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# **Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, April 19, 2016**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Larry Bagnell**



## Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Tuesday, April 19, 2016

• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)):** Good morning. This is meeting number 16 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs of the first session of the 42nd Parliament.

We welcome the long awaited return of Kady O'Malley. It's good to see you again, Kady. We know you've been resting.

Today, we have the following witnesses: Gary Levy; from Equal Voice, we have Nancy Peckford, executive director; and to answer any questions from Equal Voice is Grace Lore, senior researcher and Ph.D. candidate at UBC, who is joining us by teleconference from Vancouver.

By video conference from the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Geneva, Switzerland, we have Kareen Jabre, director, division of programmes.

We're going to have each person make their opening statement of five minutes. We'll start with Kareen and we'll be going for at least an hour, but those who can stay longer, we'll keep you as long as the committee members have questions because there are four of you.

Ms. Jabre, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Kareen Jabre (Director, Division of Programmes, Inter-Parliamentary Union):** Thank you for this opportunity. It's really a pleasure to contribute to this important debate. We really welcome this chance, so thanks again for inviting us.

As many of you might know, the IPU has been working for many years now to promote stronger parliaments and more inclusive parliaments. One of the major angles of our work has been to focus on gender equality in parliaments, ensuring that women have more access in parliaments, but also have the opportunity to really influence policy-making in parliaments.

Within the context of that work, over many years now, we focused more and more on how parliaments functioned. We developed the concept of gender-sensitive parliaments, which was the result of a two-year survey of MPs and more than 70 parliaments from around the world. We looked at how they functioned and how they actually both embodied and delivered on gender equality issues.

In 2011, we developed this concept of gender-sensitive parliaments. We adopted an action plan to assist parliaments in becoming much more gender sensitive in their work. This is an important element for us because we really acknowledged for the first time that parliament was a workplace like any other, and that this workplace

needed to be conducive to the equal participation of men and women.

Therefore, parliaments needed to look at how they functioned, how they facilitated the participation of men and women on an equal basis, and how they catered to the needs of young men and women who are the target for many of us in terms of renewing parliaments and making them, again, always in tune with society. This concept was really developed to respond to one of the first challenges identified by women themselves in running for politics, which is how can they balance family responsibilities and politics at the same time?

This is an issue. This is the first challenge identified by women. Most recently, the IPU has also been focusing on enhancing youth participation in parliaments. This, too, is an issue identified by young men and women in terms of going into politics and addressing how they are going to balance family and work responsibilities. I think it is very important to place this within the context of not just a gender issue, but also an issue that concerns both men and women, and especially young men and women.

We really look forward to Canada taking the lead in this respect. There are very few parliaments that have actually questioned and analyzed themselves to see how they were functioning and how they were actually catering to gender equality needs. It's difficult to engage in reform, so we really welcome that.

Ultimately for us, engaging in such reform makes for better and more effective parliaments. This is the message that we are also trying to promote when we work with parliaments in looking at how they function.

You have listed a series of questions of how parliaments have taken initiatives and some questions addressing the work-life balance of MPs. The important point for us, if we are to engage in this initiative is to, first of all, place the issue as a political one. This is an objective that we all want to achieve. It's important to make it a common objective for everyone. It's not just a gender issue or other issue. By placing it as a political issue, it's a very good and first way to approach it.

The second thing is for parliaments to acknowledge that this implies reform. It implies working at how parliaments function in a general way, and reviewing their work methods and their culture as well within parliaments. This is also very important in terms of mindsets that will facilitate or not, meeting this balance, and being a more family-friendly environment.

The third point for us is to look at the capacities and the needs that are required both at the level of parliaments but for MPs as well to address these issues.

• (1105)

If you were to engage on this question, for us you would need to look at how parliament works, what the needs are for MPs, and how to develop a more gender-sensitive or family-friendly culture in parliament.

Several parliaments have taken initiatives at different levels. In terms of how parliaments work, several have focused on sitting hours and days, of course, with some stopping work at 6 p.m. and others not voting on Mondays or Fridays and only focusing on votes Tuesday through Thursday. Other parliaments have fixed voting times and fixed days for votes, as I've said. This way of working and organizing work allows for better planning and, therefore, for freeing up time to meet both the family requirements and the constituency needs.

Other parliaments have tried to cater to the needs of young women who are breastfeeding or who have to cater to the needs of young children, so some parliaments have adopted a system of proxy votes for women who are breastfeeding. That's the case in Australia, for instance. Others have actually developed a system of e-voting, allowing MPs to vote from a distance. That's the case in Spain, for instance. This is for women who are either pregnant or breastfeeding and have to meet their children's needs. This is a recent formula that was adopted in 2012.

In many other parliaments, some of the initiatives taken have been aimed at looking at how IT can alleviate the work of parliaments and have parliaments function differently, and how IT can be used either to enhance the efficiency of meetings and the work of parliament or to enhance the link with constituents, which is of course one of the priorities for MPs: how can they also be present at the constituency level?

The second big point that I wanted to just quickly flag, because I know we'll speak about it, is that some parliaments have looked at the support required technically and physically in parliaments for women and men with children. This has of course been a case of developing child care facilities, which we've seen in many parliaments, whether that's a crèche, a nursing room, or a playroom, so many parliaments have experienced that, with more or less success in the challenges. I'll be happy to come back to those in our discussion.

Other parliaments have also tried to support parental leave. This is of course a very tricky issue, but some parliaments do allow for parental leave for MPs. This is the case in Sweden and many northern countries. This is of course intrinsically linked to the electoral system and the way parliamentarians are elected and also to the possibility of having substitutes. I'm happy to also go into that if it's of interest.

The last point I wanted to mention as we engage in reform for a more family-friendly parliament is there is a lot of work to do at the level of culture and changing mindsets and the ways people address this issue. In the research we've done, we've often seen that many MPs do not feel that they should claim their rights in terms of

parents, because that presents as an MP who is weak or not focused on his/her work. I think there's a question of changing mentalities and acknowledging that this is important, that it makes for MPs who are maybe more engaged and also more effective, and that MPs are human, and by addressing those needs in a constructive way we will make for more effective parliaments. I think that changing the mindset and making this less of a taboo issue is an important thing.

