



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

PROC • NUMBER 028 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, October 28, 2010

—
Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Thursday, October 28, 2010

•(1105)

[*English*]

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

This is the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, meeting 28. Our orders of the day today are pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, October 6, 2010: study of conventions concerning question period in the House of Commons raised by motion number M-517 by the Honourable Michael Chong, Wellington—Halton Hills.

Mr. Chong, it's very good to have you here today. We'll let you give us an opening statement. I think you know how all the gadgets work at that end. As I say to each of the witnesses, we're not trying to be rude, but some members will eat while you're giving your speech. It's not because you've increased their appetite; it's their only chance to take in sustenance at this time of the day. Some will be on their BlackBerrys, and I bet you know what that's like too.

Please go ahead and take what you need to give us an opening statement, and then members will ask questions.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss oral questions.

More than four in 10 Canadians refused to vote in the last election, and that's a sign that our Parliament needs reform.

Question period has become an attempt to score easy political points rather than to focus on issues that are really of concern to Canadians.

[*English*]

I think it's clear that many people would like to see the behaviour in question period changed. That's evidenced in a recent Nanos policy options poll. In the last election more than four out of ten Canadians refused to vote, which is a record low voter turnout since Confederation. I think both these facts—the polling data and election turnout—are evidence of a growing gap between Canadians and their Parliament.

I think this growing gap undermines the relevance of Parliament to many Canadians and is forcing a lot of the public policy debate into other fora, such as the courts, the Internet, and civil society. While these fora are important, they cannot represent the democratic will of the Canadian people. Only the 308 members of Parliament

elected by their constituents can do that. And if Parliament becomes increasingly irrelevant as a forum for debate, then public policy will be determined, certainly, but not in a democratic fashion.

How can we restore Parliament's relevancy to Canadians? I think a first small but important step is to take a look at reforming question period.

If there's one thing we as members around the table have all heard over the last number of years—it may not be the most intense thing we hear, but we hear it consistently during election campaigns and between elections when we go to public schools—it's that many disapprove of the way question period is conducted. So I think there is a growing divide between a body politic that is becoming increasingly apolitical and a Parliament that is becoming more and more partisan.

So what really is the problem with question period? I think the general perception in the public and among Parliament watchers is that the behaviour is terrible, it lacks substance, and is overly rhetorical. While all these are undoubtedly true, they are simply symptoms of a much deeper underlying problem. I think the real problem with question period is that members of Parliament have been stripped of the right to ask questions of the government, with the result that the vast majority of members in the House during question period are no longer true participants in question period, but mere spectators.

Let me pause here to make three very quick points. First, this is not about the current class of elected officials. I don't think that in this Parliament we have a class of elected officials who are somehow less capable and less talented than at any other time in Canadian history. I don't think the behaviour is because somehow they're a lesser group of Canadians. In fact, many have argued—and Ned Franks is one of them—that there were times in our nation's past when elected officials acted in a manner far worse than today, especially before the advent of television cameras. In my view, if you put any group of 308 Canadians in that room, within six months it would descend into the same sort of system you see today. I think the problem with question period is fundamentally its format, and the format drives the behaviour.

The second quick point I want to make concerns the decline in decorum. Some believe that decorum has really declined in recent years; others dispute that fact. People like Professor Ned Franks at Queen's University have said that there was never a golden age of Parliament.

Regardless of which point of view is correct, something has changed today. Because of modern technology like the Internet, iPads, and smart phones, what was once unseen and not televised is now not only beamed directly through television, but also beamed directly through the new media instantaneously into the cars, meeting rooms, board rooms, kitchen tables, and dining rooms of the nation. As a result, Canadians now see what was once unseen, and what they see is not something they approve of.

The third quick point I want to make is that this is not about turning question period into afternoon tea with crumpets. This is not about removing the intensity, passion, and debate from the House. It is not about making this a big round-table session where we all hold hands and hug. It's not about removing heckling. It's about fixing some of the more dysfunctional aspects of question period and making it more relevant.

The central point I want to make today is if there is one thing I would focus on out of all the six proposals in the motion, it's the fact that members have been relegated to the role of mere spectators and not participants in question period.

About 30 years ago, Speaker Jeanne Sauvé introduced changes that stripped members of the right to spontaneously rise in the House and catch the eye of the Speaker to be recognized for a question. These changes that Speaker Sauvé introduced mean that unless a member gets on the party list and has their question vetted beforehand, they cannot ask a question. The Speaker recognizes only those people on the four party lists that he or she receives each day. As a result, most members—I'd say 250, 260, 270 out of the 308 members of Parliament—are relegated to the role of spectators, since most rarely get on these lists. Rather than being attentive and potential participants in question period, members behave accordingly, as any spectator would in any forum.

I'd like to remind members that up to the 1980s, members of Parliament had the right—as Speaker Jerome called it, the right, not the privilege—to rise in the House, catch the eye of the Speaker, and ask questions of the government that were often driven by the concerns that members had heard from the previous weekend when they had returned home to their ridings. That no longer is the case. I believe this is one reason for the growing disconnect between the people we represent and the topics being debated in the House.

• (1110)

The party lists also weaken the authority and discipline of the Speaker. If a member misbehaves in question period one day and the next day appears on the party list, the Speaker has no authority to not recognize that member. Up to the 1980s, if a member was misbehaving the Speaker would refuse to recognize them for days, if not weeks. At some point the member realized that if he or she was going to be able to represent their constituents, they would have to be on better behaviour in order to be recognized by the Speaker.

I think the party lists are another big reason for the dysfunction we often see in question period.

My motion has proposed six areas of reform; I'm not wedded to each and every one of them. This Parliament is made up of 308 members. It's the wisdom of the 12 members on this committee to

decide which of the six, or other proposals, to proceed with, and it's up to the House as a whole to concur in that report.

If I were to pick one of the six proposals, it would be the fourth proposal that is the most important, which is to allocate a portion of the questions each day for backbench members.

The committee has up to six months to consider the various proposals, and other ones. It may decide to reject, amend, or adopt the six proposals I've made. It may decide to add additional proposals for change.

I think the motion provides some viable and reasonable proposals for reform, and I hope the committee will be able to report back to the House by April 6, 2011.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

This committee will endeavour to do exactly what you've asked.

We're going to start off with seven-minute rounds of questioning. I'm trying to give everybody a chance to ask questions because it is a topic everybody has a bit of thought on.

We'll start with a seven-minute round; we'll get into a five-minute round, and then I may cross-table a bit to try to give everybody a chance to talk.

Ms. Foote, you're first today.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Thank you.

And thank you to Mr. Chong for being here as a witness today. I think you're right when you say that Canadians want to see a change in the House of Commons, particularly during question period.

I think all parties have endeavoured to do something about the decorum in the House, and I think we all need to be recognized for that. That's not to say that there still aren't improvements that can be made.

I accept your motion, of course, which passed in the House. I want the opportunity now to ask questions about some of the elements of your motion. I guess I'll start with the first one, where you talk about “elevating decorum and fortifying the use of discipline by the Speaker, to strengthen the dignity and authority of the House”.

My understanding is that the Speaker has all the authority he needs at this point to exercise discipline. You seem to think otherwise. Do you want to elaborate on that?

Hon. Michael Chong: It's the paradox of the Speaker. This Speaker and previous Speakers have traditionally interpreted the enforcement of the rules at the level they believe the House will accept. I believe the Speaker's current enforcement of the rules is the one that he believes the House wants as a whole.

Now, if the committee reports back, and the House concurs in the report, that the rules should be more vigorously interpreted, the Speaker would more rigorously enforce the rules.

This is an opportunity, through this report and the concurrence in that report by the House, to strengthen the Speaker's authority.

Ms. Judy Foote: But at this point in time you would agree that the Speaker has the authority; he's just using it in whatever way he thinks is acceptable to the House.

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes. He believes he's enforcing the rules at the level the House wants, and any stricter enforcement of the rules would bring about a challenge on the part of members of the House that he's not being fair.

There is a precedent for this. There was an attempt in the 1960s, I believe it was, by Speaker Lamoureux—or maybe it was Speaker Jerome—to more rigorously enforce the rules as they were written, and there was a backlash in the House because it was seen as a Speaker overstepping his bounds. I think Speaker Milliken feels the same way, that he's enforcing at the level the members want.

But if the committee reports back to the House, and the report is concurred in, that the Speaker should more rigorously enforce the existing rules, he will do so.

• (1115)

Ms. Judy Foote: Let's move on to your second point: lengthening the amount of time given for each question and each answer.

To do one or both you'd have to either lengthen question period or have fewer questions. What are you proposing? It has to be one or the other to do what you're suggesting in number two.

Hon. Michael Chong: It used to be the case, up until 1997, that members had up to a minute, sometimes a minute and a half, to ask a question and to answer a question. I'm proposing that we put more flexibility in the length of time given to ask and answer a question.

