



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

PROC • NUMBER 014 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, April 12, 2016

—
Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Tuesday, April 12, 2016

• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): Good morning. This meeting is number 14 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, for the first session of the 42nd Parliament.

It's a very busy meeting and we have a lot of witnesses, which is great. Any time we get a few minutes, we have five or so things to get through: witnesses who can't make it, etc.; the committee report; just approving the budget for our report; the clerk's emergency motion on emergency sitting; the conflict of interest guideline; Mr. Reid's motion; and Mr. Christopherson's motion.

We'll start out. We have three witnesses in the first panel. We'll be having, first, Christine Moore, MP, Abitibi—Témiscamingue. Then we'll have the Honourable Sheila Copps, and Lisa MacLeod, MPP for Nepean-Carleton, who is joining us via teleconference from Toronto.

Thank you, witnesses, for coming. I know your time is valuable, so we appreciate it. If we could do five minutes of opening comments, and if you don't have enough time in that, then just use the time when someone asks you a question to finish your prepared speech.

Go ahead, Ms. Moore.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, dear colleagues and guests.

It is a pleasure to appear before you today. I first want to say that the comments I am going to make here represent my personal opinion on the situation, and not that of my party.

As you probably know, I gave birth to a little girl right in the middle of the last election. So I experienced pregnancy during the previous Parliament, and balancing work and family life in the context of this new one. As for my family situation, my husband also has shared custody of a school-aged daughter, which makes it difficult for him to join me in Ottawa.

The first point I would like to discuss today is parental leave. In my opinion, it is essential that we have parental leave. Ideally it should last at least six months. I would also like to add that that leave would not mean that an MP would not work. It would rather mean putting in place a series of measures that would allow him or her to work from the riding. This would mean not having to come to Ottawa, and avoiding all the inconvenience involved in that.

To achieve this, the main improvements that need to be put in place would be to establish a mechanism through which members could table various documents remotely, such as briefs on bills resembling the speeches they would have made had they been present, and a mechanism involving existing documents, for instance petitions or private members' bills. The other improvement that would allow members to work from their ridings would be the possibility of voting from a distance.

As voting in person is to me something very important and significant, I do not think that the right to vote remotely or electronically should be given to all members, but only to those who are on parental leave or on long-term sick leave. This could be done by asking the Speaker of the House, who would grant this right for a given period to those who would need it.

As for the possibility of shortening or compressing the work week, or changing the parliamentary calendar in some other way, I want to say that late meetings are extremely problematic for all of the members who have young children. Compressing the work week does not seem like a good solution to me in any way. Moreover, I do not think that Canadians want us to work less. Simply eliminating sitting days does not seem like a good solution either.

As for eliminating Friday sittings, that does not seem like a good idea. You have to understand that the fact of changing the parliamentary calendar will always have positive effects for some and negative effects for others. For instance, if certain members live too far to do the return trip over the weekend, they would not benefit from having Friday sessions eliminated, because they are here in any case. The ideal situation for them would be to sit two or three weeks in a row, stay here during the weekends, and then return to their ridings for periods of two or three weeks. However, this last solution would not be appropriate for those who live closer and want to return to their families. So it is very difficult to find a solution that suits everyone when we look at changing the parliamentary calendar. In addition, eliminating Friday sittings would be to the advantage of the party in power, because it often has to keep a large number of members here in order to avoid losing a vote, for instance, whereas opposition parties can generally have fewer members present on Fridays.

That is why the most logical solution is to see whether we can improve the daily and weekly schedule of House business. As we know that current business and question period are the activities that require the presence of many members, these two activities could be eliminated on Fridays. However, obviously opposition parties would have to be compensated for that concession by extending the other question periods to offset the loss on Fridays.

The creation of a parallel House could probably be interesting if it focused mainly on studying private members' business. This would be advantageous for the members of the opposition. When they are not chosen in the draw, they do not even have the opportunity of speaking on their parliamentary initiatives. If this were to happen, opposition parties might be favourable to changing Friday's schedule in exchange for a longer period devoted to oral questions and the study of private members' bills.

As for House business, holding votes immediately after question period would of course be the ideal solution, since this would avoid our having to leave and return. This would also allow those who do not have far to go to be able to leave earlier in the day and return the next day.

•(1105)

During my pregnancy, the long vote periods were very difficult for me. We need to schedule some short breaks when voting lasts more than two hours so that you can move around if you are pregnant. It would also be a good thing for people with health problems like diabetes. This would allow them to eat a snack and avoid feeling ill because of a very long vote.

One of the last crucial points I would like to bring up is putting in place a child care service that reflects the House schedule.

The private day care on the Hill currently only takes children full-time, and only from the age of 18 months. Moreover, it closes at 6 o'clock. This absolutely does not correspond to the needs of members. This service could be very useful for members who are breastfeeding, who have very young children and who must go and see their baby every two or three hours. Such a service would also be useful for many male members who told me that they would very much like to bring their children occasionally for a week to the House. However, since there is no day care, they cannot do so and this saddens them. This would also be appreciated by male members of Parliament who would sometimes like to give their spouse a break in caring for their children. I am aware that it is a challenge for the operators of the day care to deal with the House schedule, and moreover the House does not sit every week. However, I think it is achievable.

In closing, I would like to specify that I focused on the aspects of work-family life balance that concerned procedure, which is what this committee is looking at. I contacted the Speaker of the House regarding other improvements that would have more to do with the Speaker or the Board of Internal Economy.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to appear before you.

•(1110)

[English]

The Chair: Madam Copps.

[Translation]

Hon. Sheila Copps (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

First of all, thank you very much for the invitation.

I've probably taken a more retrospective approach to the issue. When Christine was talking about the health breaks that are necessary and some of the issues that you face when you're in Parliament, I'd like to take you back to April 4, 1987. My daughter was born on the 26th of March and I believe it was on April 4—you can check the history books—the President of the United States was giving a speech in the House of Commons. Being a political animal, I did not want to miss that speech.

[Translation]

At that time, I was breastfeeding my daughter. We are talking about two-hour intervals.

•(1115)

[English]

We were in Parliament. Some other time I'll tell you about the speech, but in any case, he spoke. Mr. Mulroney, who was the Prime Minister of the day, introduced him. I believe the Speaker gave a speech, then Mr. Mulroney, and then the President of the United States, who at the time was Ronald Reagan.

As you know, I was in the opposition at the time. Most of the political people in opposition would go outside after any speech, kind of trolling for little nibbles, little media nibbles, little fish nibbles. I was outside with Jean-Claude Malépart, one of the French-speaking members of the rat pack, since deceased; an incredible guy. We were outside waiting to comment on Ronald Reagan's speech, of course, and all of a sudden he looked down and said, "You have a problem, Sheila." I looked down and, because I was breastfeeding and the time had gone past the two hours, I had this giant wet spot on the front of my blouse.

I ran away to the bathroom. The situation was so bad in those days that they had women's bathrooms only on every second floor, because they didn't think you'd actually have women serving in Parliament. You had to run from the first to the third to the fifth to actually get to the bathroom, so we didn't even have a bathroom outside the chamber.

That being said, one of the first things Christine talked about was child care. I've tried to think about some really practical solutions that you might put forward. I won't speak to the issue of sitting Mondays and Fridays, because that's more of a legislation thing.

First of all, I'd like to say the Hill day care was fantastic. The board is fantastic. It really serves the employees. You're not talking about making life easier just for members of Parliament. You're talking about the parliamentary precinct, which at the time was about 4,000 employees, because it included the press gallery.

I think you need to bring in infant child care. The fact that you're not able to put your kids into child care until they're able to be toilet-trained is a problem. Eighteen months is even problematic, because the first 18 months are probably the most crucial in terms of the child's life.

I'm not sure about running it day and night, because I also think members of Parliament are in a way like small business employers. We're really quite privileged, because we have the privilege to set our own hours. When I became a minister, the first thing I said was that I didn't do breakfast meetings. At that time, my daughter was probably about nine or 10, and I said, "Mornings are really key times to get her going, so we start our day at nine o'clock." I think members of Parliament are privileged, because even though we face the challenges of getting our children launched, we also have an incredible number of opportunities.

I remember when my daughter was growing up, and she was the first child born to a parliamentarian. She had friends in British Columbia and she had friends in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, because I used to take her everywhere. I breastfed her in the meetings. If she needed to be breastfed, I just started breastfeeding. A few eyes popped out at the time, and we had some issues, but we got through them.

I think it's much more difficult for the lady who was fixing the table here. She cannot tell her boss, "I'm sorry, I can't come in because my daughter's sick." That goes for regular employees in both the House and the larger world. I think the committee should probably take a look at the child care family-friendly provisions that exist in the House of Commons rules. To my understanding, there are virtually none. They don't exist.

That also speaks to the second issue. How do you define "family"? A family can be two partners without children. A family can be partners with grown children or small children or parents.

I was just chatting with David Christopherson, an old colleague of mine. My mom served with him on council, and she's in a home for dementia now. I know the sandwich generation. There are many issues for families. I think the committee should take a broad look at having a family-friendly policy that would actually be instituted by the Speaker, with the potential for I wouldn't say an ombudsman but for some kind of review, because things have not changed since I was here.

Most of the responsibilities for creating a family-friendly environment rely on the individual member of Parliament, and you have a lot on your plate as well—not just for yourself, but for your staff. If there was a third-party process, it could actually give you the list of what you're entitled to and what makes a good family-friendly policy. You may want to look to the crown corporations, because I'm sure a lot of crown corporations have family-friendly policy items.

That would also deal with safety in the workplace. When you're dealing with a family-friendly policy, you're also dealing with policies on sexual harassment, and sexual harassment in the workplace. It's an issue of not just making sure your kids are safe but also making sure your employees are safe. Again, there is no real policy on sexual harassment for members of Parliament.