Also, in terms of communicating with the public, the second point in terms of culture is that we've seen that we really need to push more for a more gender-sensitive culture in parliaments, and for gender equality to be better understood, both by MPs and staff, in how parliament functions, in order to really create an environment that is conducive to reform and respects the needs of men, women, and their families in parliament. For us, I think the question of culture, communicating, and breaking the taboo around these rights or this situation is a very important point. We'd like more prime ministers to speak up on these issues and say that it's important to address this.

I'll leave it there. I hope I wasn't too confusing. These were just some of the points we've noticed on this issue in terms of recent developments in parliaments.

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. We really appreciate it.

We'll hear from all the witnesses before we get to the questioning rounds.

Now we'll go to Nancy Peckford, the executive director of Equal Voice.

Thank you for coming.

**Ms. Nancy Peckford (Executive Director, Equal Voice):** Thank you so much for being here today. It's a pleasure to see so many of you around the table.

As you likely know, Equal Voice Canada is the only national multipartisan organization dedicated to the election of more women. We communicate with tens of thousands of Canadians on a monthly basis who care deeply about gender equality. While we were extremely pleased, as you might imagine, to see this new government's commitment to gender parity in federal cabinet, Equal Voice remains extremely concerned about the under-representation of women, which is both chronic and historic in our federal institution and in many provincial and territorial parliaments.

We did an analysis during the election that suggested that based upon the last five federal election cycles there would not be parity on the ballot for 45 years, based on the one-third of candidates who presented themselves to the five major parties. Further, based upon the outcome of this past federal election and four previous elections, we are looking at 90 years before we attain gender parity in this institution if we take past performance as an indication of future progress.

It's in this spirit that EV is with you today. We're delighted to see that this conversation is happening. It's one that we've been advocating for on the outside for many years and we want to bring you some proposals in the spirit of recognizing that we're dealing with a 150-year-old institution that was conceived before women had the right to vote or stand for federal office. In our view, just like our colleague from Switzerland, this is not a discussion about women, it is a discussion about working smarter not harder, it is about being effective, efficient, and using resources wisely. I think this Parliament has a tremendous opportunity to do things differently and, equally important, to do them well, so we can inspire confidence among Canadians in this most important institution.

In our view, the House of Commons has not fully leveraged innovations that have been widely adopted elsewhere in both public and private sectors. That includes a better use of technology, maximizing teamwork, and allowing for flexibility at critical periods of caregiving.

On average, as you know, MPs are representing approximately 103,000 constituents per riding—I realize this is an average—and you are expected to fulfill many roles: community ambassador, ombudsman, champion, liaison, troubleshooter, legislator, event convenor, spokesperson, party activist, fundraiser, and, increasingly, parent and caregiver among many other roles.

Finally, the average age of the MP is slowly declining, something we are excited about. Before 2011, you may be surprised to know, there were only five women under the age of 40 serving in the House of Commons as compared to 25 male colleagues under the age of 40, which already suggests some inequality. Fortunately, in 2011, 19 women aged 40 and under were elected and then in this Parliament we believe it is the same, though there is no disclosure of birth dates of MPs anymore, so we can't be totally accurate with those statistics.

In our view, to be optimizing their performance MPs should be guided by three principles of work-life balance: sustainability, predictability, and flexibility. With this in mind, we're here today to make five major recommendations.

First, we believe it is necessary to reduce the weekly commute. Canada's federal Parliament sits approximately 125 days per year in a non-election year. That is one-third of the year, the longest of any federal, provincial, or territorial legislature. Despite bringing people here from coast to coast to coast, the average commuting time for an MP outside of the Ottawa, GTA, Montreal corridor is approximately 12 hours driving or flying time, depending on what you do, approximately six hours per one-way trip.

To address this significant commuting burden, EV would urge this committee to consider the following: more consecutive weeks in constituencies. I was here last week when one of the spouses' groups noted the importance of having MPs in their home riding for more than one week to do very important riding work in addition to reconnecting with their family.

We are also interested in the possibility of compressing the parliamentary week by starting earlier on Tuesdays through Thursdays to allow for the possibility of longer but fewer days in Ottawa. This would maximize the time of MPs while they are here, but would not compromise the hours devoted to House business. I don't

believe anybody wants that. A compressed Parliament as our IPU colleague just mentioned is now undertaken by several parliaments quite successfully.

● (1115)

In doing so, we think the Hill calendar could potentially be modified so that Mondays and/or Fridays could be treated with more flexibility, given the long commutes from west to east.

Second, we believe there should be an increase to the resources available for staffing among MPs. In our view, in the face of the constant demands on MPs, we believe you are thinly staffed given the high expectations for your engagement as legislators, committee members, ombudsmen, community leaders, troubleshooters, etc. We are asking all of you to bear a considerable burden without what we believe is the necessary support to ensure you have the team around you to be the most effective and responsive you need to be.

Our calculations suggest that most MPs have on average two Hill staff and two riding staff, which equals one staff for every 25,000 constituents if an MP represents a riding of approximately 100,000 people. We would recommend, then, in the life of this Parliament, that you consider devoting additional resources to an MP's office budget to allow for the hiring of one additional staff on the Hill and one in the riding.

Third, we believe this House of Commons needs to end the punitive treatment of new parents and mothers who are MPs. I was greatly disturbed by some of the experiences Christine Moore related here last week in terms of 14-hour drives back to the riding so she could have access to her car, and the challenges she's had navigating the Hill. In our view, it is not appropriate that there is no formal accommodation for women in the later stages of pregnancy, new mothers or parents, and the primary caregivers of a terminally ill parent or child. I believe this needs to end.