There are two things I would note that are interesting. The first is that the other Parliaments in Canada have longer times to ask and answer questions. Many provincial legislatures, the *Assemblée nationale*, and Queen's Park I believe have up to a minute to ask and answer a question. In the Westminster Parliament in the United Kingdom they also have up to a minute, a minute and a half, to ask and answer questions.

What's interesting in both cases is that members often ask much shorter questions of 10 or 15 seconds and often receive very substantive and direct answers of 10 to 15 seconds.

Ms. Judy Foote: Some would say that's better.

Hon. Michael Chong: That's the first point I'd make: because the length of time has been maximized to a minute or a minute and a half, it doesn't necessarily mean we will have fewer questions. Members may choose the rhetorical device of asking direct and simple questions and ministers may decide to provide direct and simple answers.

Today we are on this clockwork, mechanical type of system whereby everybody asks a 35-second question and everybody provides a 35-second answer.

The second quick point I'll make is that the Bloc has raised some legitimate concerns, I believe, about the very question you've asked. One potential solution is to allow the Speaker the power of reciprocity between the length of the answer given and the length of the question asked so there's some relationship between the two. If somebody asks a quick 15-second question, the minister cannot rag

the puck to provide a minute and a half answer to try to chew up the House's time.

Ms. Judy Foote: I think you would have to agree that if you're going to have longer answers then we're going to end up with fewer questions, which would not be in the best interest of an opposition.

Hon. Michael Chong: That's right, provided the Speaker doesn't have the power of reciprocity. If we were to give the Speaker the power of reciprocity and tell the Speaker that the minimum length of time any member has to ask and answer questions is 35 seconds and the maximum is, say, a minute, but there has to be reciprocity between the length of the answer and the length of the question, that would address your concern.

Ms. Judy Foote: Your fifth point: dedicating Wednesday exclusively for questions to the Prime Minister. Are you suggesting the Prime Minister would only be in the House on Wednesday, or would it be that all the questions on that day would be put to the Prime Minister?

Hon. Michael Chong: I'm suggesting both. I'm suggesting that, if it's the wish of the committee, I think the best system would be to go to a rotational schedule for ministers where they would appear twice a week on a pre-agreed schedule and that the Prime Minister would appear once a week.

Currently the Prime Minister answers about ten minutes of questions four days a week in each of the four question periods of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

Ms. Judy Foote: You do know that questions aren't always prepared in advance, that issues happen throughout the week. When you have an opportunity to put questions to the Prime Minister or to a minister on any day of the week, then it works in the opposition's best interest if you're trying to get an answer to a particular issue.

If you're going to have the Prime Minister there only one day of the week, or you're going to have ministers there on particular days of the week, is that not impacting on accountability somewhat in terms of being able to get a response from the government to issues that are in the news, or issues that have arisen on any particular day?

• (1120)

Hon. Michael Chong: I think it would lead to better accountability. I believe it would afford the opposition parties much more time to prepare the research and the detail they need to ask tougher questions.

I know how question period works. I've been in opposition, and I can tell you exactly how it works. You get up in the morning, the office of the leader of the opposition reads the *National Post*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*, *The Globe and Mail*, *La Presse*, *Le Soleil*, *Le Devoir*, and says what the issue of the day is. We'll pick a couple of questions that the front pages of the newspapers are leading with, and those become the questions of the day, because the opposition is stretched for resources and doesn't have the resources to do the research.

If you do it once a week for 45 minutes it's slightly more time for the Prime Minister. And as the British model shows, it is more accountable, because it becomes the focal point of the week. Everybody saves up their questions for the week and the Prime Minister is on the hot seat for a full 45 minutes. He cannot avoid the questions; he cannot defer those questions to other ministers. He has to answer for a full 45 minutes.

I think you'll get more accountability out of the system while at the same time providing a better use of resources on the part of ministers and the Prime Minister.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The chair got caught being a spectator there and was enthralled and we went well over time, so let's see if he can get back on topic.

Mr. Reid, you're next.

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

Thank you, Mr. Chong, for being here. I agree with you, by the way, about the inherent shallowness of question period by virtue of the fact that it's driven by the day's headlines. That was certainly my experience when I was helping to coordinate it back in the days when the Reform Party was the opposition. We were actually the third party in those days, but I remember it was a lot shallower than we thought it was going to be when we imagined ourselves coming to Ottawa to bring depth to the process and then realized the process is inherently shallow.

Having said that, I want to ask you about questions. I think there are two ways of asking questions, and we use both of them and aren't even aware of it. In the House of Commons, like the 35-second question, you as the minister have a 35-second answer. If I go to the late show, we change the timeframes, but it's the same thing: I get a four-minute question; you get a four-minute answer, followed by a one-minute question and a one-minute answer. So the idea is just a lock-in proportionality.

We come here and we have seven minutes. I can ask you a question that lasts one minute and you can take six minutes answering it. Or I can ask you a one-minute question and you can take however long it takes to answer and I can ask another one. We have seven minutes for our exchange. Does anybody use that kind of model used in committee in question period? Is that part of what you're contemplating? Or is that, in your opinion, unlikely to work, where we get a kind of dialogue going between us?

Hon. Michael Chong: I think that model would be difficult to work with in question period because of the set-up of the debate, and I also think the opposition has raised some legitimate concerns about the government trying to use up as much time as possible in order to avoid additional questions. So I think whatever system's in place has to ensure that there's some sort of reciprocity between the amount of time for a question and the amount of time the Speaker gives for the answer, so that you don't get this situation where the government is just dragging out the answers in order to chew up time.

In terms of the more informal dialogue, I think you would get more substantive questions in the system that I'm proposing, because if you allow backbench members the opportunity to ask questions driven by the concerns they have from their constituents without

having to petition their respective party to ask that question, you're going to get a very different style of question that's driven by a very different concern. So I think that will change the tone of the place.

Besides, in addition, I should add, if the backbench members are afforded that right in the second half of question period, they will be a lot more attentive in the first half, because if they act out of hand in the first half, Speaker Milliken is not going to recognize them in the second half. So there's a bit of a carrot there for members to be attentive and to pay attention because they know at around 2:40 or 2:45 they have a chance to ask a question. If they've been acting unruly, the Speaker won't recognize them.

Mr. Scott Reid: The open system of question period, where you get this kind of random selection—that survived in the U.K., is that right?

Hon. Michael Chong: I believe in the U.K. members can put their questions on the order paper and the ministers then have an opportunity to prepare, and where the uncertainty comes in is in the supplementaries. I believe that's how their system works.

• (1125)

Mr. Scott Reid: The other distinction, of course, in the U.K. is there's no assigned seating, so it makes it inherently difficult to look out and recognize the member from wherever. They have 500 or 600 members, or whatever it is over there, sitting more or less randomly. The ability to corral people is more difficult.

By the same token, I am a bit worried that we would be unsuccessful in our ability to “uncorral”, to free people from the party whips. It is, after all, an informal system that is imposed effectively by the consent of all. What I'm thinking of here is that I assume that due to an open system or a random system, as you've put it, we have to have some kind of ongoing respect for party proportionality. In theory, we in our party have the right to ask questions freely within our selection, but in practice the hand of the whip comes down and says you'll be asking a question on the following—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Get your hand off me.

Mr. Scott Reid: —and you won't be saying anything until your turn comes. Right? That kind of discipline is very hard to overcome, and we've seen that happen with SO 31s. They were meant to be free, but they're largely controlled by the party whips.

Do you have any means of getting around that?

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Reid, I think you've raised a very good point.

I think the first half of question period you leave to the parties and the party whip. That unfolds as it does now. You have the leader of the official opposition, the leader of the Bloc Québécois, the leader of the New Democrats, and then their designates in the second and third rounds. You'd leave that as it is.

In the second half of question period, you go to the random selection by the Speaker. Now, you ensure that in the second half it's still allocated by party. So there'd be party slots for the second half, as there are now, except the slots would not be filled in by the parties; it would be up to the Speaker. I think the whip would be ineffective, because the Speaker chooses who to recognize.

It would be odd, I would think, and I think the Speaker would rightfully make a point of it during question period, if only one member rose during that second half for each party. The Speaker would right away clue in that a member's right to ask a question was being infringed upon and could rightfully make the comment, "I'd like to remind members of the House that it is a right, as Speaker Jerome said, for members to ask questions. I see only one member rising per party on backbench questions, and I think parties should remind themselves of the fact that it is a right."

The minute you get two or three rising, it is up to the Speaker to pick. Once you set that practice in place for a week or two, it becomes set. I think we're then well on our way to affording that right back to members.

Mr. Scott Reid: Looks like I'm out of time here. I have some more stuff, but I think I'm going to have to let it go. Thank you.

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds.

Mr. Scott Reid: I will try one thing.

The Chair: A 15-second question and a 15-second answer.

Mr. Scott Reid: Very briefly, there are many other countries, not just the mother of Parliaments in the U.K. Are there any salutary practices elsewhere in the Commonwealth that you think are worth drawing to our particular attention?