I'm going to close now because I realize I've broadened the mandate of the committee. I remember—and Larry Bagnell, your chair, will remember because he was around maybe not as early as I was—there was a member of Parliament in my caucus who was well known for being abusive to employees. I won't go into the names or the details. It's an old history. That person lost many employees

because they were being asked for sexual favours on the job, and there was nowhere they could go. I remember arbitrating some of those myself, or trying to help because they'd come and they'd be crying to me. Women would be crying and saying, "What can I do?", and we'd be trying to make solutions.

At the moment having a template for family-friendly policy, and also a safe workplace, would be excellent work and a good outcome for this committee. I commend you to those experiences. I know I said I'd be brief, but the other thing is that you have to be strong in insisting that....

I used to bring my daughter to all the committees. I can guarantee you that if you're sitting in night committees.... I brought her to all the committees, and if she was crying, I'd say, "Go for it." Because you know what? That's the way to let people know that if you run a committee until 11 o'clock at night and then you start the next morning at seven o'clock, you're not running a family-friendly operation and maybe you should revisit some of the committee schedules, and they did. So good luck.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Lisa MacLeod, MPP for Nepean-Carleton. She's joining us by teleconference from Toronto for five minutes.

Lisa, you're on.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (MPP, Nepean-Carleton, Legislative Assembly of Ontario, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and good morning to all of your colleagues.

I was asked to say a few words about my work in Ontario at a time when I was a parent of a young child. I was a young woman, and I was the youngest person in the Ontario legislature. While my name is no longer synonymous with the word "young," I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about the work I did a decade ago to make our legislature in Ontario more family friendly.

As I said then, and I am going to repeat it today, you shouldn't have to choose between being a good parent and a good parliamentarian. Let me speak from the heart and from experience as I explain that.

When I was first elected in a by-election 10 years ago—in fact, just this past Sunday was my 10-year anniversary of being sworn in—I had eight days to move my family to Toronto, find an apartment, open two offices, begin work as a parliamentarian, and understand what I had fully gotten myself into. This was all done, of course, with the support of my family and a very dedicated staff. When it came to my unique needs as a young mother and an MPP, travelling five hours to and from Toronto, the legislative assembly really offered no support and no resources for finding what the other two speakers talked about, which is adequate child care, despite the urgency and despite my being a newcomer to Toronto with virtually no transition time. I found I was on my own.

To be truthful, for a period of two and a half years my office became a makeshift nursery to accommodate my growing baby and my demanding career, and I continued to search for child care. In the end, it was only with the support of my dedicated husband that I was able to find adequate care. My husband decided to sacrifice his career and stay at home to raise our daughter. Each week, usually late Sunday afternoon, the four of us—my husband, my daughter, our dog, and I—piled into our car in Ottawa and drove to Toronto for the entire week. This went on for the first few years of my daughter's life, until we started her in school at home in Ottawa and my husband was able to resume his career on Parliament Hill.

I look back at those days, and I am still worn out thinking of them. It is with semi-humour—because it is in part quite funny, and in other parts quite astonishing—that I say I'm not sure who took longer to get used to whom: the legislature to me, because it is an institution that has been in existence for over 250 years, since 1792, or me, the 31-year-old mother who showed up with a baby, to that institution, which is 250 years old.

I think we have to talk about some of the systemic barriers that women and young parents in general face. Obviously, we enjoy a parliamentary system that has endured the ages. It has produced good governments and great leaders. It has produced sound policies and often rigorous debate, but that doesn't mean our parliamentary system doesn't need a fine-tuning every once in a while to reflect the changes in our society.

In Ontario, making the legislature more family friendly did not mean we overhauled our parliamentary system or disrupted over 200 years of parliamentary tradition. Nor did it mean eroding government accountability tools, which are vital for good governance and effective opposition. Rather, it was more about refining and modernizing the way we conducted business in the assembly to better reflect our society and the real demands of being a good parliamentarian and a good parent.

Overall, improving the way the institution functions makes parliamentarians effective representatives and better policy-makers. In our case, the Ontario legislature would routinely begin at one o'clock in the afternoon and sit until 9:30 at night or even midnight, Monday through Thursday. We often would debate closure motions in the evenings for about three hours. A simple change to the standing orders, which was not actually that simple to make, required that we shift our hours to nine to six with evening sittings only by unanimous consent or in the last two weeks of the session. That ensured we had more reasonable work hours. I think it became abundantly clear that those measures made for a better balance in this assembly.

At the same time, and this is key, it did not compromise our debate time on actual legislation, committee work, or private members' business. This is absolutely fundamental, and I urge any changes that might be made to the House of Commons in this pursuit to respect the role of Parliament and the duties of all of its members, government and opposition.

Other common-sense initiatives we brought in at the time, which seem simple but weren't then, were changing tables and high chairs so that we would be more welcoming.

The one initiative our government of the day brought in that I did not agree with, and I still do not to this day, is moving question period into the morning. I urge the House of Commons against this for three reasons. I've noticed a decrease in the public attendance in the gallery throughout the years, making the legislature less transparent and accountable to the public. We must take into consideration our political staff and parliamentary staff who will be affected, and they will be. Finally, there is less preparation time for members of the opposition to respond to daily issues. I have never sat in government, but I imagine it's the same for the government members.

While making Parliament more family friendly is not only a women's issue, I think it is important that our assemblies respond to the reality that, now more than ever, women—young women and women with children—are making the decision to stand for public office.

• (1120)

We're winning in greater numbers and we're now a better reflection of our broader society. As I often say, it is not solely about getting more women elected, it is also about keeping us here.

I want to congratulate this committee for your thoughtful consideration of initiatives toward a family-friendly House of Commons. In 2016, we do not judge our ability or our electability by our last names, our genders, or our pay scales. But if there's one thing we can take away from trailblazers like Sheila Copps, Pat Carney, the Orange Crush, gender parity, and Rona Ambrose, is that women with families aren't slowing down in politics, we're just getting started.

I'm happy to take any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Just before we go to the rounds of questions, I'd like to welcome to our committee Madame Boutin-Sweet again and also Mr. Ron McKinnon.

We'll start the first round of questions with Ms. Vandenbeld.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much, and I want to thank all three of you for coming before the committee and for being so candid about your personal experiences, which affect quite a few and a growing number of members of Parliament.

You are the ones who have made it work. You're the ones who have blazed the trails and have succeeded as members of Parliament, as legislators, and also having young families. But I'm concerned about the deterrent effect on others when they see the struggles, when they see how difficult it is, particularly the sitting hours. What do you think we can do, not just to make it easier for them once they're here but to make sure that young families—young women and also young men who have families or aspire to have families—are not dissuaded from running because of a lot of the discussions we're having and a lot of the difficulties they have in terms of the impact on their time?

•(1125)

Ms. Christine Moore: We just have to act. We have the time. We have four years. I said at the beginning of my mandate, it's the time to act and to make Parliament family friendly.

We already did a lot in just a few months. There's now parking for women with baby carriages or pregnant women. We have high chairs in the cafeteria. We have a family room now. In just a few months, we made some gains.

I think for people who have an interest in politics, for sure it could look difficult. But we are about to change and we did. I hope this committee will be about making change, so the next legislature will be ready to be family friendly.

Hon. Sheila Copps: I think you have to be realistic about the world. My daughter turned 29 last week, and this place was very welcoming to her 29 years ago.

I remember the day I brought her in. She spit up all over John Fraser, the Speaker and it was about five minutes to two. She was like the rock star because she was the first child born. It was a huge, positive thing. John Fraser invited me to bring her over to the Chambers just before question period. Then, as babies do, she had a big blast of white crap. She shot him, and he didn't have any baby towels on. It was two minutes to two and all of a sudden his black robe was covered in white baby sputum, so he ran and changed it.

The bottom line is that it's a difficult life. For most of her early years I was a single parent. I didn't have a spouse. I remarried when she was about seven, and that was absolutely fantastic because then you have the support system.

It would be remiss to leave the public with the impression that this is not a family-friendly place, because it's a lot more family friendly than working at the steel company, for example, or a lot of other work places. I think I'm trying to direct the conversation toward the whole parliamentary precinct, because as members of Parliament we can choose our hours to a great degree. We can't choose the committee hours per se, but committees can also be responsive.

I think the biggest challenge for a family-friendly environment is for the employees of members of Parliament, not for the members of Parliament themselves, because we are the boss and we can make accommodations.

Like Christine said, you end up.... For the first year and a half I had a crib in my office, so I made accommodations. There were times that Pat Carney.... I remember one time. In those days we had the circular revolving doors, and we were all rushing out of a vote. It had been a long vote, and my daughter wasn't feeling well. You could extend the hours of the child care to maybe 7 p.m. or 7:30 p.m.

It was a six o'clock vote, and she had a fever. There was no baby stuff, so I gave her this grape juice. All that was in the anteroom was coffee, or cola, or stuff like that. I gave her grape juice. When we were coming out of the revolving door, right in the door, whoop, she had a giant grape juice explosion in the middle of the revolving door as everybody's rushing out from the vote. Barbie McDougall who was a minister at the time—I think she was foreign minister—ran and got her driver. She brought some water. She sat down with me

and we cleaned the vomit up off the floor. People are willing to pitch in.

I go back to the fact that as a 29-year-old, she's very flexible now because she lived a life where she learned to sleep like a carney. She can sleep in a drawer. She sleeps like a baby anywhere now, so there are some positive aspects too.

Structurally you do need to look at child care hours, in particular child care for infants, and also the family-friendly policy as it applies to employees. Is there an overlay, and is there somebody you can go to if you feel your family hours are being disrupted because of your employment?

The Chair: Thank you.