EV, as a consequence, supports the call for a minimum of three months of riding-based activity representation for MPs who face these circumstances. As a consequence, it would mean introducing the prospect of proxy or electronic voting for a small cohort of MPs who are in legitimate need of it. As we've heard from our IPU colleagues, it is something that other parliaments have undertaken with some success.

If Canada's Parliament were to go down this road, MPs would have to be given the opportunity to teleconference and provide written comments on bills or debates, among other things. It is an ambitious task, but we believe it can be done.

Upon returning to Parliament, we want to echo our concerns on the lack of access among MPs to child care services on the Hill. As the chair of a day care board in the Ottawa area, I do believe child care spaces and centres can grow and be flexible if they are given the resources to do so. We believe, in anticipation of the fact that there may be more than one or two young infants on the Hill, Centre Block or another close building should be looked at to potentially care for young children six months and older.

Further, we do believe the provision of occasional on-site care in the House for infants under the age of 12 is also required, and attainable, to provide care for a baby during unexpected votes, a committee meeting that goes late, or other unusual circumstances. Again, I don't see this as an impossibility. Equal Voice provides child care at evening events. There is a roster of highly qualified day care providers in this area who I believe could be on call for occasional child care services.

These measures, of course, are not about reducing the amount an MP works but about facilitating, recognizing, and valuing the other work MPs are doing.

I'd like to wrap up by saying clearly, however, that this is not just about the structure of Parliament. It is also about the tone and language of politics. We have heard from many women and men that they are turned off by the kind of leadership they see on display in the House from time to time, particularly during question period. Other legislatures in Canada have eliminated the banging on tables and significantly reduced the heckling MPs dish out to their opponents. While theatrical, we think it is time to revisit these behaviours once and for all to address what we think is a reputational crisis in the federal political arena.

In conclusion, apart from this study, it is our view that a regular five-year review by this committee of House practices to assess them for their flexibility and reasonability is imperative. We think you can come up with predefined criteria based upon the literature of work-life balance.

• (1120)

We know this has been done before and that other modifications have been made in the past that have made the lives of MPs significantly easier. In the fall, you joined one of five countries that have gender parity in cabinet. We are regarded as a leader, and it is now time to lead on gender-sensitive Parliaments.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we'll move on to Dr. Gary Levy. Thank you for joining us.

**Dr. Gary Levy (As an Individual):** Thank you for the invitation to appear. I suspect I was invited because of an interview I gave questioning the idea of changing the parliamentary calendar to a four-day week. In fact, I think a good argument can be made for that change, but I have not heard it so far in your deliberations.

You don't lose much by not sitting on Fridays. There are no votes in the House. Committees normally do not meet, few ministers are in question period, and many members are on their way to the airport before the House rises. But the idea has not been well received in the

coverage I've seen in the media. Perhaps my presentation can help to explain why.

In 1982 I worked for the committee that brought in the first parliamentary calendar. It was 160 days, which replaced an average of 175 days when Parliament operated without a fixed calendar. The present version provides for a maximum of 135 days, but in the last decade the House has only sat as many as 129 days on one occasion, and in many years it sat less than 100 days. Put another way, you have a calendar which at best provides for six months on and six months off. If you came back earlier after Labour Day and after the new year and eliminated all but two break weeks, one in November and one at Easter, you could have a calendar of about 160 days with no Fridays.

I know members are unhappy when journalists or academics refer to break weeks as holidays, and I know all of you work hard during these constituency weeks, but they are holidays from Parliament. They are holidays from holding the government to account, and they're holidays basically from committee hearings.

The break weeks may be much loved, particularly by ministers who don't have to face question period, but I suggest there are three things wrong with our very generous approach to break weeks, aside from creating the erroneous impression that you're on holidays. First, I think break weeks encourage obstruction, because if the opposition can delay a bill until the Thursday before a break week, they have effectively stopped it for 10 days, and sometimes more. The result has been a dramatic increase in the use of time allocation motions. Even the dreaded omnibus bills are partly due to the limited time that Parliament is sitting. If nothing changes, I suspect the government, despite its promises, will have to result to both extensive time allocation and, perhaps, even omnibus bills before this Parliament is over.

Second, I think break weeks are really part of the permanent election campaign and a huge advantage to incumbents. They are essentially the importation of an American practice instituted because congressmen are always looking for money for the next election, and they use break weeks for constant rounds of fundraising. We have a different system and different election laws. I believe if constituency events and fundraising were focused on Fridays and the House met with fewer interruptions, the result would be a more functional as well as a more family-friendly Parliament.

A third point, which is perhaps a bit theoretical, is that break weeks reflect a view of the member's role as a delegate who primarily represents the view of his or her constituents. This is perhaps obvious, but there is a more traditional view of the role of an MP, first articulated by Edmund Burke. He thought the role of a parliamentarian was to exercise his or her independent judgment on the public issues of the day. Of course, that judgment is informed by views of constituents, but in this age of communication and social media, is it necessary to be in the riding in order to know the views of one's constituents?

A final point regarding the calendar is that I think a good bit of family friendliness could be injected simply by using pairing, which seems to have fallen into disuse. This was mentioned briefly by the clerk at your last meeting, but I think it bears repeating. A member on either the government or the opposition side advises his or her whip about an unavoidable conflict. The whip calls his counterpart on the other side, and an agreement is struck whereby one member from the other party will absent himself or herself from the vote and this will be indicated in the journals as being paired. As I said, that could be used a lot more than it is, or has been in the last decade.

• (1125)

I don't have any great knowledge of dual chambers, but I looked at the British Standing Orders, and they appear to be used partly for what we call private members' business and partly for questioning ministers. In the Canadian context, I could see a dual chamber used for specific debates. For example, the budget debate could be split and take half the time. The same could apply to the throne speech. Parts of private members' business, excluding the vote, could be moved to the parallel chamber.

However, my real question is, what are you trying to accomplish? If you're looking for ways for members to get their views on record, you could accomplish this by allowing members to append their speeches to *Hansard*. However, if the purpose is to free up more House time for discussion of legislation, I think there are better approaches.