Hon. Michael Chong: Australia is interesting. I was talking to the high commissioner of Australia to Canada, who told me that the Australian Parliament is taking a look at discussing some of the proposals in my motion and taking a look at implementing some of them over there, as well. That's something interesting for us to note.

To answer your question, the member for Brandon—Souris, Mr. Tweed, recently went to New Zealand's legislature and told me that there were a number of practices there we could take a look at. One of them made its way into my proposal, which is to examine the requirement that ministers respond to questions directed at them. He said the speaker there has the power to compel a minister, even the prime minister, to re-answer the question if he feels it wasn't properly answered.

There are some other practices elsewhere that we could look at, as well.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

The Chair: Before we go to Monsieur Paquette, that is fantastic, Mr. Chong. I'm sure the chair would travel to New Zealand to check that at the direction of the committee.

Monsieur Paquette, you're up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): First of all, thank you for appearing before the committee. As you know, we voted against your motion and are still opposed to most of the motions you have introduced.

With respecting to elevating decorum and fortifying the use of discipline, we are in favour of that. We also talk about that every week at the meeting of house leaders. Yesterday, however, it was the government house leader who sparked a confrontation by virtually accusing one of our members of being a member of the FLQ. So it's all well and good to change the form of the questions, but if there is

no political will on the part of each party to discipline itself, I don't think the format will change the result in any way whatever.

Second, we had the member for Lévis—Bellechasse who came and said that one of our members was financing cocktail parties with Islamists. So I'm in favour of decorum, and perhaps the Speaker can be more severe. For example, I move that the groups that loudly applaud every time one of their ministers rises—I must say it is often the Conservatives—should lose their right to ask questions. They don't have the chance to ask many, three in fact. So the Speaker could rule that any group that delays oral questions through somewhat excessive expressions of enthusiasm should be penalized. I have no problem with that, but I would be quite surprised if the format of oral questions changed anything whatever.

As for lengthening the amount of time given to questions and answers, my party and I are prepared to examine that option. That time is indeed relatively short. Furthermore, as you mentioned, the Assemblée nationale has another way of operating. It seems to produce results, but it clearly reduces the number of questions.

Reviewing the convention whereby the minister questioned is not required to answer could also be a good suggestion.

Where the matter becomes complicated is when it is suggested that half of the questions every day should be allocated for members whose names and order of recognition are randomly selected. I did understand that the first half of oral questions would remain as it currently is. The purpose of question period is normally to be accountable to Parliament. In that context, members are entitled to ask the government questions, even government members, in which case, generally speaking, these are planted questions, that is questions designed to put forward what their government considers is one or another of the good aspects of its policies. The fact nevertheless remains that, in general, it is the opposition parties that ask the government to explain a situation or a policy. It is very rare for government members to take a critical look at their own government.

That means that, regardless whether the government is a minority or majority government, many questions will be asked by government members. You mentioned that that would change the nature of oral questions. I understand that. That will indeed be the case. It will penalize the opposition parties, particularly the smallest ones, hence my surprise that the NDP is supporting this motion, unless it is doing so opportunistically. Ultimately, however, this is still an open question. In short, this may not be acceptable to us since, as you know, we will always be in opposition.

Then it is suggested that Wednesday should be exclusively dedicated for questions to the Prime Minister. We might be able to consider if there wasn't this idea of exclusivity. However, I went to Westminster with Speaker Milliken this summer. During question periods other than those in which the Prime Minister answers questions—he does that in the second part of the question period on Wednesday—not only are there no journalists, there are also no members. The chamber fills only when the Prime Minister is there, unless of course a terrible tainted blood scandal has broken the day before and the health minister's turn comes round that day. Otherwise, there are no journalists or members in the House of Commons. Once again, I believe there is an advantage from the standpoint of accountability if the opposition parties are able to question the government immediately, depending on current events.

I'll give you an example. We've just learned that the UN representative believes that Canada has made a mistake in deciding not to consider Omar Khadr a child soldier. That's what I want to question the Minister of Foreign Affairs about today, not next week, whereas that won't at all be the case given current events.

In our view, these two questions, rotation and the order of recognition being randomly determined, are measures that give the government an advantage, not the opposition, and therefore not Parliament. That somewhat explains our opposition.

However, thank you for your effort. Like you, I am in favour of decorum. As you can see, I'm hardly shouting at all. In any case, I'm not shouting "Get out."

Thank you for listening to my comments.

•(1130)

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, sir. Perhaps I can respond to the issues you've raised.

First, the issue of the Prime Minister appearing on the Wednesday of every week. The major problem now is that every minister uses four hours of his time every day to prepare for question period. However, only eight or 10 ministers answer questions during every question period. In other words, after using up four hours of their time every time, 30 ministers of the Crown attend oral questions every day but to do nothing. That's a major problem for their ministers.

[English]

For the vast majority of backbench members it's the same thing. I've been going to question period for six years, and it's a two-hour part of time out of my day, and I often wonder how effective it is for the 260 members who are there in the House. We are all very busy with committee work and answering the concerns of our constituents, and we often don't have enough hours in the day to keep up, and yet we have to sit through question period and not play any meaningful role at all.

The other thing I've noticed is that I think it's very important for the Bloc to have the same amount of time in the House to ask questions as they do now.

•(1135)

[Translation]

You're an elected member. We live in a democracy, and it is therefore very important for the members of the Bloc Québécois, including yourself, to have the same time to answer questions as is currently the case.

[English]

So I'm in favour of making sure they have the same amount of time they have now. This is not to diminish the amount of time given to the opposition parties to ask questions.

[Translation]

The problem of oral questions in the House of Commons is not a matter of decorum. The fundamental problem is the rules. If we change the rules, we'll change decorum.

[English]

So I think previous attempts to change decorum in the House have focused on the symptoms of the problem rather than the underlying problem, which is the format. The format drives the behaviour, so I think we need to change the format in order to address decorum.

The Chair: Great.

You're well over seven minutes there, and the rules and orders make it that I'm going to go to Mr. Christopherson next.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: I just wanted to say that I'm surprised that it takes them four hours not to answer our questions

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson, you are there.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair. I appreciate it.

Mr. Chong, thank you again for the work you've done. It is very interesting.

Like you, I have a lot of concerns about the way we do things. I got into politics, as most of us did, to change things that we didn't agree with, but I have to say that my experience has tempered that a bit, in terms of change for the sake of change isn't always the way to go. You have to make sense, particularly when we're dealing with the traditions of Parliament, and we need to walk carefully.

Like some members here, I have a fair bit of experience in these areas, having served on city and regional councils and then in the Ontario legislature, where I both asked questions and answered questions as a minister, and I've done the process of preparing for question period. I've also been a house leader and a deputy speaker, and there are my six years plus here. I have some idea of these issues in other arenas too.

Let me say at the outset, for the 26 years plus that I've been in elected office, in every arena I've been in, there has always been an issue that the current clowns in place are worse than the previous clowns, and decorum is always the issue. On the Hamilton city council, when you're having fist fights in the back parking lot, there might be some justification, but for the most part it's always thus and everybody is always better.

We've had them. It's true. There are those of you who know.

I want to be specific. I'm just going to throw some thoughts out to you, in no particular order, Michael, and get your feedback.

On increasing the time of the question, I was one of those who had to learn to go from one minute to 35 seconds, and being somebody who is long-winded to start with, this was a major challenge. But I have to tell you, in terms of the quality of the responses, I'm not yet convinced they're either any better or worse. For the person asking the question it was often better because you had a little more time to lay out the issue, to put things in context for anybody watching who didn't know the issue. And most people don't know the particular issue, especially if it's local or a very detailed one within a portfolio. Ministers can use the one minute usually to get up, as they do now only for twice as long, to brag about what's great about their ministry and their government and their leader, etc.

I have to say also that this occurred to me, and again, this is the benefit of being on all sides of the House: there are times when the answer to a question is no, and to have the Speaker say they took 45 seconds to ask the question and he wants you to take 45 seconds to answer it, well, no, no, no.... That could become a joke too. I'm just not sure that alone nails it.

I don't have a lot of time, so I'm just going to jump around. I'm going to jump to the end so I get this in. I do believe, however, that the absolute key to everything you've raised for the most part comes down to Parliament telling the Speaker to increase the level of discipline through the rules. I've seen deputy speakers, who don't have the same relationship with Parliament that the Speaker himself, in this case, has. But Speakers are sovereign. Whatever they rule, that's it. There is no appeal. There's nowhere to go. And I have seen Speakers stand up and just by standing the place goes dead quiet. If you're heckling, you're watching the Speaker because they're one of those who don't let you get away with it.

Chris Stockwell, if anybody knows Chris Stockwell, was one of the best speakers I've ever served under, and it was partly because he was really tough on the rules, but he was really fair. He was always fair-minded about things. So I'll get that out there.