Lisa.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much.

I tend to agree with both Christine and Sheila on a couple of things. I think child care is something that acts as a deterrent, if a lot of women with a baby or who were having one knew when they got elected that they would be needing to find two child care spaces. Obviously I live in Ottawa; I serve in Toronto. That was eye-opening to me. I think Sheila also makes a wonderful point. My daughter walks around Queen's Park now at 11 years old knowing every member of all of the caucuses, and they've watched her grow. It's a tremendous privilege, in fact. She knows two members of this committee, both Anita and Scott. I think in and of itself that's important.

I think if there's one thing I could impress upon, it would effectively be trying to find a way for new members or sitting members who do have children to understand that Queen's Park child care and the House of Commons child care are not something that would be suitable for our children. Not that it's not quality care; that's not where I'm going. But in terms of our work hours it's the fact that we would have to have two spots. We only sit four days a week, not the full five days as you folks do, but that's certainly a consideration. We had a period in 2007 where five women from the government of the day didn't re-offer. That's why I always come up with this line: it's not just about getting us elected anymore, it's also about keeping us here. The issue each one of them cited in 2007, which was my second election, was that they had to spend more time with their families, so it's striking that balance.

Some of us, Anita, have to find different ways in order to accommodate our growing families. For example, on PD days I try to take a day with my daughter because I know I'm away all week, and she has one this Friday with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. My new MP Chandra Arya is going to be opening up his constituency office, and she will be going. It's highly likely that Victoria Varner will be with her mother that day. We try to accommodate little things. Sometimes it works; sometimes it doesn't. But we're very fortunate to be able to call this our career. It's just that it would help if sometimes our institution tweaked some of the things, like having a bathroom, or having a change table, or having a high chair, or having a resource where we could find child care in the city that we're not from.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

I now move on to Mr. Schmale. You can direct your questions to whomever you want, or to all members.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Okay, thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to each of you for attending here today, and thank you for your feedback.

I'm the father of a four-year-old son, so it's been a balancing act for sure. I remember after being elected I asked my predecessor what he did with his family, what was the best. His answer was that for every option you choose there isn't a perfect one. It's going to be bad either way. It's going to be the least of the bad, if you will, and you make a decision based on your own situation. So that's what we did. My family is back home and we try to do the best we can with that.

I'm just curious actually because I was listening to Ms. Copps and Madame Moore speak about a spouse being away from Ottawa and being a single mother for a number of years. I thought to myself, what would happen if something happened on my end and I became a single father with sole custody? What would I do? I was just batting around the options as everyone was talking and thinking that it would be extremely difficult. Especially with day care, you said it ended at six o'clock and sometimes we have votes until seven. I'm just actually curious, what do you do with your daughter when we have votes and day care ends?

Ms. Christine Moore: With me for the votes, I have no one. Sometimes I try to hire a nanny. I have never found one who was able to do the job with the schedule and everything. Some weeks I have my mother or some family member who just comes to help me with Daphnée. At that time she just stays with my mother, for example, my aunt, or different people who are there to give me a hand. But if I have no one available that week, I don't have a choice. I bring Daphnée with me for a vote. I try to avoid her crying too much. It's why I asked my whip for me to be seated at the end of the row, so she is not in the middle of the House. That way maybe the crying could be less disturbing. I don't have any choice because I cannot leave the baby in my office and just close the door. I don't have the choice, so I bring Daphnée with me. That's why she's with me. I try to be discreet but she's a baby so you cannot control babies crying. I have her with me. Sometimes I breastfeed in the House because we have a vote. I try my best to manage it.

Hon. Sheila Copps: When I was a member of Parliament, the child was not allowed to step into the House. You had to pick up your child by I think 6:15—the child care closed at six, but they had some flexibility—so you could run over and run back. Honestly, the parliamentary pages—and the interns, because they had interns also—were fantastic. They would bounce her on their knee or whatever, because she'd be in the other room while I was inside. Sometimes the votes would be really long, and she'd start bawling or whatever. Everybody became conscripted between six and seven.

I think that even allowing the baby in is a big plus, because the baby is actually with the mother, whereas when we were there, they said no strangers were allowed in the House. That was the rule.

• (1135)

Ms. Christine Moore: What we have asked is to be allowed to have the baby until they turn one year old. That's usually the period during which we breastfeed. This is what we have asked for, and it is tolerated by the Speaker.

Right now, she's young so she comes with me, but later she will stay with her dad.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I'm just going to bounce around here quickly.

Ms. MacLeod, you were talking about how moving question period to the morning affected not just the members but also the staff. I'm curious. Obviously, with question period in the morning, because there's prep time, staff might have to come in a little earlier. That means that those with families would be affected, but does it also mean, for members such as you, Ms. MacLeod, that you came in earlier yourself and then missed that time with your family in the morning?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I worked on Parliament Hill right up until my by-election was called, so I was used to coming in at seven—in fact, I was in at about seven this morning—but it was a change in culture for members who had been here for many years and many meetings. It did impact members in terms of question period preparation, in terms of their scheduling with stakeholders, attending events, that whole sort of thing.

The other thing that we noticed, and I was talking about this with my House leader earlier today, is that not only have we seen a decrease in the number of people who show up in our public galleries to view question period and to make us more accountable to the public, but also we have noticed that there has been a change among the media. In fact our press gallery attended when we were making the family-friendly changes at Queen's Park, when the government was suggesting moving it to the mornings. Our press gallery actually appeared as a witness and said, please don't do this.

We're noticing that there has been a change as well in the coverage. Usually by about one o'clock or two o'clock, there's a shift in terms of the public reporting of what's been happening at Queen's Park.

There are a whole host of changes, then, that occur as a result of that one change in the time when question period occurs. I can't speak from a government perspective, as I've only ever served in opposition, but I can tell you that it requires everyone to be in earlier, be on top of their game, and respond in some cases to media reports or issues that happened the evening before in their local constituency.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Many of us are parents. I look across the table at Ms. Sahota and Mr. Chan. We've all gone through it. It's something we all need to balance. I think there is no easy answer, but I thank each and every one of you for coming out today. Thank you for your comments.

I only have a minute, so there's no use really in asking much of a question.

Ms. MacLeod, if you could say hello to my provincial counterpart Laurie Scott, that would be appreciated.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'll do that in caucus this afternoon.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll move on to Madame Boutin-Sweet for the NDP.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the committee for allowing me to appear today.

As a point of information for Ms. Copps and Ms. MacLeod, I am the NDP whip, and as such, I submitted a report to this committee about a month ago. As Ms. Moore was saying, we have already obtained several things by discussing things with the Speaker of the House, who has been very cooperative on these matters. We already have a room, crossings and parking for parents, as well as high chairs that are more appropriate in the cafeterias. Several things have been brought in, but there is still work to be done.

One question we discussed at some length with the Speaker, which I hear about a great deal here and which still has not been resolved is the matter of the day care. The Speaker has offered to help mothers find nannies, but as Ms. Moore was saying, it is, among other things, difficult to find French-speaking babysitters in Ottawa. And so we are going to have to find other solutions. One of the problems is that the day care only offers full-time spaces. Certain parents, such as fathers, would like to bring their children here a few weeks at a time, or a few days, but cannot do so because of the day care hours and the age of their children.

We have discussed this a great deal, but I would like to know if you have any suggestions or concrete solutions to propose to help solve this problem. We have to keep in mind that the quality of workers is important because they are going to be taking care of our children.

● (1140)

Hon. Sheila Copps: When I started, I said that I would not hire a nanny because I did not want a nanny to replace me. I had decided that right from the beginning. There was a woman who lived close to me who spoke French fluently. There are a lot of francophones in Ottawa.

If we have a day care, it is thanks to Jeanne Sauvé, who was Speaker of the House. She started this over 30 years ago, but since then, the status of the day care has not been reviewed.

First of all, things have to be broadened. We have to have something for the younger ones, because it is harder to find someone to care for children between 0 and 3 years of age.

Afterwards, I think it would be easy to set up a list. The Speaker could perhaps review the hour when votes are held and extend the sittings in light of that. I am not saying that we should sit 24 hours a day, but we could perhaps sit until 8 p.m. It's a bit like the chicken and the egg. It also depends on the hours when the votes are held. Why not hold them until 9 p.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and invest a bit more money in the day care so that they could also take babies?

As for the nannies, the Speaker could easily keep a list of available persons for that.

[English]

At top speed, I'm sure they could have a list of available professionals who are available to do that on a short-term basis. I think that would be a nice way to supplement. If you didn't want to expand the *garderie* hours, it would be a way to supplement for the small number, because remember the *garderie* is also for all the employees too and not just the members of Parliament. The waiting list when I was there was two years to get in. Obviously it needs an expansion. It hasn't been touched in terms of the structure.

The Chair: Do you want Lisa to comment on that?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much.

I have two comments here. One is that I think it's absolutely critical that every assembly in the country, including the House of Commons, consider a resource list for caregivers that we can access as members, and that doesn't necessarily just have to be caregivers for children, and it's not just during the day. Frequently we have events, whether it's in Toronto, Ottawa, or wherever, that we're required to go to in the evening. That type of child care was also very difficult for me. I really find myself nodding my head with that and agreeing with my colleague.

The second thing is that one thing we have started to do in the Ontario legislature is that we have our votes after question period, which the House of Commons may want to consider. Although we're doing question period in the morning, we do have votes right after question period. Members are all there, and it's a certain period of time. That's one consideration, but it's certainly something that we're doing here.

Again, I have to say very honestly that I believe the situation for child care at Queen's Park is the same as the House of Commons. It really isn't designed for members. It is designed for people who work and live in a community, and I think that's important. There should be child care available to staff, but it doesn't necessarily meet the needs of a mom or a dad who is travelling between cities and has an irregular workweek. I think that's a really key point that we have to be very public about.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Boutin-Sweet, you have the floor.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Regarding the time of the votes, we have already begun holding them immediately after question period.