Why not limit second reading debate to one day? This sounds draconian, but that is the practice in Britain. After the minister introduces and gives reasons for supporting a bill and the opposition party critics give reasons for opposing it, I think you only need a few more speeches by interested members, and then the bill should go to committee. Of course, there could be and should be exceptions to a one-day rule when bills are matters of conscience and members have a legitimate interest in putting forth personal views that differ from those of the party leaders.

Finally, let me conclude with a couple of general observations. In the last decade, Parliament became the subject of many criticisms, "dysfunctional" being perhaps the adjective used most frequently to describe our most important democratic institution. I hope this new Parliament will address some of the issues that led to those criticisms.

One such area is question period. I'm not sure if a British-style Prime Minister's question period is part of your mandate, but I hope you can push that forward.

Another problem is non-confidence motions, because the timing is largely controlled by the government. This led directly to two unfortunate Parliamentary incidents in the last decade. This problem could easily be corrected by changes to the Standing Orders.

I'm getting away from purely family-friendly issues, so I will stop here. I look forward to your questions.

Thank you.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much to all the witnesses.

Just to remind people, it's not just a study on a family-friendly Parliament but also a study on a more efficient, inclusive type of Parliament. It's for a lot more things than just families.

Nancy will be happy to know that two weeks ago, we opened an Equal Voice chapter in the Yukon in my riding. My commute is 28 hours a week.

Gary will know that Edmund Burke lost a number of elections with that philosophy.

We'll start the questioning with Ms. Vandenberg.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.):** Thank you very much.

This question is for Ms. Peckford and Ms. Jabre. Kareen, it's good to see you again after all the work I did in a previous life with IPU, especially on these issues.

I know that both your organizations have done a lot of work when it comes to the barriers to women running for office. Some of those include the self-selection of women choosing not to enter politics and also the problem with the retention of women, in the sense that a number of people will say they don't want to continue. A lot of that goes to the impact political life has on families and the added caregiving responsibilities that women often have.

I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the deterrent effect on running for office that the hours and the impact on families could have on women and other demographic groups, as well as the impact that has on the representativeness of a Parliament and the number of voices that are reflected in Parliament.

**Ms. Kareen Jabre:** Thank you.

First, it's great to see you again. It's really nice to be in contact and working together again.

In general, at the IPU all the surveys we've carried out over the past 15 years have really highlighted the challenges for women running. We've also surveyed candidates and within groups of civil society, etc. The first thing that comes up as the first challenge or cause for the hesitation of women is the anticipated difficulty in managing family and work responsibilities.

You'll be interested to know that we asked the same question to men and to men MPs, and this issue, sadly enough, did not come up as one of their major challenges.

This is why I come back to the change in culture. For us, whatever we're going to do and whatever reform is carried out, you're going to have to have reform in the public space, but there's going to have to be reform in the private space as well. It's going to be linked to redefining gender roles in families as well. If this part of the reform does not take place, then you're going to have a limitation in terms of the impact of whatever policy you take at the public level.

However, it is definitely one of the biggest deterrents. This is why we are so happy to see this debate, and not only for women: it's becoming a deterrent as well for young MPs and younger people who are interested in running. You have an eager younger population, but they are also realizing that they have lots of other objectives that they want to carry out in their thirties, or whatever it is, whether it's studies or families, etc. and they wonder how they are going to do that all together.

I think this is definitely a key issue in terms of participation and having more inclusive parliaments.

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** Maybe I'll ask Grace, who's on the line. She's just finished a 15-country study, where she interviewed 90 female elected representatives from countries the world over. She could speak to some of the insights that elected representatives gave her in terms of the deterrent effect and the sustainability of parliamentary life.

**Ms. Grace Lore (Senior Researcher, Equal Voice):** Yes, certainly. Balancing family and caregiving with being a representative was something that came up in all of the seven countries that I was conducting interviews in.

To the questions of deterrence and retention, a number of women reported that if they could, if they had the opportunity, they would not do it again, both because of the difficulties in balancing family and being a representative, but also because of the points of tone, language, and aggressiveness. There was a lot of concern about their children watching them participate in this or fall victim to some of the more aggressive styles of politics. Again, it's both the structure but also the culture of politics.

There is an interesting point to be made about deterrence and retention and dealing with these issues. For example, a lot of women in my study reported that being asked about this all the time—and this being a question about women in politics—to some extent recreated the problem as their problem rather than a broader problem, as was said, for younger MPs, or men who are also navigating having families and being representatives. At the same time, it is fundamentally a gender issue. It is deterring, primarily, women, as the IPU study in particular finds the difference in reporting that as a deterrent.

• (1135)

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** I'm interested that both of you talked about the tone or the culture, and particularly decorum in question period and the heckling as one thing that is deterring women and affecting retention. Do you think that an effort to minimize the heckling and to minimize the aggressive tone of politics would actually lead to more women running for Parliament?

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** There was an interesting study commissioned by the Manning conference, in fact, undertaken by André Turcotte, a well-known, widely respected pollster. He interviewed a small subset of leading businesswomen, many of whom said they were less concerned about work-life balance issues in terms of contemplating a run for federal office, and much more concerned about the culture of politics and whether or not they could thrive in that environment, and whether or not they could recreate the success they were having as leading businesswomen.

I think very ambitious women, in some respects, have made the adjustments required to accommodate family and other personal obligations, but they come up against a political institution that they think may not be receptive to their leadership styles, which I think often are more collaborative, do leverage better teamwork, espouse a kind of innovation that I don't think we always see associated with our federal Parliament. I think that is certainly something to keep in mind.

To answer your question, Ms. Vandenberg, I believe, and certainly our organization believes that to reduce the visual...that most Canadians see, which is banging on tables, would in fact be a highly symbolic gesture to showing Canadians that in fact we're a serious body and that we take the issues of Canadians very seriously. We see it nowhere else. We don't see it in corporate Canada, we don't see it in schools, we only see it in Parliament.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we'll go to Mr. Reid, who's sharing his time with Mr. Richards, for a seven-minute round.