Having the Prime Minister on one day is probably one of the ones I'm most interested in, simply because most of us don't get an answer from the Prime Minister. Most of us can stand up and ask the Prime Minister a question in our third, fourth, fifth question slot. The Prime Minister normally doesn't respond, throws it over to another minister or the House leader. The only time the Prime Minister.... And this was true of the premiers in my day: they would only answer questions from the leaders. They felt obliged to do that to show the respect for another leader who could theoretically become Prime Minister, so they would give them the respect of standing up. Sometimes they'd look at them, sometimes they didn't, depending on

the relationship, but they did stand up and address the questions that came from the leaders. Beyond that, they'd toss it to somebody else.

The idea of an ordinary backbencher getting a shot at the Prime Minister has some real merit. And in terms of looking at this in a non-partisan way, the notion of freeing up the Prime Minister of the day—not the other ministers, I'm not as keen on that at all, and I'll explain why if I have time—to spend more time doing the Prime Minister's job has some merit. It's a complex country, a complex world, so I'm a bit open to that.

● (1140)

I'm not so open to scheduling the ministers. I understand what you're saying about the wasted time. I went through that—the butterflies in the stomach every day when you have a front-page issue and you're getting ready for question period and you know you're about to be drilled and so much is riding on it. But on the other hand, the ministers also don't know what you're going to ask on any given day, and that forces a good minister to stay on top of all their files. A bad minister, quite frankly, can keep an eye on three or four files or be prepared for a day or two. But on any given day, someone could stand up and ask you anything in your portfolio, and you had better know your major files; you had better know the procedures that are involved; you had better know where things are, and if you don't, it's going to show very quickly.

The other thing on that is that as tough as it is and with the time that's wasted, the most wonderful sound in the world when you're a minister is “this House now stands adjourned”, because then there's no more question period, and you're in control of everything. Life as a minister when the House isn't sitting is really good. When the House is sitting, it's really good, but it's really tougher.

So in my view there's a balance there. I have some other thoughts, but I'll give you a chance to respond, if I've left any time.

The Chair: You have forty-five seconds to do your best.

Mr. David Christopherson: That's not bad. I could ask a question in that time.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Christopherson, Mr. Chair.

I think we're all concerned about any change to an old institution, but I think we know the consequences of some of the changes I've proposed, because some were past practice in the Canadian House of Commons for many decades. Arguably the question period we have now is an aberration. It's a question period with rules that were established only in the last 30 years. Question period started after Confederation under unwritten conventions, but nevertheless it existed for many decades before the more recent changes that were introduced in the last 30 years. We know the consequences of some of these changes, because they were past practices in the Canadian House of Commons.

We also know some of the consequences of the other changes I've proposed, because they're present practice in other Westminster-style parliaments. So we can look to those parliaments to see how question period functions in them.

The other thing I'd add about change is that we weren't cautious about the change in 1980 when we stripped members of the right to ask questions in the House. We weren't cautious in 1997 when we decided to go from minute-long questions and minute-long answers to 35-second questions and 35-second answers.

There seems to be a great deal of caution when we're trying to restore the right of members to represent their constituents to ask questions, but not a lot of caution when we need to further centralize power among the party leadership in all the parties.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

We're going to move to five-minute rounds. I thank you for being good with your questions and your answers today. I'm also quite disappointed that Mr. Chong did not suggest that I sit behind him during question period. I'm very studious and very well behaved during question period. I had to get that in myself, you'll notice, and you'll pay for that later.

Ms. Ratansi, we're on five-minute rounds. I'm going to try to get everybody in today, so if you don't have to use five minutes, please don't.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Are you kidding?

Mr. Chong, thank you very much for being here.

This is something that needs to be done, because students and other people come from my riding, and they see us, and they wonder. Knowing my professional vantage especially, people wonder how a person who used to do receivership can be in such a position where everybody is yelling. Everybody is supposed to be quiet—right?

I'll give you a few questions, and then you can take the time to answer them.

When you talk about elevating the decorum and fortifying the use of discipline by the Speaker, doing so is at the discretion of the Speaker. You stated there was a specific incident in which the Speaker enforced the true meaning of the rules, and there was a revolt. So the Speaker either has the power or doesn't have the power. Could you tell me what happened?

You are suggesting that he fortify it. How can he fortify it? If the weapon is available, why isn't he using it? I know Speaker Blaikie used to use them quite effectively.

The Chair: We feared him.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Somehow we need to do that.

You talk about lengthening the amount of time given to each question and answer. Would you be suggesting that we lengthen the question period? Or would you be suggesting what they have in Britain, where the questions are all pre-submitted and the only spontaneity is during the supplemental questions, which are off the cuff? If ministers are required to respond, they do respond, and I'm sure my Bloc colleague was saying that, but how do you get substantive answers? Do you want to call it answer period instead of question period? Is that the way you want to change it? Perhaps we could do it.

You asked to allocate half the questions to backbenchers. That's something you want. Do you mean government backbenchers? Because if you look at the opposition, their backbenchers ask questions on a regular basis. So where is this coming from?

You want to dedicate Wednesday exclusively for the Prime Minister. I know that happens in Britain, but what happens if the Prime Minister is missing one Wednesday? Does he have to do two days the next week?

If you can answer those, then I'll see how much time I have.

The Chair: Well, you've used two minutes and 30 seconds, so I would think reciprocity settles it.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Ratansi.

With respect to elevating decorum and the enforcement of the rules, successive Speakers since the 1960s have generally interpreted the rules in a way that they believe members have supported. To put it to you differently, Speakers prefer to have members self-enforce the rules and they feel it's really up to the House as a whole to regulate itself and to respect the rules during question period. That, I think, explains why most Speakers are reluctant, if not completely opposed, to imposing their will upon the House. This has been the trend for successive Speakers since the 1960s.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: I'll counter-question you, then.

If the Speaker is going to enforce the rules and he thinks that members of Parliament have to do it, if he were in Taiwan he would be in real trouble, because they jump across and kill each other. There's the House leaders' meeting, which says to stop heckling, and you say heckling doesn't make Parliament dysfunctional. I think it does, because it's juvenile.

So if the Speaker were to say "No heckling, everybody behave yourself," the person looking at you from home would say, "Why is this member heckling? What's the matter with him? Why is he shouting? If you did that in school you'd be in real trouble."

Hon. Michael Chong: Look, heckling is part of parliamentary debate. I think the occasional heckle is a good thing. But I would say that the problem isn't with the heckling, the problem is with the screaming, the fact that we need to use earpieces turned up on full volume.

I can tell you I think I've suffered some hearing loss in the last six years—and this is no joke, and my wife often says to me that I'm speaking too loudly—as a result of the fact that the noise levels in the House are often so loud. Now, they haven't been recently, but often in the last year they've been so loud that you couldn't hear the person next to you speaking, even with your earpiece turned on full.

One of the solutions the committee might recommend is for the House technicians to turn the maximum volume down by half. When the volume's turned down by half, the House will automatically quieten, because in order to hear what the question or the answer is, you'll need to have a degree of quiet in the House.

Quickly, to answer your other questions, I'm not proposing to lengthen the amount of time for question period from 45 minutes.

And in terms of what happens when the Prime Minister is missing on a Wednesday, in the British Parliament the Deputy Prime Minister steps up to the plate and answers the questions for the full 45 minutes. The British Parliament used to have two separate 15-minute question times per week for the Prime Minister; they've combined it to one. I think this is something we should take a look at too.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Am I done?

The Chair: You certainly are.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Are you sure?

The Chair: I know, we were all enjoying it, but you are finished.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: I didn't heckle, I counter-challenged.

The Chair: I will counter-challenge several times during question period today.

Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you, Mr. Chong, for being here today.

I want to agree with my colleagues who applaud you for the spirit behind the initiative you're bringing forward here, the way you've done it. I think you've brought it forward in a very good way.

I think we all agree that we'd like to see the decorum in the House of Commons improved. Mr. Paquette referred earlier to what he called "an inflammatory comment". All of us around this table could give evidence of what we consider to be inflammatory comments by others. I think, to be fair, it's human nature for us, and probably even our duty, to in some way respond to a comment that we feel is either blatantly false or is simply made to inflame, and I think we will continue to heckle.

You made the point that the issue isn't about removing heckling, but it is about removing some of the volume of that. Otherwise, why would the students who have come here be so disappointed in what they see? I don't imagine they're disappointed that they have a 35-second question when there's a 35-second answer; they're disappointed in the volume that's going on back and forth.

So we could say it's juvenile to heckle, but sometimes the questions themselves may indicate the need for that kind of response.

I have just two quick questions, two points. One is the discipline that you're calling on the Speaker to enforce. You mentioned the possibility of ignoring the member. That would be one form of discipline. Do you have other ideas as to how the Speaker could be more effective in bringing the discipline you're calling for?