Ms. Moore, you have experience. We talked in the House of Commons of trying to find nannies. Can you tell us about your experience in this regard?

Ms. Christine Moore: After discussing things with the Speaker, the human resources director agreed to look into finding a nanny. Naturally, I would have been responsible for paying her, as the goal was to find someone who could come to the office with me, could follow me around, could take care of Daphnée, in short someone who could come with me to Parliament. I also wanted someone who could speak French, but we were unable to find anyone.

There is now a service on the Web that is called Nannies on Call. It is offered in several cities, Toronto among others, but is not yet available in Ottawa. If this service were offered in Ottawa it would be ideal. It would allow us to have child care. The members could reserve a spot ahead of time and say, for instance, that they would need someone the following week for the entire week. The person who would be responsible for the service could reserve a certain number of babysitters according to the needs and the number of children who would be there during that week.

• (1145)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Earlier, you said that you would bring Daphnée to the House of Commons and that the Speaker gave you that right, but it is not always easy to have a baby in your arms in this place. Do you have any suggestions to make on that?

Ms. Christine Moore: I am sitting next to these windows. So there is some free space next to my desk. In a discussion with Minister McKenna, we talked about making small chairs that could be installed next to the desks. In that way, the babies could be seated. There is enough space. A member with a young baby could ask to sit next to the windows so that she could put the small seat next to her. In that way, her baby would be seated next to her. This would make her life easier as she could then get up without having to stand with her baby. With a little bit of ingenuity, I am sure that it would be possible to make such seats. I offered to do it myself, but I was told that there are people here who have the necessary expertise to do that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for the time.

I forgot to welcome Daphnée to our committee meeting.

Now we have Madam Petitpas Taylor.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Good morning, ladies. Thank you for your frankness and for sharing your personal experiences.

Ms. Moore, I am a new member on the Hill. I watched you this winter going about in snowstorms. When I went to my riding, I often talked about you and your courage. Thank you very much for everything you do.

[*English*]

I would like you to perhaps elaborate on something. There was a response that was given earlier with respect to both Ms. Copps and Ms. Moore regarding when you were in the House. With your experience perhaps you were the only ones who had a child in the House at the time. You had individuals who would assist you like the pages and other staff who were there. But if we were to have 15 babies in the House, how do you think that could have worked back then, and how could we make it work now as well? With these policies that we're looking at we want to encourage more people to be here, and not just have one or two people here.

Perhaps you could elaborate on that.

Hon. Sheila Copps: That's why you need to revisit the child care.

When I came to Parliament there was no child care available for anybody from zero to basically the age of two and a half. Now maybe it's one and a half. You have to be toilet-trained to go into the Hill day care. Effectively, the first two years of their life you're on your own. If you had infant child care here, that would solve the problem.

The only reason that I ended up conscripting the pages was because the way the Hill's day care works is that you have to pick them up at six o'clock. I think there was a fifteen-minute leeway. It might have been a quarter to six or six, I can't remember. It ended up being just about the middle of the votes, so you'd run over and get them before the vote. When the vote was on they weren't allowed in the House so they'd be sitting in the anteroom. Sometimes you'd have a member of your own staff come up because you might be speaking or have notes or whatever. Sometimes the women and the men who were the pages would love to play with them so they would take them. She was the only one. Probably because there have not been children in great numbers, nobody has really addressed the issue.

That's what you're looking at now; that is, expanding out to include zero. Also, it's having this list of people who are available on an urgent, on-call basis so you can say, "Look, I have an emergency. I need to get to the riding." You can have this list that could help.

Ms. Christine Moore: I can add to that. In fact, if we have the day care in Centre Block, just outside of the House, I don't think we will have to bring the babies into the House. This will deal with the issue. In terms of breastfeeding, maybe if we have long votes...but as long as we have the day care with extended hours we won't have to bring them into the House.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: In our workplace, are there things we could improve, for instance regarding transportation or moving from room to room in the building? Do you have any other suggestions that could make life on the Hill easier for parents?

Ms. Christine Moore: Of course, ideally the day care would be as close as possible to the actual House of Commons. We would only have to go down the stairs to breastfeed the baby, do what we have to do and come back.

I experienced that at the NDP convention. There was a day care in the building where the convention was held. All I had to do was go down a flight of stairs to visit with my daughter and breastfeed her. Afterwards, I was able to go back to the convention and continue to participate.

We will soon be moving into the West Block. We could move the day care closer at that point. While the Centre Block is being renovated, we could take advantage of that to rethink things and prepare a room. The move gives us an opportunity for better planning.

As for getting around, that is quite complex. When you leave the parliamentary precinct and use Ottawa streets, ideally, the child would have to be in a child seat attached to the bus seat. I did this once. The problem is that the green shuttle buses do not have safety belts. As for the white buses, their seat belts are not long enough to go around the child seat.

The simplest solution is to take my car, and that is what I do. That is in fact how I got here earlier. I put the stroller and all of the things in my car and I drove to the Centre Block where there are now parking spots reserved for mothers with strollers. I took all of the things out of the car. When we are done, I'm going to take my car because going up the hill with a stroller isn't always easy, especially when there is snow. In the summer, it is a little easier to do it on foot, but in the winter it is quite tricky. For the moment, the easiest solution is to take my car to get around. On the bus it is quite complicated because the bottom part of the stroller takes up a lot of room. You can manage, but it's quite complicated.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, go ahead. You have one minute.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Actually, I'm going to be sharing some time. In this final one minute, since both of you here have been pregnant while being members of Parliament, could you both address this?

Ms. Moore, in which month did you give birth to your daughter? I'm not quite clear.

Ms. Christine Moore: I gave birth to my daughter in September, so I was 32 weeks when I stopped sitting in the House. In fact, it wasn't that bad for me because there was no advanced medical care if I had my baby prematurely. In fact, it was better to be in Ottawa than in my riding. If I had my baby before the time I would have been evacuated anyway if I had been in my riding. It was a good thing for me to be here.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: We've been talking a lot about after having the baby, what happens, how can we take care of the child here. Also, there are those who are wishing to have children. I had some discussions with other members of Parliament who may not have any kids yet and they're hoping to start a family at some point. It seems very daunting to them to try to figure out when is best to have the child—and it doesn't always work that way.

Are there any suggestions, since you've been through this process, that you may have for our committee as to how we can improve the leave, or as you mentioned, voting from your riding, or other things so that people don't have to choose between serving as a member or having a family?

Ms. Christine Moore: I would say that maybe we can, through health services, have access to doctors, specialists in pregnancy. Our doctors are often in our ridings. If there's a question, or an emergency or something, and were unsure, we don't have any doctors, any contacts. Maybe health services can find a way to give us access to a doctor who can follow pregnant women if we need it.

• (1155)

Hon. Sheila Copps: I'd like to take a slightly different tack, because I think pregnancy and birth is about that period of transition for the first two years. You can fix the child care quite easily here on the Hill. The other issues are probably more problematic.

The bottom line is that when your child starts school—and I think Lisa is on line here—and you're trying to split yourself between two places, it's a huge balancing act. But the member of Parliament who spoke about having... The same thing happens to a man who comes to Ottawa and has to leave his family. There are huge sacrifices involved in politics.

I think it would be interesting—and I know my daughter would love to appear, if the committee could pay her travel costs from Calgary, because she's living in Calgary right now—to hear from the kids.

It's a wonderful experience to be a child of a politician. I used to play housewife, because that's what my mother was. When my child was growing up, she used to play reporter. She used to take a little stick and interview me, because that's what she would see around the Hill. She ended up with such a broad and expansive view of the country that it was a wonderful blessing. Yes, it is challenging, but I think the benefits that accrue from being exposed to this life of... It's somewhat of a spalpeen life—you are a bit of a nomad as a politician—but those characteristics can also lend themselves very well to growing a child who's very flexible in adult life. I think it would be fun to hear from the kids.

When my daughter was growing up, the last thing she wanted to do was hear about politics. I'm surprised, Lisa, that you can even get your daughter to go to political... But she's only 11, so wait until she's 14. Now that she's 29, she's thinking again, so I think there is a huge positive to it.

Just like those women who may not have thought about running but finally just said, go for it, I would say, go for it. You can accommodate, and there will be reasonable accommodations in this place. It's a wonderful place for a kid to grow up. All of the members on all sides have that experience. It's something you share together. I think it's really positive.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll have our last questioner, Mr. Richards, for a couple of minutes.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thanks.

I had a number of things come to mind.

I was listening to you, Ms. Moore, so I'm going to focus my questions mainly towards you. The day care issue has been adequately covered, so I'll skip by it. I think it's been talked about quite a bit today. You mentioned a couple of things.

One that struck me was your mentioning the idea of parental leave. I think you indicated that it wasn't really leave you were seeking; it was more special accommodations that would be available for mothers in, I think you said, the first six months after a child is born. It was the ability to work remotely, for things such as speeches and voting and things like those.

Was that what I heard? Did you want to elaborate on that a bit?

The second question.... I'll just ask them both at the same time, and you can elaborate on both of them. You mentioned for votes specifically the idea, when there are longer voting blocks—when voting takes more than two hours, I think you said—of building in breaks of some kind.

I could see, especially when you think of some of the marathon votes we've had, that this would obviously be helpful for mothers or fathers with children, but there are probably also a number of other members for whom it would be helpful. I know there have been members who had other medical issues, or similar things, that they were dealing with, and it was certainly difficult for them during some of those longer voting periods.