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC):** Thank you. I'd like to address a couple of questions to Mr. Levy, if I could.

You didn't say this, but I got the impression, when you were talking about a four-day week and a larger number of weeks, that effectively you're suggesting we ought to have the same number of sitting days, but if our weeks are 20% shorter, we would have 20% more sitting weeks. Is that a correct characterization of what you're saying, or are you saying something different?

**Dr. Gary Levy:** What I'm saying is that at present you don't sit long enough, and that the proposal to take out Fridays and simply add those hours onto Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, leaving you the same number of hours, doesn't resolve that issue. I'm saying that I think we'd have a better Parliament if you sat longer, more continuously.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Now I am completely uncertain as to what you are saying.

Are you supportive or not supportive of terminating the Fridays?

**Dr. Gary Levy:** Yes, I am, if it is accompanied by a longer overall sitting period.

Now, I just pulled 160 out because that was a previous standard, but if it was 150 or more.... We are in the low 120s now, I think, in a normal year.



**Mr. Scott Reid:** I think of it as being, essentially, that we sit 26 weeks of the year, exactly half of the year, and then we have 26 weeks of something other than sitting—work for some people, and maybe play for others.

Essentially, there would be more days of actually sitting in the House of Commons, whatever that works out to.

Am I right, then, that you think the fact that our Fridays are structured as they are means that they are not fully functional days, and that effectively we should either make them into normal days like a Thursday or a Wednesday, or eliminate the Fridays and add more Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays?

• (1140)

**Dr. Gary Levy:** I don't think there is much you can do about Fridays, given the country that we have and given that you have to be in your constituency. Some people have these horrific commutes, as has been mentioned. I would hope that by having a four-day week you wouldn't turn Thursdays now into Fridays, in other words with no votes, no committees, and so on. You would have to see how that works.

If Thursday was a normal day, as it is now, and Friday was off, I don't think you would be losing that much.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** There is something I have to say that nobody has brought up before; it is just my observation. People say that they are constantly in demand back in their riding. I have a rural riding with many small communities—the classic place that makes many demands on your time—but in my experience, when I say that I can't be at someone's event because the House is sitting, I have never once in 16 years up here had someone say to me that this is not good enough. Everybody accepts that this is my first job. Of course, there were times when people came from all over the country by train and could not get back.

It strikes me that more availability inevitably means more demands on you, and if you aren't available simply because you have to stay in Ottawa for the job, there would be a reasonable accommodation on the part of constituents. Maybe I just got nicer constituents than most people. I actually do think that, but others will disagree.

I have one last thing. You mentioned the idea of one day for second reading, except for special bills. We all understand that Bill C-14, the assisted suicide bill, is a matter of conscience. They are not always so clearly distinguished this way. Do you have any tests that would be applied to allow us to tell when a bill is of the ordinary run and when it is not of the ordinary run?

**Dr. Gary Levy:** I think it's more about whether it is a free vote. Something that is a free vote is usually a free vote because it is a matter of conscience. I think that is the case with that bill. Most bills are not, so I don't think it would come up very often.

However, I do see that as a big problem with your schedule. You have two break weeks between now and the time when that bill is supposed to be passed, according to the Supreme Court. The number of members who will be able to speak is going to be limited by that, and maybe further limited by time allocation.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** In all fairness, if we take this seriously enough we could say we are sitting here. This is a matter that overrides the

need for me to go home and attend maple fest in my riding, in my case, and that sort of thing. Alternatively, it supercedes my need to go home and get a good night's sleep every single night during this period. I could stay here and give my speech to the House of Commons at one in the morning or two in the morning, if need be.

Those are reasonable things that could be done. You wouldn't want to do them for every bill, but it could be done here.

**Dr. Gary Levy:** Yes, I remember the capital punishment debate, which was before we had a calendar. Almost everybody wanted to speak. I think well over a hundred members spoke on that. I don't think anybody thought of imposing a time allocation or limiting that in any way. It was a very important debate. Many people felt very passionately about it, and the proper thing to do was to let everybody speak. I don't think you can do that anymore, the way we are set up.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC):** I think I'll just request a future round, Mr. Chair. A minute is not really enough time to get in the questions that I would like.

**The Chair:** Mr. Christopherson.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Very good, thank you, Chair.

Thank you all very much for your presentations. It's helpful when witnesses disagree because it gives us an opportunity to get into some back and forth, which I'm going to try and prompt in a moment.

At the risk of regretting saying this, but in defence of heckling—

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

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Obviously anything that is intended to drown out someone who's speaking, regardless of who it is, that's not even heckling. That's just plain obscene, rude, and unacceptable behaviour. I have to tell you, Chair, my experience is—and I've been doing this for a long time now, in all three orders of government—I'm always mindful of the fact that whenever I'm in session, whether it's city council, or a legislative chamber, or the House of Commons, that the debates we're having, the procedures that we have, and all of that replaced the way we used to decide who has power and who gets to decide things, and that used to be on the battlefield. You can't argue there aren't a lot of emotions going on when you're on the battlefield. To me, a good heckle is like a good political cartoon. It causes you to laugh, but it underscores the issue you're trying to amplify.

I just want to throw that out there. I think it has a role. I think of things that matter. If someone was giving a speech, and I was in the House, and they're going on and on about how the steel industry is yesterday's history, and because of the environmental issues we ought not to be even looking at the steel industry, I have to tell you that my constituents expect me to do more than just sit there at that moment. There has to be an acknowledgement there's a certain amount of reaction that's said, and it's part of it.

I understand the point that's being made, that it becomes such a hostile place, but to me it's only like that when it's in the extreme. Anyone who doubts my commitment to that can ask Sandra Pupatello, who was a former high-profile Ontario cabinet minister when I was deputy speaker, and what I did in that House when the opposition, males, late at night, drowned her out. Ask her. I'm there on that part of it, big-time.

I guess this idea we would always, without exception, sit very quietly, like we were in church, to me that doesn't reflect the reality of the place and what it's for. I just throw that out there because I'm a glutton for punishment.