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes. I think restoring the right of the Speaker to recognize members is also about restoring the Speaker's right not to recognize members. I think that's an important part of discipline.

What other ideas would there be? The Speaker is reluctant to expel members from the House, and many members have told me they're reluctant about it too, because they believe it just gives more incentive for members to act out of hand. I think there's a simple solution: dock the member a week's pay. If a member feels so strongly about a particular issue on which the member is representing constituents and is acting out of hand and the Speaker expels that member, money shouldn't be the issue. We're not here to make money; we're here to represent Canadians and to fight for the things we believe in.

So I think there's a simple solution to reinforcing the rules around expulsion from the House. If you're expelled you get docked a week's salary. I would fully support that measure. I think it would be an excellent way for the Speaker to enforce discipline, and it also allows members to make their point. Clearly, if they feel strongly about something, it shouldn't be an issue if they're docked a week's salary.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: On the suggestion to require ministers to answer the questions asked of them, we've all seen examples where a particular opposition member will ask a question and name a minister who clearly is not in charge of that portfolio, simply to make a point.

So would there be an exception, and would the Speaker have the discretion to say, "Look, that question doesn't apply to minister X but applies to minister Y. We ask minister Y to answer it"?

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, I put that in my proposal because there is some sort of practice like it in the New Zealand Parliament. But I don't have exact ideas on how it would be enforced. I'm simply suggesting that if we're going to go to a rotational schedule for the Prime Minister and other ministers to answer the questions directed at them, if the Minister of Finance, for example, is to appear on Tuesdays and Thursdays to answer questions about his portfolio, another minister will not be put there in his stead as a way to avoid answering questions.

I think if we're going to re-examine the entire system whereby ministers appear every day and replace it with a rotational system, then we also need to make sure that the opposition has an opportunity to ask questions of particular ministers.

• (1155)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Albrecht.

Madame DeBellefeuille.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for appearing here this morning, Mr. Chong.

I listened to your responses to the various colleagues around this table, and what surprised me is that you suggested that the ministers who are not likely to be asked questions during oral questions are wasting their time, in the same way as backbench members who don't have the opportunity to ask questions. I'm a whip, and I don't have the opportunity to ask a lot of questions, but I believe that question period, for me, is an exciting and formative time in shaping my knowledge. I like to hear the questions from the other parties, and I like to hear the answers from your ministers—when they give any. It's also important for me to hear the answers and not just to ask questions. I'm very much insulted when I see a minister, for example, who knows the subject does not concern him, reading his newspaper or *Maclean's* magazine without paying attention to the questions of the other parties or to his colleagues' answers. I believe it is part of our job to ask questions, but also to listen to what the others say. That enables us to open our minds.

Decorum is a lively topic of discussion for us, as Mr. Paquette said earlier, particularly since the start of the session. I believe that the problem is not the way question period is conducted, but rather decorum. Decorum is based on one thing, the willingness of the Speaker, leaders and whips to enforce the rules already in place. If the Speaker were more respectful of the rules and enforced them more, if the House leaders of each party set the example and the whips enforced the rules, quite sincerely we would not be here around this table discussing a reform of oral questions.

The proof of that is that significant efforts have been made in the past few weeks. As a result, for example, the Bloc Québécois has often been allowed the seventh question. Consequently, there are more questions, more decorum, more respect, less racket and more exchanges between the opposition and government parties.

We agree about the lack of decorum, Mr. Chong, but we don't agree on the nature of the problem. I would say to you that, even if we change the container, the content will still be the same; we won't be changing much or improving much.

Don't you think that the role of the opposition is to ask the government the best questions, the most embarrassing questions possible, until it proves to us that we are wrong and it is right? In that way, democracy is practised in a much fairer manner. If government backbenchers ask questions only to promote the actions of their government, I don't believe we're doing citizens a service in the discovery of reality. In other words, don't you think that question period will lack appeal if all we do half the time is promote what the government is putting forward rather than raise questions the government will have to answer?

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, sir.

I agree. I think government members should ask questions that come from their fellow citizens, not questions prepared by the government. The big problem with decorum is that most members, from all parties, are spectators. They aren't participants because they don't have the power to ask questions without the party's support. In my opinion, we must have a different question period; half the time should be allocated to the four parties and the other half to backbench members. I think that would change the atmosphere and decorum in the House of Commons.

●(1200)

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Chong, I don't know, but if a backbench member from the party in power has questions to ask on behalf of his fellow citizens, he can go and see the minister; he has inside access. Why should the question become a topic of debate if, in any case, it's possible for him to get an answer?

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, the subjects being asked about and answered would be far more diverse than today, but that's democracy. That's the nature of democracy. Ministers are going to get these obscure questions.

In speaking to Don Mazankowski, who was a 25-year member from Alberta in the House of Commons, he told me that for 15 of those years he sat as an opposition member. He also told me recently in Calgary that he gave his questions to the minister ahead of time to allow the minister to prepare an answer. I've heard that from other members as well who used to serve in the House of Commons in the 1970s and even the 1980s. In fact I was speaking two weeks ago with somebody who worked for Monsieur Chrétien.

[*Translation*]

He was the assistant to Mr. Chrétien. He told me that, during the war between Iraq and Kuwait, the first Gulf War, before oral questions, Mr. Chrétien submitted to Mr. Mulroney—the Prime Minister in 1990—the question he wanted to ask him because it was an important question for Mr. Chrétien and he wanted a real answer.

[*English*]

So there has been a tradition of giving ministers a heads-up. I'm not suggesting that we do that, but if you're a backbench MP who has a question that a mayor or a group of constituents has sincerely asked you about, you might rise in the House three or four days before you get recognized. Maybe on the fourth or fifth day you get recognized. Before you get recognized, you give the minister the question and say, "Here's the question. I'm just going to ask it. Maybe you don't have an answer but I want to be on the record with my constituents, in a public forum, in the interests of transparency, that I'm representing them and their concerns to Parliament." Then I can go back and say, "Mr. Speaker, I have a mayor who's voiced concerns about an infrastructure project that may not be completed by March 31 of next year. Could the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities tell this House what the government will do if particular infrastructure projects are not completed?" I then can go back to that mayor and say, "I've asked the question on your behalf. The minister said they'll take it under consideration."

The Chair: Thank you. We're well over time on that one.

Mr. Christopherson, again, in the interests of trying to get everybody in today, try to do your best to shorten this.

Mr. David Christopherson: I will, thanks.

Just on that last point, I've done that both ways. On a local issue, it does make sense. If you want a positive answer on a local project and you give the minister a heads-up, you stand a better chance than catching them off guard and their answering with a place-setting negative, because they can always change the answer to positive much more easily than saying yes initially and then trying to say no later.

Conversely, I've had people come to me and do the same thing when I was a minister and say, "This is what I'm looking to do and here's the question I'm going to ask you. I'm hoping we can advance this. I'm not looking for conflict."

It doesn't happen very often, but when it does, it can be effective. I don't know that we need to change the rules for that. Maybe we just need to enlighten members that there are different ways of approaching Parliament, rather than just putting on our body armour and heading in.

The point I want to make is that in my experience the behaviour you refer to affects the format. I'm looking at this and thinking that the dynamics around behaviour are going to be the same, although they're going to be applied in a different format. So many of the things we're concerned about—control, authority, and all of those things—are going to evolve quickly back into the same dynamics because of behaviour. The format may give a different end result, but the input is still going to be the same, if you know what I'm saying.

I'm very keen on the suggestion you're making about half the question period being the set format we have now and the other half being opened up. You said that if one person stands up, the Speaker could say, "Hey, something's going on, there's only one", because someone's not using their right. But within a caucus, the dynamics could evolve very, very quickly, so that everybody will soon tacitly agree, in the interest of the caucus and furthering their agenda, on who will stand up. Where you'll have an exception is somebody in caucus who says "I'm not agreeing with that and I'm going to stand up anyway". So really, all we would have done is potentially allowing, if you will, those who are out of step with their caucus an opportunity to create a little bit of grief for their caucus, which makes for some entertaining politics, but I'm not sure it actually furthers the cause.

Or, if I'm with my colleagues and we're fighting for attention in our relatively small caucus, we might cut a deal that nobody gets up on Monday so that Harry can get his question. Nobody gets up on Tuesday, so Sue can get her question. Again that's why I said the dynamics around behaviour will still come into play.

So help me understand how that would work, because I'm open to it, I like it, but I'm just not sure how it will work.

• (1205)

Hon. Michael Chong: I think Mr. Reid raised this concern earlier as well, and I share your concern.

Here's an option for the committee to consider. We could go, in the second half of question period, to the same kind of lottery system allocated on the same party lines as today for private members to ask a question. So if the system isn't going to work because the parties are starting to reach their tentacles into the right of private members to ask questions, then one of the options is for the Speaker to

establish a type of lottery system, like we have today, for private members' business whereby two or three weeks ahead of time, the Speaker would draw names out of a hat and would say, "Mr. Albrecht, you have a question slot two weeks from now on the Thursday. You're number three in the lineup in the second half of question period." That is a way to address the problem.