I would be curious to hear whether you had any specific thoughts or proposals on that aspect of building breaks into a longer voting session.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: We could take a 15-minute break every couple of hours during voting periods, to give people time to eat, go to the washroom, and so forth. That makes sense to me. People with diabetes need to eat; if they don't, they could be endangering their health. That's a specific example of a group of people who absolutely need to take a break. Otherwise, they would have to miss votes, and that would be unfortunate. That isn't necessarily a work-life balance issue, per se.

As for parental leave, it should be possible for the parent to work from their riding. An MP's entire support network, child care providers and those who can help us, often live in our ridings. When an MP brings their one-month-old or two-month-old to Ottawa, it's very hard to make arrangements without that support network. There are also many visits to the doctor and follow-up appointments, both

for the new mother and the baby. Having to come to Ottawa in the first few months after giving birth makes life very complicated.

I don't think any member would want to take six months off work. They would prefer to be able to work from their riding because they would be able to control their schedule. It would give them the opportunity to adjust their work hours and go into the office on days when they had child care. Members have much more flexibility when they can work from their ridings. It might even be possible for them to work from home.

As an MP, I would say it's impossible to take six months off work. When I go to the grocery store, I run into a constituent who tells me about a problem they're having. Short of staying at a hideaway in the woods somewhere for six months, it's impossible not to work as an MP. People recognize us and tell us about what they are going through, wherever they run into us. Being able to work from our ridings would help a lot.

That would require establishing a remote voting system, through a smart phone app, for instance. It could display the motion and allow for voting. The application could even be set up to take a photo of the member to ensure it was indeed them casting the vote. It could also be used to submit a brief corresponding to a speech the member would have given had they been able to rise in the House on a given bill. A mechanism could be set up to submit petitions or private member's bills, either remotely or through an intermediary.

At the end of the day, I don't think members who have just had a child, like myself, are asking for six months off work. Rather, we are asking for working conditions that make more sense for us. My baby spends 14 hours in the car every weekend. She's good in the car, but not all babies do well with travel. Those 14 hours are tiring, and they certainly take their toll on both the baby and the member who has just given birth and gone through a physically trying experience, from a medical standpoint.

Commuting between our ridings and Ottawa is demanding. If the member could avoid all that travel, they could come back to work on the Hill refreshed and ready to go. They could also opt to come to Ottawa once every two weeks. They could be here in person the week when something important was going on or their presence was absolutely necessary, and stay home the following week. That would be less draining on the child and allow for some flexibility during the baby's first six months. I think new fathers should also have that option.

● (1200)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson.

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

With your indulgence, consistent with talking about making the world a better place, I just want to take a minute first of all to thank Sheila for coming. I was the one who made the recommendation.

We're very proud of Sheila. In Hamilton, the Copps name is part of the Hamilton DNA, starting with her dad, a well-known former mayor, and her mom, as mentioned, who was a councillor and an alderman in ward 4. I was her seatmate for five years before I went on to Queen's Park.

Hon. Sheila Copps: David used to babysit Danelle when she came to town.

Mr. David Christopherson: I did.

I was asked by Mayor Fred Eisenberger if I would be good enough to bring to Ottawa to give to Sheila, on behalf of the City of Hamilton, an award to her mother for her work on city council for so many years in terms of making Hamilton a barrier-free community for all Hamiltonians.

So I thought how appropriate at a time when we're collectively talking about making the world a better place, not only Sheila and her dad, but also her mom, played a significant role in Hamilton. I'm so proud to have known them.

I'd like to take a minute to present this to Sheila and ask her to give it to her mom with the thanks of not just Hamilton but Canada for the work that she has done to make this a better place.

Some hon members: Hear, hear!

Mr. David Christopherson: Also in 1984 it was my first election, and Sheila kindly handed me my head on a platter, but I learned so much.

Again, it's so great to have you here, Sheila. Thanks.

•(1205)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that very important point of privilege.

Thank you to all the witnesses. This has been very creative and helpful. If you didn't get in everything you wanted to, feel free to send a letter to the committee so we can use the other points you might have.

We'll break for a couple of minutes to change panels.

•(1205)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1210)

The Chair: I'll call us to order again. Anyone in the room—media, House of Commons staff, or members' staff—is welcome to the food that's left if they want. We'll start right away so we can get on with our three witnesses.

Welcome to Regina Flores and Michelle Warkentin from the Parliamentary Spouses Association, and from the Vanier Institute of the Family, Nora Spinks. We'll have five-minute opening presentations by each member, and then if the parties can let me know who they're going to have as questioners, we'll have a first round of seven minutes each for questioners.

We'll start with Regina.

Ms. Regina Flores (Member, Parliamentary Spouses Association): Thank you so much for this opportunity.

We're all very aware of the challenges that lie in MPs playing a dual role, one foot in their riding and the other in Parliament at all times, two demanding aspects of their job that are often at significant geographical distance from each other, placing significant strains on MPs' personal lives. The result is that MPs confront two imperfect choices, both entailing significant costs in terms of the time that can be spent with their families. This is a price that should not necessarily be paid by those wishing to participate in public service. We do welcome the serious attention being focused on establishing a work-life balance with concrete initiatives, and we hope that this is only the beginning. We're excited to work closely with you.

At one of the orientation sessions for new MPs and their spouses, we received some stark warnings and some anecdotes from past MPs, some of whom had chosen to not continue in parliamentary life. I think it's a warning that I'll never forget. I remember one quote in particular. They said, "If you have addictions, this will be the year when you go to rehab. If you have relationship issues, this will be the year that you have a therapist or get a divorce." It was just very direct, but it was refreshing. I think that's one of the main points. Empowering the spouses and the new MPs from the very beginning with any knowledge and experience is one of the most crucial aspects. I can imagine I wasn't the only one Googling for any news article, or report, or study, or paper on balancing work and life for members of Parliament in Canada. There's not that much out there.

I will point out, though, that there is the Samara organization, which you're probably familiar with. Their paper, "Balancing Family and Work: Challenges Facing Canadian MPs", which gathers a bunch of MP exit interviews, was quite enlightening and a good starting point, for me at least.

The good news is, though, I think we're currently experiencing a great atmosphere of collegiality and camaraderie among MPs across party lines. There's a really fresh energy to look at improvements, and the fact that there's time and resources being invested in this is very encouraging and refreshing.

Concretely, I think one of the easiest ways to allow MPs to feel less stressed about missing opportunities with their spouse and with their young children or with their families is to possibly look at the ability to expense some claims for family participation. I know that for our rural riding it's a constant—country fair, spaghetti dinner, church services, this and that—where sometimes the gas, or the accommodation overnight, or the entry fees, or donations really add up. Certainly, not all of them will be eligible, but rather than just the MP claiming their personal expense for that, to see where family can come as well. I know that's one way we try to creatively plan the family time so that the children can spend time with the MP. That would be one item.

Other spouses have mentioned additional points for family travel. They feel that in some cases there's not enough.

In the 10 or so responses that we received from the questionnaires that were circulated to the spouses, there seemed to be a resounding agreement on the need for calendars to be synced. Unfortunately, right now, unless I don't know something, we seem to have the family calendar, which constantly needs to be updated with the parliamentary calendar. That can be very frustrating for the MP's staff as we try to update, and it's in constant flux. It would be great if we could find some technological solution.

I'm certainly not the one to suggest it, but even talking amongst other spouses, they've said they've put it into Google. Anyway, I think that would be a great one because we just need to alleviate that stress for the staff and for the MPs as well.

Another item that has been raised is regional support groups for spouses. While we do have this wonderful association, a lot of people can't make it to Ottawa all the time, so by having smaller splinter groups regionally for areas like the greater Toronto area, Montreal, etc., there can be that feeling of support.

One interesting point that was raised was how easy it can be to get sucked into the vortex of endless receptions, events, and functions, losing sight of priorities such as exercise or family dinners.

• (1215)

In light of some of the stark warnings received regarding addiction issues, and I don't know how it could be conceived but we need some kind of comprehensive review of consumption habits, particularly alcohol, and their impacts on family and health. These are very alcohol-centric events in the receptions in the evenings. We don't expect to see a smoothie bar or a juicing station anytime soon, but perhaps baby steps toward alternative spirits.

As well we were also getting a lot of support on the idea of a proxy, a remote, or a different electronic system of voting. People felt that idea, along with the parallel secondary debating chamber, could be helpful. They thought that sitting periods could be shortened, and it would allow members extra opportunities to speak on certain bills, or reports, and at the same time free the chamber for debate on other matters.

That said it doesn't necessarily address the underlying problem of such demanding schedules. Compressing the sitting week by eliminating Friday doesn't necessarily mean it's going to be a lighter schedule. The more critical point would be increasing the efficiency of the time spent in the House by shortening those sessions overall, employing a different system of the on duty roster, and perhaps starting the voting period earlier.

The child care facility point would only be successful if it operated with extended and creative hours, with half-day and full-day drop-in rate options, and in a perfect world evenings as well for the many functions that go on in the evening. If there could be that drop-off option of course it presents challenges for the operators of the facility in terms of figuring out those staffing schedules. A survey of all MP's families to see what the true needs are would be the first step. Possibly to make it economically feasible it would need local community participation as well, which might raise security issues.

There is also a concern about adequate parking spaces. As a side solution, perhaps we need some kind of babysitting central where it's

on-call parliamentary babysitting services where certain babysitters have been approved, and they're there and available. I know this is a very specific thing, but it's something that people raise all the time in terms of being able to balance all of that.

I know that's something our association could certainly help with. There was a realistic reaction to the parental leave feasibility, most thinking that it wouldn't be realistic to have a very long period, but certainly wanting to encourage an attitude of it not being stigmatized, and not being penalized, and certainly that it should be offered. I wonder how much time I have left.