I want to go on about the eight months, because of course it seems to be at odds with where Madam Peckford was in terms of more back-to-back in the riding. I'm not sure the two are marriageable, if you will—there's probably a better word. Madam Peckford, if you wouldn't mind, I'll give you an opportunity to respond because maybe I'm misinterpreting. Maybe you're seeing something that Mr. Levy's proposing that isn't that far, but it seemed to me they're two different concepts. One was the focus on the consistency here in the House, and the other one was a little more consistency in the riding, which common sense might suggest would be a hard balance to achieve.

Your thoughts, Nancy, please.

• (1145)

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** I think you're very capable parliamentarians, and I think with some work you could marry the two, if you will. I think it's the toll of 28-hour commutes that is particularly objectionable. If there's a way to cluster more riding time, apart from summers, obviously an extended period in the riding around the winter holiday, Christmas, as it's known by many. I think if you could look at other periods for which, in fact, maybe you do more two-week periods in the riding so you get a chance to situate, adapt, acclimatize, and meet the needs of your constituents, but also meet the needs of your family and potentially cluster more time back here on the Hill, I think it's possible.

I think it takes some creativity. It means House leaders and others have to sit down and look differently at the schedule. I think it may be doable, but I defer to Mr. Levy for further comment.

If you don't mind, I wouldn't mind saying a little about heckling.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Sure. That's all right.

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** I come from a very emotional and animated Newfoundland family of the Peckford ilk. I know all about emotion in debates and I appreciate some of your sentiments.

Where I think it's problematic for us—and I know you know this, but just to have it on the record—is when it looks like bullying, when it feels like bullying, when there's humiliation, denigration, and a diminishment of one's voice. I think that for women who come into a House of Commons that's predominantly male—we have 250 men, 88 women—I think some of that heckling takes on a tenor that's not necessarily gendered, but has a gendered effect.

I also think there are introverted male MPs who don't in fact enjoy that to and fro in the same way that you might.

I think you can strive for better. Obviously, the Speaker is constantly seeking a balance between letting people respond and giving people a chance to say what they need to say. I think you can set a higher standard and, more to your point, I believe it would be impactful and that it would make a difference.

• (1150)

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Fair enough. Before I go to Mr. Levy I want to put this out.

In my experience, two things happen when you're away from home and family. You come home on the weekend, and rather than life becoming normal for your family, quite frankly, you're the interruption to “normal”.

I know it sounds funny, but after enough years, that becomes a problem in terms of how you're perceived by your family. When you have an apartment in Toronto, or Ottawa as is the case now, the risk is that that becomes home, that you start thinking about your apartment away from home as your home.

I even catch myself saying to my assistant Tyler, “Well, I'm going to go to this meeting. I'm going to drop in to those two receptions and then I'm going to head home.” I try and catch myself. That's not home. That's my apartment. My home is in Hamilton with my wife.

The ability to stay in one place is important from a constituency perspective, but if you're in Ottawa for too long at a time, even with weekend breaks, that becomes your “normal” rather than your real home, which should be your “normal”. I know I'm out of time. Thanks, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, David.

Because there are not a lot of westerners on this committee, I'm glad you raised the point, Nancy, about the three-hour time difference. It takes an hour every day, so by the time you readjust it's time to go home again.

We'll go to Mr. Graham who's sharing with Ms. Sahota for a seven-minute round.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I was trying to imagine what military role Mr. Christopherson would have had in the war scenario that would have existed prior to legislative bodies and I think it would have been the regimental bagpiper, but I digress.

Mr. Levy, I have a few questions for you. If, thanks to technology, it is not necessary to be in the riding to know the views of constituents, then doesn't it follow that it's not necessary to be in Ottawa to share those views?

**Dr. Gary Levy:** Yes, but you're in Ottawa for other reasons, for question period, to hold the government to account, and to have committee meetings.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** Right, but if we can use technology to have less time in the riding so we can have more time in Ottawa, then we can also use technology to have more time in the riding and less time in Ottawa. The argument doesn't necessarily flow and that's the point I'm trying to get at.

You can't overstate the role of social media. In a riding like mine, the biggest issue we have is a lack of Internet access. I live in a rural riding. It's not very far from here. My riding is big enough that it takes as long to get between the constituency offices as it does to get to my riding from Ottawa.

What would you say to rural regions that don't have the benefits of these modern technologies that would allow us to spend less time there? I have 43 municipalities. I have to spend every minute that I possibly can there. The idea of spending less time in the riding is an anathema to me. I need that time there. I'm not spending enough as it is.

**Dr. Gary Levy:** It goes back to the old debate about the role of members of Parliament. Some are primarily constituency people; that's what they're interested in. Others are more interested in the policy debates that go on in Ottawa.

I'm not sure if we can resolve that, but I think, in looking at things like the calendar and the use of time, we have to come up with a compromise. I'm not sure that six months on versus six months off is the best compromise.

I'm suggesting more like eight months on and four months in the constituency, but people will disagree upon this depending on how they see the role of the member of Parliament. I don't think there is a hard and fast answer to this.

Related to that, on the whole issue of family friendliness, I think there are 338 members of Parliament, and I expect there are 338 different approaches to what is family friendly for them. I'm not sure we should be constructing things like the calendar to deal with an issue of family friendliness.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** If we don't, we'll have fewer and fewer families who are here.

I think the debate needs to take place on Ms. Peckford's points on these things. The calendar is one of the most important avenues for how we control our lives here. The fact is, I was late for this meeting because I still had to be in the House. I had to rush here. If we compress that even further, my life is going to be rather chaotic, as if it isn't sufficiently already.

I'm simply trying to get to the bottom of why you'd want us to sit an additional 25 or 30 days, because you're saying you want it to get back up to 160 which seems like a lot.