There are different ways to address this problem.

Mr. David Christopherson: Of course, then they're going to have a less likely chance of being able to get into the main questions because they know they've got that spot. That's why I keep referring to the dynamics at play.

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, but I do think—and your earlier point too is something that's very important—I think the format fundamentally drives behaviour. Look at this committee.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm disagreeing with you on that, because the behaviour dynamics will be the same no matter what the format.

Hon. Michael Chong: I don't agree with that. Sorry, I misinterpreted what you said. I think the format fundamentally drives behaviour. Look at this committee. We're not behaving the same way in this committee as we do in the House. Why is that? It's a different format. The format fundamentally drives the behaviour.

Mr. David Christopherson: But I've been in committees that have descended into chaos.

Hon. Michael Chong: They may have descended into chaos, but you don't see the same kind of behaviour. You don't see the Speaker of the House rising out of his chair and leaving the House.

Mr. David Christopherson: Actually, chairs leave their meetings because they're out of control.

Hon. Michael Chong: Do you see the Speaker adjourning the House?

Mr. David Christopherson: To go back to my key point, I think 90% of what we're talking about can be resolved by telling the Speaker we want the rules enhanced.

Somebody mentioned Speaker Blaikie. I didn't want to name names, but I'll tell you, it was a different House when he was in the chair. Same rules, same format, but when that Speaker was in there, you didn't mess around.

Hon. Michael Chong: I agree with you, and that's why the first proposal I made is for this committee to recommend ways to strengthen the authority of the Speaker and to restore the dignity of the House. So I agree with you.

I think the Speaker's role can be strengthened. If this committee, through its report back to the House, recommends that the Speaker more rigorously enforce the existing rules and the House concurs in that report, the Speaker will certainly follow the House's direction.

The Chair: All right, we've finished two rounds. We'll start a third, and again this time I'm going to try to get people in who have not had questions.

Monsieur Proulx.

[*Translation*]

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

Good morning, Michael, and thank you for appearing before the committee. There are a number of points in your presentation and in your bill with which I do not agree. As a whip, I'm opposed to the idea of randomly selecting the names of members who may ask questions. Unfortunately, we're required to enforce a certain discipline within the political parties. That applies to oral questions, to the period set aside for statements by members and to other privileges that must be applied in order to impose or restore a certain discipline. For example, I object to the idea of you randomly allowing a member who completely deviates from party rules to ask questions.

I have been objecting for a long time to the three questions that the government may ask. That gives it three opportunities to hold a press conference. If the government wants to hold press conferences, it can simply call them and disclose what it wants to announce.

When you say that ministers take four hours a day to prepare, you insult our intelligence, Mr. Chong. If we do a count, we realize that the same minister, your house leader, answers about 70% of the questions put to your government. In fact, some ministers in your party have never answered a single question. They have a car, driver, and staff. They act as though they have prepared for question period; they arrive in the House with documents and a computer in hand, but they know perfectly well that they will never have to answer a single question.

Furthermore—and I believe it was David who raised this question—a good minister doesn't need a four-hour briefing every day in order to know his files. He knows his files. You'll tell me that some parliamentary secretaries need a briefing before oral questions because they don't have the same opportunities. I agree. Having previously occupied that position, I know that's necessary.

You mentioned longer questions, but you say you don't want question period to be extended. In other words, you want to reduce the number of questions. I'm opposed to that. You say we have to restore to the Speaker of the House the rights he should have or to call members to order. I'm sorry, but the Speaker already has rights. A number of members, both David and I and others, have previously sat in that chair and used the existing Standing Orders to call members to order in various ways.

A number of years ago, when I occupied that chair, a member from your party constantly shouted and always offered his opinion when he didn't have the floor. At one point, I refused to give him the floor, and when your party's whip asked me why I had done so, I told him that member definitely had nothing further to say as he had spent half an hour shouting. Let me tell you that member stopped shouting and we allowed him to speak again.

In your bill, you raise a number of points that may be interesting in small doses. You present ideas with a view to restoring parts of rules and customs that should still be in effect. However, it's been a very long time since the Speaker of the House called a government member to order. I would say there are many occasions when he could do that. That's his choice. However, I don't think there's any

genuine desire to change matters. On a number of occasions, it has been moved that decorum be restored to the House, but someone has always objected to that idea, or else accepted it then subsequently done the opposite.

● (1210)

As long as there are individuals in the government who continue to play the fool when they answer questions from the opposition parties, there will be no possible solution to the decorum issue. This situation merely encourages the opposition parties to become more talkative, indeed more violent. Many of our recommendations—

[*English*]

Am I done, sir?

The Chair: You're at five minutes and 30 seconds.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I have another ten points to bring up here.

The Chair: I think a written submission to the witness, perhaps...

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Maybe I should do that.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Chong. I believe you're beginning to understand what I think of your bill.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Chong, would you like a small amount of time?

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes. I have a couple of points of fact.

It's not a privilege for members to ask questions in the House. Speaker Jerome has ruled; it's in O'Brien and Bosc; it was in Marleau and Montpetit. It is the right of a member of Parliament to ask questions of the government.

Second, I understand the need for discipline. Party whips and leaders have ample tools to enforce party discipline. The problem is that the autonomy of the individual member of Parliament within the party system has become so diminished that it's becoming increasingly difficult for individual members of parties to represent their constituents.

I think we need to rebalance some of the power in the House away from the parties toward individual members—within the party structure. I'm a proud Conservative and am proud of my party and its leader, but I do believe that we need a greater degree of autonomy to represent our constituents. We need to do that in order to restore Canadians' faith in their Parliament.

Quickly, on the last point, the four hours a day to prepare is a problem.

● (1215)

[*Translation*]

In 1970 or 1971, Mr. Trudeau, who was Prime Minister at the time, adopted the same idea as I am presenting in my motion, that is to say of a system of rotation for ministers and the Prime Minister. So this is a longstanding problem within our system of government.

[English]

It's not a recent problem of our government. It's been a longstanding problem. Even Mr. Trudeau, when he was prime minister, realized it and adopted a similar rotational system for his ministers in the early 1970s. I don't have the exact details, but it was drawn to my attention recently.

The Chair: Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, in full respect to our witness, you told me that my five minutes were over, but you assigned him another three or four minutes within my time, so he could make these comments.

The Chair: Above your time, sir.

I've been pretty flexible today. I can certainly show you the page where we've gone two minutes over for most. I don't like to use discipline as a way of doing it. I'd rather use the fact that we can get along and get questions and answers done.

Mr. Hoback, it's your turn.

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

I hope Mr. Proulx wasn't suggesting he take up my time. Of course he would never suggest that.

Mr. Chong, one comment I want to make to start is that I'm not sure if this is the right way to go or not. I haven't made that decision. I want to listen to all the facts and hear all the different ideas. But you're addressing something that a lot of constituents have asked to have addressed, and that's decorum in the House. You're addressing it in a way that is.... Maybe one of the ways to look at it is whether the process of the House, the way the House operates and functions, can improve the decorum.

It's interesting. I remember in the late 1980s, early 1990s there was this party called the Reform Party. It came to be elected in western Canada based on the fact that they wanted to improve decorum in the House. They wanted to change how Ottawa operated. They came to Ottawa. I talked to a couple of the older members who were there at the time. They talked about how they got to Ottawa and the first thing they did was a social with everybody, trying to bring everybody together. Their goal at the time was to create an environment where we could agree to disagree, but we'd still do what's best for the interests of Canadians.

I think about a year or two later they were getting picked on by their own members, who were saying they were ineffective in Ottawa because they weren't in the media, they weren't out and about, they weren't criticizing, they weren't doing X, Y, Z. Then I think we started to see things change back to the way it is today.

It's really interesting, because if there's one complaint I get consistently from people across Canada, and it's consistent with the school kids especially, it's on the decorum in the House. They want to know why it is the way it is.

I think that's a really good question that we should be trying to ask here. Is it the way we handle ourselves? Is it the fact that we feel we have to go for the throat every time we have a question or an answer? Is it the fact that we're not willing to give credit when credit is due on both sides? Is it the fact that the government may not be

willing to listen to a good suggestion, or that the opposition parties aren't willing to give a good suggestion? Those are the questions I get asked in my riding quite often.

Some of the concerns I have when we look at the process are around the role of parliamentary secretaries in this type of situation. What would their role be and what would it consist of? What would the role of late shows be? How would that be affected? Would it change?

I guess I'll just leave it at that, Mr. Chong, and see how you answer those questions.

Hon. Michael Chong: Let me start with the late shows. I don't anticipate any change to the late show. If you ask a question of the government and you don't feel you got a full response, you can always go for the late show that day. That would stay in place and as it is now.

In terms of parliamentary secretaries, it's up to the committee, but I would envision that they'd play the same role as today, which is to fill in for the minister when the minister is not able to be present.

