as a guideline, as Liberals we tried to ban BlackBerrys in our caucus and it just didn't work.

I don't know how it's going with you guys. Do you guys—

[*Translation*]

Do you have a "no Blackberry" policy at your caucus?

Yvon, are you allowed to use BlackBerrys at your caucus meetings?

[*English*]

We tried. We're a little bit more undisciplined.

Mr. Michel Guimond: This is why everybody knows what's going on inside your caucus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: I have no comments to make on that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Going back to the camera issue, it is stated in the rules and regulations that the use of cameras is prohibited, but we all know that most BlackBerrys and cellphones have cameras.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Going back to the issue of the cameras, it's not prohibited to have them there. It's the use of them there that is prohibited.

The Chair: Great.

Thank you very much for attending today.

You've answered our questions about your referral back to this committee. You have done nothing but give us more questions to answer, but that's what we look for, of course. That's why we're here.

Thank you for giving us some of your precious time today. Our committee will now discuss what our next steps are on this, and it's certainly up to the committee whether we go in camera to discuss committee business or stay just where we are to do it.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: We'll be following on Twitter to find out.

The Chair: Yes. I'll send that right off to you.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you all.

Committee, if we're going to discuss committee business or the further study of this, normally we would go in camera to do so. Shall I suspend for a moment to do so?

Seeing no objections, we'll suspend for a moment to go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

- _____ (Pause) _____
- _____

[Public proceedings resume]

- (1230)

The Chair: We're back. It's as if you never left.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Chair, I suggest we speak to our colleagues about the issue we've been discussing.

The Chair: That would be a great idea, Mr. Lauzon, but does the rest of the committee agree we should speak to our colleagues?

An hon. member: What issue was it?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: The issue was that we had the Speaker and the clerk here discussing today the use of technologies and how that affects decorum in the House and procedure in the House. So we can go and speak and we'll gather back at a later date with all of that.

Go forth.

Thank you all for participating today. It was a great meeting.

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