• (1155)

**Dr. Gary Levy:** As I say, that was reduced from 175 before there was a calendar, but I think it has to do with the time available. I don't think all the time allocation helps the atmosphere in Parliament. In fact, coming back to what Mr. Christopherson was saying about heckling, I don't see heckling as a problem but rather as a symptom that the place is not working the way it should, and there are many reasons in the Standing Orders why it's not working. The one I'm focusing on is the lack of time available to have a proper balance

between the government's ability to govern and the opposition's ability to oppose.

Looking back on changes in the 1990s, when we went to this 125-day year, we lost that proper balance. As a result, we have a much more combative aggressive Parliament because there's not enough time to get things done that should be done properly, maybe without as much time allocation and as much pressure for the limited time available.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** One final question before I pass over to Ms. Sahota.

You're suggesting that we reduce second reading debate to a much shorter period of time. If we do that, do you still see a need to have more sitting days? It seems like you're getting it from both ends.

**Dr. Gary Levy:** The idea I'd like to leave you with is that the use of time is a whole package. Obviously, one thing is tied to another. If you limit second reading debate, that implies you want to have more time in committee and maybe this is going to need reforms to the way our committees work. So you kind of have to look at the whole thing together. I'd agree with that.

But as a general point, having so many speeches saying the same thing over and over again, often written by departmental officials on the same bill, I don't think adds a lot to the atmosphere in Parliament. That time could be used more productively and in a better way, and this would lead to a better atmosphere, and a better atmosphere would lead to less heckling, although maybe not no heckling.

The same can be said for the change to question period that I mentioned. If we had a Prime Minister's question period, a lot of the focus, the heckling, would be on that day, and the other days, where you'd have a rotation of ministers, I think would be much calmer with much less heckling and much less attention from the media, and would be better overall for the public interest.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.):** Thank you all for being here. It has been quite enlightening to hear all the different ideas that you have. When I first decided to run for this position, I had a very prominent female political figure ask me why I would do this to my family. I was quite shocked, because I thought she was also doing it to hers. She said that if I was interested in politics, I should stick to municipal or provincial politics, that federal politics may not be best for somebody with a young family, that I would really destroy my family.

I thought about this for quite some time and that idea is definitely out there. It is why we see fewer women participating in federal politics, I believe. We keep asking the question, why aren't women more involved? Why aren't they getting into federal politics? I think it's quite clear. It is quite demanding, the role you have, although it's constantly changing, and each family is trying to adapt and change the role of what each partner does in terms of family care.

As we stated before, a lot of demands were traditionally placed on the woman and it's quite interesting.... Nancy, you mentioned that we are the longest sitting federal parliament, one of the longest, and definitely the longest sitting legislature compared with provincial legislatures. However, Mr. Levy, you think that we should go back to 150 years ago when we sat even longer, when this institution was created by males who, perhaps, didn't have that same kind of demand on their lives when it came to families.

Which is it? I'm really confused. Should we be sitting longer? Are we already the longest sitting as it is? Should we be sitting less? I'm quite perplexed by the presentations today.

**The Chair:** Let us have very short answers, because the time is up for the round.

• (1200)

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** I compared the data for the number of sitting days federally with data for the number of sitting days provincially and territorially on average. The data I looked at clearly suggested that the federal Parliament sat the longest of any of the provincial, territorial, or federal legislatures.

**Dr. Gary Levy:** We're a Parliament of a G7 country. I think that's slightly different from a provincial or a territorial legislature.

Comparisons are difficult, but in the U.K. they don't have a calendar. One year they sat for 142 days, and the newspapers called it a zombie Parliament because they thought it was not long enough. It depends, then, what year you look at.

If you look at the IPU statistics, you'll see that we're in the mid-range, at 125 days. There are many that sit less, but quite a few sit more.

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** I would just say, to Mr. Levy's point, that we are also one of the largest countries geographically anywhere in the world, and that, I think, necessitates a rethink of how we get our MPs here and what kind of physical time they need to spend in this House.

**The Chair:** How about having fast rail?

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** I would agree with that.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next is Mr. Richards, for six minutes.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you. I appreciate your being here as well.

I want to ask you a question, a similar question for both of you. What I'm going to do is characterize what I think I understand your proposals to be for changing the sitting days and sitting weeks. You both come at it from very different approaches and have very different suggestions, but both of you are advocating for some change.

I'm going to characterize what I think I've heard your suggested changes to be and then ask you a couple of questions around that. I'll then let each of you answer.

Ms. Peckford, you can go first, and then Mr. Levy, but I'll throw the thoughts out first, and you can correct me, if I'm mistaken.

It's based on something Mr. Levy said. He said there are 338 members of Parliament and that he expected each of us would have a different approach to family-friendly. I think that's an important point. Almost every member of Parliament has a different situation, and every change that can be contemplated could affect each of those members of Parliament differently. It could be family-friendly for some and maybe not so friendly for others.

Ms. Peckford, I think what I was hearing was that you're suggesting sittings Tuesday through Thursday, with longer days on those Tuesdays through Thursdays. We wouldn't be sitting, then, on Monday or Friday. Then you would suggest more consecutive break weeks or constituency weeks.

I didn't know whether you were suggesting that the number of days currently is about right. You can comment on this when you're answering. Would this mean more weeks, or are you suggesting that the number of weeks would remain as is, with the sitting days just being longer so that there is the same number of sitting hours? That's what I wanted to ask you.

I guess the question around that is, say for example, for a member of Parliament who has their family here.... Some members probably make the choice to move their families to Ottawa so that during the week, when they're here, they can be home with their family in the evenings, and when they go home to the constituency, they can focus on their constituents and really work hard to get around to a lot of events. The question is about the effect this might have—both the fact of longer sitting days and obviously more consecutive weeks—on a family like that, for example.

Another question is this. I don't want to put words in her mouth, but when Christine Moore was here, I think this is what she was indicating; I hope I'm characterizing it correctly. She mentioned that she didn't feel that getting rid of Fridays was something that would be helpful for her, particularly. I think this centred around the fact that being here through the week, she can have a focused week here, and the same thing back in her constituency. The question, then, is about the effect this might have on someone in that situation.