With respect to the issue of the Reform Party, in the way it tried to improve decorum, I think the fundamental flaw was that they did it alone. I remember Mr. Manning sat in the second row, I believe, of the House and they didn't participate in some of the other behaviours taking place at the time. I think the problem with doing that is they gave the advantage to the other four parties.

That's why my motion calls for changes to the Standing Orders and other conventions that apply to all parties. We all equally share the advantages and disadvantages of the changes proposed. I think that is the critical difference between what was attempted then and what I hope we're going to try to do now.

• (1220)

Mr. Randy Hoback: One of the current comments I've made with different student groups that I've had in the House, sitting in the chairs, is on the role of cameras. I know the argument there is about having the visibility and being open to Canadians to watch Parliament at work. You often have to wonder about the role of question period, the role of the camera, and how it affects question period. I often wonder if question period has become more of a theatre than an actual function of Parliament where it's actually getting a good question and a good answer.

How would you address that issue?

Hon. Michael Chong: I don't think we can remove cameras from the House. We're in the modern age of technology and transparency. The public wants a light shone where things once were much more private. I don't think we can remove cameras.

Secondly, I don't think cameras are fundamentally the problem. In the occidental world, whether it's in continental Europe or the United States, there are cameras in those legislatures and we don't see the same kind of dysfunction that we see in ours. I don't think cameras are necessarily the problem.

I do think, though, that cameras exacerbate the problem as they are used in our House of Commons because the technicians have been instructed to go for the narrow shot, so you only get a shot of the person speaking and everything else is filtered out. Maybe a solution is to allow the cameras to go to a wide-angle shot of the entire House from time to time.

Maybe the solution is to cut the maximum volume of these earpieces by half. One of the reasons we have problems in our question period is because the noise levels are so loud that you can't hear anybody. Why is that? It's because you can put the earpiece on, turn the volume up, and it doesn't matter what the person next to you is doing. In most other legislatures where they do not have translation, they don't have that problem. They have no earpieces to listen with, so they necessarily get a lower volume in the House because they need to be able to hear without any assistance.

Maybe the solution is to cut the volume in half, which will have an enforcing effect of getting people to quiet down to be able to hear anything through the earpiece.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong. Thank you, Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you, Chair.

Thanks very much, Michael, for coming here.

I think one thing we've discovered here today is that there's clearly a wide variance of opinion on your motion. Nonetheless, your motion is one that I think has a great deal of interest among all members here, and I think all members of Parliament. I'm glad we've got six months in which to write a report, because I can see this discussion developing among our members here, and perhaps even with other witnesses. Hopefully, at the end of the day, whatever this committee decides will result in some improved decorum, and maybe improved functioning of the House.

I want to make a few comments, and then ask one specific question.

With overall decorum, I still think, and other members have spoken before me and have said the same thing, it primarily is the responsibility of the members themselves, and particularly the parties and the House leaders. You mentioned earlier in your presentation that you have seen in the last few weeks an improvement in decorum, and so have I. That is a direct result of all the House leaders and whips getting together and agreeing to try to temper the enthusiasm, shall we say, of their members. Yes, from time to time there are still some outbursts, but generally speaking over the last three weeks I think we've seen a marked improvement in decorum. That's a result of, and credit to, all of the parties together agreeing to try to improve decorum. While I think the spirit behind your bill is laudable, I also firmly believe that the main function of decorum is the responsibility of the House itself and the parties themselves. So I hope we can continue to work together, and I've been very encouraged by what I've seen.

The second comment I would make is on the role of the Speaker. I agree that the Speaker, and I think other members have said this as well, needs to be more engaged, shall we say, in discipline. Whether it's the committee report that gives or encourages the Speaker to use

the levers at his disposal more effectively, I don't know. I certainly would be in favour of that. But I think that some of the more effective ways of dealing with it you've already mentioned, and others have. Marcel just spoke about it when he was in chair. To me, the most effective way of say punishing or reprimanding a member is to make that member invisible to the chair. We all want to get on camera, right, and if you are not recognized by the chair, and this could go on for an extended period of time, that is going to smarten up that member very quickly. If that member is prevented from either asking a question, prevented from making an SO 31, prevented from doing anything in a public fashion, that's severe discipline. I think that's something the Speaker should be doing on more occasions than he has in the past.

Regarding technological changes, I hadn't thought about it, but I really like your suggestion for our consideration of lowering the volume of the microphones. I'll refer to an example, and I think everyone here knows it to be true. One of our members, Rob Bruinooge, when he was parliamentary secretary for the Minister of Indian Affairs, on many occasions would have to go up and answer questions in the House when the minister was absent. When Rob got up to speak, he's such a soft-spoken gentleman that automatically the volume in the House just went down, because they were straining to listen to what his answer was. He never did anything more or less. He always spoke in the same very soft tone. I think you're onto something there, that if we just lower the volume on our earpieces, that may be something.

I also agree with something you said—I had it down in my notes here, and you mentioned it just before I got to speak—on the use of cameras. When you've got hecklers, they're doing so I think as much as anything because they know that they're hiding behind the cloak of anonymity. If you opened up that lens, and if their constituents could see some of these people yelling and screaming, with their faces flushed, I think if they got a few calls from their constituents saying “You look like a complete jerk-off, what are you doing there?”, that would have a very positive effect on lowering the temperature.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: We already know the names of those.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I get those letters without even being on the camera.

I think that widening the camera lens is something that could be very positive.

I disagree with one thing you mentioned with regard to Speaker discipline, and that's expulsion, for two reasons. One, of course, is that many people—as, quite frankly, I sometimes did as a political adviser in years past before I was elected, I'm ashamed to say—would advise a member to get that person kicked out. Why? Because then you go right to the cameras outside the House, and you become a *cause célèbre*. You could become a spokesperson. Why were you kicked out? I was fighting.... It's an advantage to people to get kicked out sometimes, and they do it purposely. So I don't think that should be something that we really encourage the Speaker to do.

•(1225)

The second thing is that if you expel somebody, in my view there would have to be some sort of right of exception. Theoretically—and I hope this would never happen, but follow it with me—let's say there's a minority Parliament and there was a very important, very close vote coming up. Our speakers are elected. All of a sudden the Speaker, in trying to gain advantage to his or her own party, expelled somebody from the government, let's say because the Speaker knew the vote was going to come down to a difference of one or two votes. He was expelled the day before a critical vote and he was not allowed to come back into the House for a week. You deny that person his right to vote and it could affect the outcome of whether a government falls or not. If you do that, you would have to do something there.

The last thing I would like to say is that there has to be an exception rule—

The Chair: When did I become invisible? You're reversing this trend where the Speaker doesn't see you as invisible; you see the Speaker as invisible.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'm sorry. It was my only question, and I—

The Chair: Mr. Chong, a response, very quickly, and we'll move on to the next.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I don't even need a response, if you want to move on.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Weston.

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chong, thank you for coming. Certainly I want to commend you, as all members have, for starting the debate, actually starting the discussion, if you wish.

We had the pleasure one evening, over some chicken wings, to have a discussion about this, and I was struck by your sheer genuineness to want to accomplish something to try to increase the level of decorum in the House. I also believe you want to try to increase the substance in question period. To that effect there are some factors that obviously have played against that, whether it's decorum, or substance, in a sense.

We live in a world, as we've all talked about here, of the sound bite—the clip—and a lot of us play to the camera. We look to try to be on the evening news—or, as my colleague says, a cause for celebrity, status that we can take home with us.

Having said all that, my question is more around your thoughts on lengthening the amount of time given for each question and answer, whether it is necessary to have an equal amount of time for the question and the answer. If we're looking for the substance here, is the substance in the question or in the answer? I throw that out for further discussion.

Quite often we see things in the preambles to questions that we saw here earlier today. Monsieur Paquette, in his comments earlier—he wasn't really asking a question, he was making a statement—talked about items he raised in a point of order yesterday on the floor

of the House; it gave him an opportunity to reiterate those same points once again. Quite often we see that.

When we have that in question period—those same points made over and over again—the ministers are put in a position to try for the one-upmanship. I guess that's one of the things I question: do we really need the same amount of time for the question as we do for the answer?

The other question I have, quite quickly, is on requiring the minister to respond to questions that are asked of him. I believe what you're saying is that if I get up and I want to ask a question of the Minister of the Environment, let the Minister of the Environment respond.

The other thought I had is how you require that individual to stand and answer the question. How do I actually require that minister to answer the question I've asked? I've heard what you said about reciprocity with the Speaker, in that sense, but there's still difficulty in trying to get that actual question answered.

Those are a couple of thoughts I had, and I'll throw them back for your thoughts, Mr. Chong.