• (1220)

The Chair: None. Thank you very much. When people ask you questions, you can extend.

Ms. Warkentin.

Mrs. Michelle Warkentin (Member, Parliamentary Spouses Association): Good afternoon.

My name is Michelle Warkentin. I'm the spouse of Chris Warkentin, member of Parliament for Grande Prairie—Mackenzie. During the 10 years that Chris has served in this position, we've had three children who are currently nine, seven, and five.

Becoming a member of Parliament is not so much a job as it is an act of public service. Those who know this to be true are the families of an MP, in whose job there are no guaranteed days off, very little public understanding of the demands, and a whole lot of scrutiny. Add to the pressure the breadth of our country and throw a family into the mix, and you have 338 different ways to be a member of Parliament.

Of the dozens of spouses I heard from in preparation of my testimony this afternoon, I realized that every family makes accommodations for the demands of the job in different ways, but several themes became apparent. One universal theme was the honour it is to support our spouses in their roles as members of Parliament and the joy each spouse shares in their partner's passion. Each spouse spoke of the sacrifices they knew they would be making when their partners were elected. No matter what considerations are made, the job demands sacrifice from elected members and their families. This should be made clear by all parties to all potential candidates.

I've heard from some that it might be helpful if parties or Parliament provided better information about the specific time commitments and demands on members to help prospective candidates make informed decisions before seeking public office. This may lead to less disappointment or frustration upon winning.

Regardless where families choose to reside, sacrifices will be made. Time improvements made in Ottawa will not necessarily benefit families who choose to remain in the riding. Families with young children will find that there will always be periods of separation from the member as demands in the riding and in Ottawa require constant and unpredictable travel. I know this is especially true for our leaders, ministers, parliamentary secretaries, and opposition critics.

One way to encourage families to stay together is to find a way to promote spousal independent travel. Currently, travel points are available and the budget is appropriate; however, I've heard from several families that in an effort to avoid public scrutiny they are reluctant to make use of the travel points made available.

A change that has been made that has already improved work-life balance for MPs is moving votes to right after question period. This has allowed MPs more flexibility in their evening work schedules. Every effort should be made to continue this practice, as this allows local members the ability to go home at night and gives non-local members the time to connect with loved ones in the riding.

Those who have been elected for a number of years have recognized the importance of summer weeks in the riding and the ability to then carve out time with the family. These weeks should be protected so that summer flexibility remains.

Another consideration could be made with respect to spring break. Each province has a different time for spring break, and even within a province there can be different weeks off. What a welcome change this year to have Chris home working in the riding during our children's spring break and to have two weeks in a row. If the parliamentary calendar could allow for two weeks in a row during the spring break timeline, I believe this would then accommodate most members from all provinces.

With respect to compressing the sitting week, the responses were mixed, but the vast majority whom I heard from believe that Canadians expect question period to take place five days a week during sitting weeks. Question period happens earlier on Friday morning, allowing members to make it home for the weekend. Furthermore, party whips have the authority to accommodate members who have farther to travel or have personal or riding obligations, as no votes are held on Fridays. Concern was expressed that if question period on Friday were taken away, it would reduce our members' advocacy and accountability by 20%. Furthermore, at a time when many constituents are being laid off, it's hard to justify asking for a day off.

The question asked about operating a child care facility on the Hill was posed to the spouses, and I was able to speak with a member and spouse who currently have their child in the Children on the Hill day care centre. They gave rave reviews and suggested that MPs receive priority when it comes to the waiting list. Another spouse suggested that the age of acceptance be lowered from 18 months to 12 months and that availability be granted on a drop-in basis for visiting MP dependants. Most spouses noted that setting up a separate day care facility would face many challenges, as the hours and days spent in the House of Commons are not consistent or year-round.

While we appreciate the discussion of parental leave, of the dozens of spouses who responded to me with respect to this issue, all voiced concern. Skepticism was expressed by spouses that paternal leave, even if made available, would not be used, because of the impression among the voting public that the member was unavailable to them during their elected mandate. I note the experience of other members who required extended sick leave from their responsibilities and who faced significant criticism about not being available to their constituents.

I believe all parties currently make concessions for the birth of a child, medical emergencies, or severe illnesses, which help to cover the MP's responsibilities. To set up a structured parental leave, however, might leave a politician open to attack during the next election. Furthermore, concern was expressed about how this would work in a minority government, when every vote counts.

● (1225)

Regarding the idea of electronic or proxy voting, the opinion was expressed by the majority of spouses I spoke to that members should be present together in Ottawa to vote. Much discussion takes place between members and parties, which goes on outside formal meetings, that would be adversely affected by members not physically attending votes. There is much to be said about the ability to come and reason together in the House of Commons. I heard it from many that the ability to vote is the privilege that members earned by winning this election.

Technology has improved by leaps and bounds in the 10 years we have served. FaceTime, Skype, texting, etc., has allowed us all to stay connected and maintain communication. Many requests were made, however, that the members' calendar be made more easily available to the spouses via electronic measures.

In conclusion I'd like to again express the privilege each spouse has felt as they have supported their partner in pursuit of their passion and the honour it is to be part of making a difference for our country. While there may be many ways to improve a better work-life balance for MPs, each current member ran in an election for the privilege of having this job. While some MPs will choose to move their families to the Ottawa area, some will make the choice to commute every weekend. Every change might benefit some, but it's unlikely to overcome the challenges faced by the majority of MPs. Everyone around this table knows that regardless of what changes are made, out of a desire to serve, the vast majority of MPs will continue to work long hours and through weekends to advocate on behalf of their community, their constituents, and their country.

On behalf of the spouses, we thank you for your service and appreciate your efforts to involve us in this discussion.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go on to Ms. Spinks.

Ms. Nora Spinks (Chief Executive Officer, Vanier Institute of the Family): Thank you. Thank you for those wonderful remarks.

My testimony is going to be completely different. I'm here with my colleague, Sara MacNaull, who has just completed a study on flexibility and flexible work arrangements, including at several crown corporations. I'm here as a researcher but also as somebody who has spent the last 30 years working with organizations to create environments that are supportive of families and not just friendly but actually fully inclusive.

In my experience, successful organizations that take on this task take it on usually out of the goodness of their hearts because they understand that it's the right thing to do. There's also a tonne of evidence that shows that when organizations make accommodations, and adjust what and how they conduct work, there is a win-win-win: productivity increases, efficiency and effectiveness increase, and individual health and wellness increase.

When we look at the organizations across Canada and around the world that are involved in looking at the same issues that this committee is looking at, about 50% take a very strategic view. The other 50% take it on as it comes, so whatever the issue is they deal with it and take care of it and then move on to something else. Those that are successful over the long term are the ones that look at this phenomenon very strategically. There are many motivating factors for organizations getting involved in this, some of which have been discussed here today, whether it's changing demographics, whether it's inclusion, whether it's competition, and that's looking at different organizations.

But I think looking at it from Parliament's perspective there are a couple of things that are unique to Parliament. I think the first thing that needs to be made really clear is: what is the frame? What is the framework that you're going to be hanging all of these initiatives around? I also think that it's going to be really important because we're looking 20 to 30 years out. We're looking at a framework for a policy not just for today. As one of the questioners said, what about the future when there might be 10 or 15 children?

As the complexities of families increase and as there are more blended families, more skip-generation families, more families responsible for elder care and caring for disabled siblings in adulthood, it's important that we don't just look at family from one perspective but that we look at it much more holistically. Not only is Parliament going to be addressing the unique needs here on the Hill and with parliamentarians and the extended family associated with Parliament, the people who work and support and who sit around the edges of these rooms, but also the people in the riding offices and in the homes back in the ridings.

It's also a very significant role that you will play not only in Canada as a role model as a leading organization taking a look at these issues strategically, but also around the world as well. Other parliaments around the globe are also trying to deal with the demographic phenomenon that we're all experiencing in our lives today, but it's also going to be under the microscope for not only those who may be considering running and those who cast votes but also those who are looking at modelling based on the experience here. I think from looking at where you're at today and where you want to be, and being really clear around what your priorities are, it will become much easier to identify the leading and promising practices that are out there to learn from.

In my 30 years as a consultant working with organizations, I spent an enormous amount of time around boardroom tables in the automotive industry, in pharmaceuticals, in manufacturing. Just before I came to the Vanier Institute I spent time with the teamsters. This is an issue that crosses over every possible workplace.

● (1230)

What's unique about finding a way to create a culture of inclusion, and not just family-friendly policies and practices but embracing the concept of inclusion and making sure that everybody feels not only welcome but fully supported to participate in their respective roles, whether it's the member of Parliament, whether it's the spouses or the circle of support around them, whether it's their constituency, or whether it's the members in their ridings.... I think this is a really important opportunity for Canada to build on the experience of the past.

There have been non-strategic, one-off situations. We also need to recognize that you're going to be under the microscope from the perspective of the child development specialists and the pediatricians across the country, and that it's not just about finding a place to park infants or to put children but about creating a healthy environment for them so that it not only makes it possible for parliamentarians to survive and fulfill their responsibilities, but for the children to truly thrive in an environment in which their child development is as optimal as possible.

● (1235)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Unless there is a huge outcry in the committee, I think our limited time will reduce the questioning to five minutes a person.

I'd like to start with Mr. Chan.

I can say, Mr. Chan, on behalf of all the committee members, that we're delighted that you're back.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you.

Let me take a moment, before I turn to the witnesses, to simply thank everyone for their tremendous support, given my recent announcement. I guess I face the same challenges that parents face, as someone who potentially may be on long-term disability. I'm pleased to be here and I intend to be here as long as I can be.