•(1230)

Hon. Michael Chong: With respect to lengthening the amount of time given to ask and to answer a question, I think whatever the committee proposes in that regard, if anything, is done in a way that is fair to all four parties and ensures that the current allocation of time in the House—a quarter to each of the four parties—remains the same, and that some of the opposition concerns about the government using this opportunity to provide longer answers doesn't give the government the advantage of using more time in their answers to prevent the opposition from having its fair share of questions.

I'm not wedded to anything specific. I think giving the Speaker the power of reciprocity between the length of the question and the length of the answer is a solution. Perhaps we have a minimum 35-second rule whereby anybody has a minimum of 35 seconds to ask a question and a minimum to answer a question. If the question is shorter than 35 seconds, the government still has up to 35 seconds to answer it. If the question is longer than 35 seconds and goes to a minute, then the minister has up to a minute to answer the question. There are different ways the Speaker could be instructed to deal with that issue.

In terms of the second part of your question that had to do with ministers answering questions, again, you can interpret that in various ways, but if we are going to go to a rotational schedule or the like, there are different ways to do it. Fundamentally, though, of all the proposals I've made, the most important one is restoring the right of backbench members to ask questions of the government on behalf of their constituents. That is the most fundamental change I think we need to make. I think it would restore the balance of power between the party leadership and individual members of Parliament in those parties.

We are a democracy, and I think Canadians, our constituents, look to us to represent them in the House. Give the first half to the party leadership—and all the four parties can do whatever they want with it—and give the second half of QP to the backbench, as it used to be for decades before the 1980s.

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

We have now had everybody at the table, except for Monsieur Laframboise, who came in late. We had a chance to ask some questions today. I would like to do just a few quick rounds of one-offs, and I will cut you off if you go longer than 30 seconds in asking your question and see if we can get a couple more.

We have proven the point today that we have witnesses here to look at, because the witness comes with all the goods, I would think, and yet we spend all our time asking the question and not giving him any chance to answer. Let's see if we can do some quick one-offs and get some knowledge from the witness before we let him go.

From the official opposition side, we have the Liberals. Is there anybody with a one-off question?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: You talk about spontaneity, and I wonder how spontaneity versus the lists, the prepared lists, will bring about more discipline. Everybody could go all over the map.

Hon. Michael Chong: With spontaneous questions comes the restoration of the right of the Speaker to recognize members, and the corollary of the right to recognize members is the right of the Speaker not to recognize members, if their behaviour is out of sorts.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: How do we ensure equality between parties then?

Hon. Michael Chong: The Speaker could choose not to recognize a member in a particular party but choose to recognize the person next to him who has been behaving appropriately. Surely not all members of a particular caucus are misbehaving all at once in the same way.

The Chair: I have seen that happen too.

Mr. Reid, very quickly.

Mr. Scott Reid: Just following up on the question of how to get equality from parties, I think parties have an unofficial status in the House of Commons. Equality of parties is presumably a corollary of equality of members, if we all have an equal right to be recognized.

If we have something like a lottery system, inevitably, when everything is totalled, you've had an equal number of questions per party. So you can achieve that by that means, as opposed to making a mechanistic decision that we have to have x amount of time for the Liberals, then for the Bloc, then for the New Democrats, and then back to the Liberals, as we do it now.

Would you agree with that sentiment?

Hon. Michael Chong: I think whatever proposals you make must be on the basis that the existing time allocation for each of the four parties remains the same. I think it's a non-starter for the House as a whole to change the allocation of time among the four parties. I think each party needs to have the same amount of time it has today. Otherwise, you're not going to get a consensus on this.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame DeBellefeuille.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Chong, we haven't addressed that part, and I'm curious to hear your answer.

We belong to a political system in which we run as members of a party. So there are four parties in the House of Commons, sometimes three. This isn't a proportional system or a mixed member proportional system. So if we accepted your suggestions, in the existing system, I don't believe it would be possible for a member who has been elected as a member of a party voted into power to form the government to ask questions that are really embarrassing or troublesome for his party.

If we were in a proportional system, there would be a number of parties. However, in the present system, I believe your recommendations would enable backbench members of the party forming the government to ask their government sympathetic questions. I don't think your objective will be achieved in the existing parliamentary system.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'm in favour of the present system. However, I believe that, if we change the rule, we'll have another system in which backbench government members will be able to ask the government real questions. A lot of members of the government party would like to raise issues that are not priorities for the government, but that are priorities for the citizens in their constituencies. The ultimate priority for all the backbench members of all parties is the citizens in their constituencies, with a view to securing votes in the next election.

[*English*]

I think it will change, the tone of the questions posed by both government and backbench members.

The final thing I'd add quickly, because I think this is important, if you were to implement a change to lengthen the amount of time given to ask and to answer questions, the Bloc Québécois members could have the exact same system they have today. If you put in place the rule that says a member on both sides can ask or answer a question, and they have a minimum of 35 seconds to ask and answer and they have up to a minute to reply, and there's a rule of reciprocity, the Bloc members could ask staccato-type, 35-second questions, as they do now, and the government would be forced to give 35-second answers. You could have as many questions and styles of questions that you have today, and it would afford the other parties a different style if they wished to take advantage of that.

• (1240)

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson? No?

Mr. Lukiwski.

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

I have one quick question, Michael, with respect to your suggestion that ministers be scheduled on specific days. Do you envision some sort of a rule of exception in extraordinary circumstances? For instance, the Minister of the Environment is scheduled to answer questions on Wednesday of a certain week, and over the weekend there's a major oil spill. Obviously, Monday and Tuesday the opposition, rightfully so, would want to ask questions about that oil spill, which is a major sort of environmental crisis in the country, but the minister is not there for two days, under your schedule.

Do you see any kind of an exception rule where the Speaker could say that under these current circumstances, he would suggest that the minister be there on Monday to answer questions about the particular issue? How would that work?

Hon. Michael Chong: As I said, I'm not wedded to exact details on how this would work, but my suggestion is that we not change the schedule because of an event that happens on the weekend. Why? Because the House of Commons has tools in place currently to deal with that. It's called emergency debate. You can petition the Speaker to recall the House in the evening to have an emergency debate. That power is used not infrequently by members. So there are already tools in place.

The second thing I note is that our system already doesn't allow for that. If an oil spill happens on a Friday at five o'clock, we have to wait two days before the House can ask questions of the government anyway. So if an oil spill happens on Saturday and the Minister of the Environment is slated to come Tuesday, that's no different from an oil spill happening on a Friday and the minister coming Monday, as is currently the case.

Many other parliaments have a once-a-week or twice-a-week rotational schedule. They are no less accountable, no less timely than in our system.

The Chair: Thank you.

Anyone else on the opposition side with one question?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: We're done, aren't we?

The Chair: One o'clock is our finish time.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: We have committee business.

The Chair: Did we elect new chairs?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: We're asking.

The Chair: We will get there. I just want to make sure anyone who has a question gets a chance to ask it.

Is there anyone on the opposition side who would like to ask a question? Apparently not.

I'm going to get to you, Mr. Reid; I'm just being as fair as I could be.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Speaking of not seeing people....

Further to Mr. Chong's point, oil spills can also occur on say June 30. I think we have to accept that there's a practical consideration here. Having to wait a few days for an answer is not necessarily a problem that the nation hasn't faced before.

The Chair: Mr. Chong, would you like to wrap up, just very quickly?

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, just very quickly. I would just leave you with three final thoughts.

The Chair: Before you start, if you have any suggestions on witnesses we might want to see, please throw them in. Thank you.

Hon. Michael Chong: I was just going to suggest that.

A number of Canadians have indicated to me that they would be interested in testifying at this committee. Joe Clark, the former Prime Minister, has indicated to me personally that he would be interested in testifying on this issue. Mr. Broadbent, the former leader of the New Democratic Party, has participated in debates on this issue recently and has indicated an interest in it. I know that Mr. Preston Manning is interested in this issue and has recently written opinion editorials in *The Globe and Mail* on it. Those are just a few of the witnesses. I'd also suggest that you invite Mr. Robert Marleau, the former clerk of the House, who witnessed some of the changes I've talked about.

I have two other quick points. I hope the committee will endeavour to report this back to the House in advance of the next federal election. I think there's a possibility of a spring election. The order compels the committee to report it back by April 6, 2011. If there's an impending election in March of next year, I hope the committee will see that it is reported back to the House some time before those confidence votes.

Finally, if I were to pick one message or proposal that I think is critical to parliamentary reform and the reform of question period, it would be to restore the right, for one half of question period, of backbench members to represent their constituents and ask questions of the government. I think we need to rebalance the power in our system toward backbench members and away from the four parties. I believe in the party system and our parliamentary democracy, but I think we need to restore a right that members once held. I think that will go a long way to restoring Canadians' faith in our Parliament and in their democratic institutions.

Thank you for having me.

● (1245)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong, for all your help today and the great information you've shared with us. You've given us a task. This committee will decide how we can do it. Thank you very much.

We're going to suspend for a moment and go in camera for committee business.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:
Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En cas de non-livraison,
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and
Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the
following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les
Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à
l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>