I want to thank both organizations, the Parliamentary Spouses Association and the Vanier Institute of the Family, for coming here. I think we've had a very productive day in terms of getting a sense of each of your organizations' and your memberships' perspectives with respect to how we can make this a more accommodating place, not only for the members but for the entire support system that goes around all of us. Whether it's a matter of the spouses or of the staff, we want to create an environment that is ultimately inclusive, yet at the same time maintain the spirit of the purpose of Parliament, which of course is to deal with the nation's business.

I'm going to turn my first set of questions to the Parliamentary Spouses Association.

My spouse has actually joined your organization for their activities today. Jean has joined you. She waded in quite strongly in advance, so I already had a precursor of many of the comments that you've raised. I think it was very instructive to have a sense of the collective will of the spouses. I note that, even as Ms. Spinks has noted, the nature of family is changing. It is no longer, as traditionally, just the women; many of the spouses are now men. I congratulate you on the fact that one of the vice-chairs within your association, in fact, is a man.

The challenge has always, certainly for my family, been the issue of coordination. I take to heart all of the comments you have made. My spouse is an incredibly active participant in the work I do. In fact, yesterday she actually did an interview on OMNI television in Cantonese—her Cantonese level is better than mine, but believe me, not much better—and it was quite a challenge for her to do that. I really appreciated her doing so, basically to give people an update on my current health situation.

The question I really wanted to pose to you was the whole nature of supporting spouses and making sure they can integrate more effectively the demands of family and our demands as parliamentarians.

My spouse, for example, spends probably two or three hours a week talking to my staff to figure out where the heck I am, what I'm going to be doing, when I'm going to be doing it, and whether she has to cover me, especially in my current health condition. She finds it very challenging. I know Mr. Graham, who is not here today—one of our other committee members—does everything on Google Calendar, which of course takes things off our parliamentary calendar.

Would it be helpful to have access to a parliamentary spousal email, a parliamentary Blackberry, an integration of access to our parliamentary calendar? That's my first question to you. Would you find it useful? I know my spouse certainly would find it highly useful. It might reduce the stress on my staff, as she tends to talk to them somewhere between 10 and two in the morning, in order to get an update on what I'm up to. I know it should be my responsibility to do it, but I'm usually at some event when she's trying to figure out where I am.

Ms. Regina Flores: I would say definitely. It was in the comments. I didn't raise it because I didn't think it was financially feasible to have parliamentary spouses equipped with that, but it was certainly in the comments that we received.

Mrs. Michelle Warkentin: I find that it's so good, so beneficial for spouses to speak to staff. Ultimately your calendar changes faster than even you know. I think that is the thing, especially for new spouses coming into this, to realize that not even the MP knows things that are coming.

Even if the staff says to the spouse, you should be speaking to your husband or wife, not even the MP really knows what's going to happen next. It would be highly recommended to make a calendar available. I know it depends. My husband is on a BlackBerry and I'm on an iPhone, so sharing a calendar is going to be challenging. I guess I rely on staff quite a bit to make that available.

Technology has jumped so much to date, I think we should be able to make calendars available. I don't know about allowing more electronic devices, but certainly we can find a way. Everyone has a phone already. Make calendars available to spouses. It would certainly help.

● (1240)

Mr. Arnold Chan: The question is the IT challenge, I think.

Mrs. Michelle Warkentin: Absolutely, and I rely on my staff.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I'm in the same boat. I am on a BlackBerry and my wife is also on the iPhone, so I'm in exactly the same boat.

Mrs. Michelle Warkentin: Yes, exactly. I think if we could make staff say, hey, this is a method to share calendars easily.

Security is the biggest issue, absolutely.

Ms. Regina Flores: Even with technologies these days there could be a layer, a filter, a security, so that red is only staff and the MP. But at least we know that it's blocked. We don't need to know where they are, or what the meeting is, just that they aren't available. There could be layers.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I had a question, but I think my time's up. I'll catch you after.

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to come back to the calendar issue. I just wanted to start with something here. I think with the electronic voting and the proxy voting it was unfortunate that they were put together.

Speaking for myself, the idea of having electronic voting so we can get through votes more quickly would alleviate a range of problems, and we would be unlikely to have very many of these multi-hour voting sessions that Christine Moore was complaining about, quite correctly. We could all cast our ballots, or press our buttons, or whatever, all at once from our desks in the House of Commons. I think there's a lot to be said for that and we should look at that in our report.

Proxy voting is a different story. That's where you give your vote to somebody else. Most frequently this is exercised when dealing with masses of shares for corporate boards of directors and so on. It's fine for shareholder meetings under certain circumstances but we are not shareholders, we are representatives.

I think the idea of one member of Parliament assigning their vote to their party whip so they cast it on their behalf, or whatever arrangement it is that deprives that MP of the individual decision-making on that point, is, first, I'd argue probably unconstitutional, and second, completely antithetical to what we are here for. That's just an editorial.

I'll now go back to the actual matters that you raised. I struggled with the issue of calendar syncing. I've been here for 16 years; the system has never worked. We keep working on improving it. My goodness, technology can handle these things, but given the firewalls we've put in place here, I think my sense is that we're either never going to get there or it'll be so slow and painful that...

In the end, what my wife and I do is we're on Google Calendar. We have a Reid family calendar and we have a team Reid office calendar. She can see and make changes to the team Reid one. The office can't see the private calendar that let's us put up things that aren't necessarily for sharing. That is the only way we've figured out doing it.

The other thing that we do, which I'd actually recommend anybody to do, is that we have a meeting once a week. In our case it's Thursday mornings, right before this committee, where we sit down with the staff, we get Robyn on the phone out in the riding, and we go through my calendar for the upcoming week and any invitations. That helps a lot. For anybody who wants to not drive their spouse insane, some version of that system really works well. This is actually for you guys, and not for the spouses here. It took me 15 years to figure that out. But now that I have, I want to share my new religion.

Actually I did have a question relating to the travel point thing. It's simply this, and Michelle this goes to you because you are from far away, whereas Regina, you're like me. You're from very close to Ottawa. Is the problem that we have a one-size-fits-all spousal travel points system, where actually we need something that's different to deal with the people who are further away and therefore essentially have greater needs when it comes to travel?

Mrs. Michelle Warkentin: Quite possibly, that is exactly it. I know that because we have to travel so far. For me to come, I start ranking up in the budget, and then that is released to the media and it falls under public scrutiny how much is spent just to get someone from farther away to come visit the MP and to be here on the Hill, even for events. Yes, you bring the children less often to come see dad at work, or come see mom at work, because you know that you will be scrutinized for how much you're spending.

That could be looked at, even if it's just consolidated so that it's one bill. I think spouses are separate right now from dependants, so even to say that it's just all a family allocation, and even allowing members from farther distances a bit more latitude, but ultimately each province.... Isn't it broken down by province, and which members spend how much on travel and different things, and then that is released? It's great for accountability and we need that, but I do know that if you want to stay out of the public eye then you don't fly, and you don't come as often.

• (1245)

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, all, for coming out here. I appreciate it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Boutin-Sweet.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you, ladies.

Ms. Flores, you raised two or three points I'd like to discuss further.

You mentioned the very alcohol-focused receptions, where less than healthy food options are served. You are absolutely right. Unfortunately, people do have substance abuse issues, whether it be

alcohol, drugs, or something else. What's more, the divorce rate among MPs is high.

One of my duties as party whip is to help members, but the services available in the parliamentary precinct are quite limited.

Do you think support services for members should be improved as part of the work-family balance initiative? It's not easy for someone with an alcohol problem to admit it, talk about it, or seek help. Do you have anything to suggest in that regard?

That question is for Ms. Spinks and Ms. Warkentin, as well.

[*English*]

Ms. Regina Flores: It would be great to have external professional services available, such as consultation for groups that can come and take a moment to share the struggles that they're having. I'm not a professional, but I have heard that there are some MPs who have pledged, in solidarity with their colleagues, to not drink at events because they're going through things like that. It seems very isolated, and there's not a big support network.

I've toyed with the idea, just because it's my preference to have a mini yoga express offered, and some MPs have shown interest. Yes, I think that's needed, and I think this is the time when people are more open to that.

Ms. Nora Spinks: I think that goes back to the whole concept of what we are hoping to achieve here. In part, what we're hoping to achieve is to ensure that all MPs not only have a healthy home life, healthy relationships, and a solid circle of support, but also that they are healthy and well themselves in order to fulfill their multiple responsibilities. It's a tough job. It's hard on your body. It's hard on your life. It's a hard job to do. It's also fulfilling, and it's exciting, and it's enriching, and it's important work that needs to be done.

There are organizations, and other companies, who have chosen to make a lot of their evening events alcohol free. It all depends, and if that's going to be one of the priorities, multi-purposing this health and wellness concept with everything, then it's not just looking at meeting schedules and things, but also about how you feed yourselves and how you look at the way you run your day. Why not start question period with a little deep breathing to put everybody in the right space? It sounds funny at first, but if you saw the paper this morning, there were police officers doing yoga and meditation before they go out to do their work.

This is the day and age where we're now beginning to recognize the significant importance of health and well-being. We're all building mind, body, and spirit to live to be 100. Whether you're in the House for 10 years, or 20 years, or you have 20 years after to do something else, we need to make sure that we don't burn people out and that we don't require them to sacrifice their personal relationships and their relationships with their spouses, or with their children, or with their communities because we can't figure out how to coordinate calendars. We're so beyond that now that we should be able to get the easy stuff out of the way and start dealing with the important stuff.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you.

Before I turn the floor over to Mr. Christopherson, who would like to speak with you, I'd like to say something.

We've already suggested another option to the committee—allocating travel points to other people. For example, Ms. Moore sometimes brings her aunt with her to babysit. Perhaps, then, the points could be extended to individuals who aren't part of the immediate family. That's something that could help families.

But that isn't a question for you, so I'll hand the floor over to Mr. Christopherson.

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you. I'll segue to the last issue and say on the points system that when I was at Queen's Park, we adopted the points system that was here federally because our system was unfair. They used to only show the dollar amounts in terms of what it cost you to travel from your riding to the capital. That's fine for me. I'm in Hamilton and the capital is in Toronto, but if you're in Sault Ste. Marie, your dollars look different. We changed it to the points system that they have here, meaning if you use x number of trips, it counts as points.

Yet we're still left with the political problem, Ms. Warkentin. I think your point's well taken. There has to be accountability, but maybe there's a way of pooling that, because the idea is the accountability. People know you took that trip, and if you want to know the total dollar amount, there you go. If you want to break it down, call Air Canada. It's easy to figure out what this would likely be. I get that whole point.

It's this element of fairness. It's much easier for me, even in Hamilton, to move my family to the capital than it is all the way from the western end of the country. We need something there, without losing the accountability, and I appreciate your saying that. We can't lose that. There has to be something here in terms of a little more fairness, because your family would take a bigger hit publicly for doing the very same thing that I'm doing, strictly because of your geography, and that's not fair.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I would like to start off by thanking all of you for being here today.

I'm interested to know a little more about the spouses association and how many active spouses you have in the association. Was the question as to Friday sittings posed to all the association's members? Do you have a lot of male spouses that are active on your association? How was the consultation process done? Was there a survey or what were the means?

Mrs. Michelle Warkentin: I've been involved with the PSA the entire time. They did send out the questions via email to all the spouses, and yes that means male and female. They asked me to speak, so I wrote to all the Conservative spouses because I have access to all their email addresses. I asked for another volunteer to take my place and also pose the questions again and ask for a response.

Not only that, but then I started calling as well. I also spoke to several male spouses. The PSA is a great organization to give support, and I highly encourage the Liberals to also form their own Liberal spouses association. There's such support to be had within that. Did that answer your whole question?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Were they asked about the schedule and the Friday sittings? How many of them responded to these emails? I'd like to find out whether we have a good amount of people that are giving us representation.

Mrs. Michelle Warkentin: Yes, they had about nine or 10, and I had about 25.

Ms. Regina Flores: The questionnaire was a written questionnaire with, I think, seven questions. I received 12 responses, and about eight out of the 12 agreed that Friday off would be great.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: We didn't get that through the presentation.

Mrs. Michelle Warkentin: There is a difference. A lot of scepticism was voiced, just with the concern that if you're going to shorten the week then Thursday might be a longer day. Then those who have farther to travel cannot fly home Thursday night like they would typically do, because Fridays are covered by local MPs or those who are on rotating House duty. I would just like to make that point.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Percentage-wise, you would say more voted in favour than not in favour.

Ms. Regina Flores: I was just looking at the responses received to the association, not the Conservative edition.

Mrs. Michelle Warkentin: I had about 25, and the PSA had about 12. I think that then, even amongst the 12, there was a couple that were not in favour.

• (1255)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It would be great to have even more input. If it's possible, I'd love to see the feedback we could get from all the spouses. It would be nice.

The Chair: If you could send anything in writing to the committee, it would be great to have more information.

Ms. Nora Spinks: Let me also share with you a little bit from the language around “family friendly” and around “accommodation” and around “inclusive work environments”.

Considering the whole question of accountability and transparency, I think we have to stop using the term “off”. Friday is not “off”; Friday is just different work. I think it's really important to recognize that we're talking about parliamentary work and riding work. Family still wraps around all of it, but I think we need to be really careful, when we're asking the questions, about how we're asking them.

I want to comment on what was said about bringing families to Ottawa. There is a gender divide when it comes to males and females bringing families to Ottawa. Men historically most often brought their families to Ottawa and stayed connected. Women tended to leave their families behind because they tended to have a spouse in the paid labour force who was working back home. We have to be careful when we're looking at this. There are some gender differences when it comes to strategies and solutions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Our last questioner is Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you very much, the three of you, for coming and sharing your thoughts. It's greatly appreciated.

The Parliamentary Spouses Association does great work. Thank you for everything that has been done. I recognize what you said earlier about using travel points for coming to and from the capital based on where you live and how public disclosure affects choices about how you make the decisions about whether you come to Ottawa to see your spouse or not. Although we need disclosure, I think this may be an area we can look at.

Just out of curiosity, when you hold events for the spouses association, do you get more involvement, because of what we have talked about, by spouses who live closer to Ottawa, in Ontario, Quebec, that kind of thing, rather than out west or down east? I think it's very important that we include our spouses. I think their knowing what we do and their maybe seeing everything are very different. When you're here and experience it, you can understand.

I'm just curious whether distance is a barrier to their participating in some of the events that are held.

Mrs. Michelle Warkentin: It's not necessarily. If you saw the spousal event today, I would say I was quite surprised by how many were here from other parties, in fact.

I think it depends on your stage of life and how available you are to travel. If you have young kids at home.... I brought one child with me, so I have left two at home. But you know, it's not even children. I appreciated your saying that. It's elder parents as well. I know one spouse couldn't come because she's taking care of her parents. I think it depends on your stage of life and on your flexibility to be able to come to attend spousal events. Quite a number made the effort to come.

Then, even if you're local, you have more of a life here, and then it's hard to get the time away as well. It's not an easy answer, that way.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I agree; it is tough, but when I go back to the riding, I'm trying to figure out ways to incorporate my family into this life. I have 11 Santa Claus parades. Right after Remembrance Day—the Sunday after—it starts and it goes all the way until December 15th, it was this past year. It was tough, and the House wasn't sitting, so I can imagine that if the House were sitting it would be just.... I would be grumpy. My staff would be grumpy. My spouse would be grumpy. My kid would be grumpy. I actually started bringing him to some of the parades. It worked out well. Luckily it wasn't a cold winter, so it worked out very well.

An hon. member: You could explain it to him.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Yes, but just to get them involved, I think, helps as well, and just for my spouse to have that kind of break, if you will, and me to spend some time—

Ms. Regina Flores: Even if they're not participating in the organized events, to just be in touch.... Sometimes it's just venting sessions, but that helps, is that not right?

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Absolutely.

Ms. Regina Flores: People are feeling that they're not alone. I've only been in this for less than six months, but already you're feeling

across party lines just a system, a network of support. Not everyone else is going to relate to what you're going through. Definitely I'm encouraging them all to dialogue with us, whether it's by email or....

• (1300)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Yes, absolutely.

Mrs. Michelle Warkentin: I'd also just like to point out that it's good for spouses to come, if only because then there's appreciation for the commute travelled by the MP to make it home. Every time I come—and I fly a red eye, if I have to get here—I can appreciate what he goes through to get home every weekend to spend time with me. It's so good for spouses to come to see that you are at work here, that you guys aren't sleeping in when we're at home with the kids. It's beneficial all the way around for families to come, and it's such an honour to come and be a part of history like this. It's so good if they can make the effort to come and be involved.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I agree. As I said, to be here to experience it is very beneficial.

In terms of health and fitness, we had talked about this before. Here's a quick pitch for the parliamentary running group every Tuesday and Thursday, at 6:45 a.m. We have no representation from the NDP. I'll see David Christopherson here on Thursday at 6:45. Maybe we can just expand on that. I know it's very tough. I find I will usually say I'll do it in the evening and something will come up. I think if I don't do it in the morning, it's not getting done. My clothes have shrunk since election day.

What advice can you give us?

Ms. Nora Spinks: I think there are a couple of things that organizations have done, and in part it's becoming mindful of it and putting it front and centre. That means making sure that when you're planning meetings it's not always just sandwiches and that there is a juice bar. Why not? Companies have been dealing with this for a long time. One of the things that happened about a decade ago was the elimination of frying equipment in all the cafeterias in manufacturing organizations. There was a little grumbling for a day or two, or a week or two. Then they got used to the salad bar.

Once it becomes mindful and starts to become part of the culture.... What I'm saying is that it's not just tinkering around the edges, but it's getting at the culture and become very mindful of it. Then it becomes much easier. It also becomes easier when everybody knows there is a certain block in the day, say 5:30 to 8:00, that is your time. It's your time to Skype. It's your time to work out. It's your time to meditate. It's your time to catch up on whatever it is. Nothing is booked on a particular day, or a particular time, and everybody buys into it. Once it's collective and everybody is supporting everybody, it becomes much easier to fulfill.

The habits that are formed here are habits that have been formed here for 150 years. You have to start with a whole new set of habits, as well as a whole new set of strategies and solutions. I think once that happens you will be much more successful, much more healthy, and the families will be less stressed. Take advantage of what is there. Broaden your thinking of families and don't leave anything untouched. Don't just focus on a compressed workweek. What about a compressed work month? What about working six days a week instead of four days a week?

We have lots of experience now with gas and oil, and with mining and how they're doing what they call FIFO, fly in, fly out. Exactly what you guys are doing. Only they've been experimenting on what's the ideal for health and well-being. What's the ideal? They're still producing, and they're still being productive. Don't just think that a compressed week is the only solution. All the literature shows that if you're going to compress your workweek, Friday is the worst day to take off. Mondays are a whole lot better for everybody for a whole

host of reasons that I could get into if anybody is interested. For optics, practicalities, efficiencies, and travel think Mondays as your riding day as opposed to Fridays. I can give you lots of data on that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Arnold Chan: If there's data you could share with this committee, I would find it invaluable simply to make the point to our own respective caucuses.

The Chair: I'd like to thank all the witnesses for coming. As I said earlier, if you have something more, please send it in writing to us. We'll see everyone Thursday when we're going to have the House of Commons Administration so we can ask about the day care and everything. It should be a packed meeting.

Thank you everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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.

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.

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