Then Mr. Levy, you felt that maybe getting rid of the Fridays would be okay, but that we'd need more sitting weeks, and not only more sitting weeks to accommodate the Fridays we're losing, but you think there should be even more days than we currently sit.

I guess I wondered a little bit. Obviously, many members of Parliament go back to their ridings for the weekends or whatever. Does the travel time involved in that then become...because there are more sitting weeks and you're losing more time both serving your constituents and being able to spend with your family?

The same thing goes, I guess, for those with young children. If we're going to have more sitting weeks, does that become...? I think it speaks to what Mr. Christopherson was saying: it almost becomes that you throw your family's routine out by being home. What effect would this have on that type of family?

I'll let you both comment on those comments.

Ms. Peckford, do you want to go first?

• (1205)

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** Right. I think what we are saying—we've seen it in other countries and Ms. Jabre did speak to it—is there is this idea of a compressed week, which doesn't necessarily eliminate Fridays, but does give parliamentarians the opportunity to start the day earlier so that you maximize the time you have here in Ottawa by starting the day at 8:00 or 8:30 a.m. I know sometimes committees do meet a bit earlier than the House starts its sitting time, but, obviously, it's compressing and maximizing the time that you have here so that there may be more flexibility on a Monday or Friday.

We understand that some west coast MPs are taking red-eye flights to come to Ottawa to be at QP on Monday afternoon. I don't know about you, but my sense is, if you've been on a red-eye all night, how effective are you as a legislator? I think we have to balance the toll it takes for people to be physically present with the quality of work they're doing.

To that degree, we noted that the federal Parliament sits for the longest number of days of any provincial, territorial, or federal legislature. Is that enough or too little? I think that's for you to decide, but I think what's more important is how those days and weeks are organized so that people are at their best and that the toll that it takes personally on their families is not so egregious.

Obviously, the divorce rate and separation rate among MPs is extremely high, disturbingly high. This is an institution that's supposed to reflect Canada. If your working conditions are such that you are no longer reflective of the average Canadian, it's troubling. This is an institution that remains one that has women chronically and significantly under-represented. So talking about calibre of outcome, if women remain a minority voice for the next 100 years, can we really confidently assert that we're doing justice to women and men both?

Those are considerations that are primary, in my mind, to answer your question.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Mr. Levy, before you respond, could I just add one thing to what I'm asking you?

I understand that you're proposing more sitting, and there certainly can be merits made of that in terms of holding the government accountable on more weeks of the year, but I think what we're hearing from the Liberal Party is the suggestion that we would remove the Fridays. They don't want to sit here on Fridays, but they're not looking to increase the number of weeks. I want to hear your thoughts on that as well.

There's the fact that they'd be removing Fridays, talking about longer days, but it wouldn't be adding any sitting weeks. Does that then mean that maybe there would be fewer days or fewer weeks of

the year that the government would be held accountable under that scenario that the Liberal Party is suggesting?

**Dr. Gary Levy:** That is exactly what led me to give the original interview opposing Fridays off, because I understood that there would not be any change in the number of break weeks. I think if you look at some of the newspaper coverage, the editorials, they've generally been opposed to taking Fridays off because it's seen as less work, even though the hours are the same.

If that were the case, then I would certainly be opposed to that because I don't think it's the right approach. Even if you have the same number of hours and even if you make some technical tricks to call a certain day two days in order to get your notice for motions, I think people would see that as a kind of gimmick, and a day is a day. I don't think you can fool people on that and I don't think it would help the image of Parliament to go to a four-day week and keep all of the break weeks.

I'd just like to make a couple of other smaller points. I found myself agreeing with what Sheila Copps said to you last week, I think it was, that Parliament is a relatively family-friendly place if you compare it to working in a steel mill in Hamilton. I think this is something to be kept in mind, that you may not want to go too far in pushing this. You have a lot of freedom. If pairing comes back, and you have a family birthday on a Wednesday or a Thursday and you want to be at that birthday or graduation, and there's a vote that day, you can arrange with the whip to be paired. I think this goes a long way to solving some of the problems of people with families.

About the commuting, I really don't have an answer to solve that. It's something everybody knows before they go into it. I think the calendar, being six months on and six months off, encourages members to keep their families in the ridings. This is a very personal decision, and I wouldn't presume to tell anybody what's right or wrong on that, but I think if it were the other way, you might have more members bringing their families to Ottawa, and it would be interesting to perhaps look at some studies that were done earlier and see how many did bring families to Ottawa compared to now. That's just an impression that I have.

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Before we go on to Mr. Lightbound—and welcome to the committee—Grace Lore, you haven't had a chance to speak much. Is there anything you wanted to add?

**Ms. Grace Lore:** No, I'm okay for now. I'll answer any specific questions directed to me, but I think Nancy has had the chance to answer from Equal Voice's perspective.

**The Chair:** And Karen, I thought you might have wanted to comment on some of the questions.

**Ms. Karen Jabre:** Yes, thank you for that.

I want to support what Nancy was saying.

I think it's a question of how you reorganize the time if you were to shorten and compress the week, take the opportunity of IT to enhance opportunities, and being more inclusive in one way or the other. Spain has been looking at e-voting to allow women and men who have family obligations to take part in votes but now they're also looking at ways of taking part in debates and committee debates through electronic means. It's not just the question of voting, but also having more participation through electronic means.

I think this is something to consider in terms of how you organize and take advantage of the IT facilities out there. More and more I think it responds to what Mr. Graham was saying, how you can use IT not only to reach out to constituencies but to allow MPs to stay in their constituencies and also take part in the work of Parliament. I think you are the best to know how to organize this stuff, but maybe it's just to be creative.

The tendency in the other parliaments around the world has been to go for more compressed weeks. I was looking at Australia, a big country with different time zones. They sit from Tuesday to Thursday. It's a smaller parliament.

**The Chair:** Do you happen to know what Italy does with their diaspora when they allow members of parliament to live all over the world. How do they do their voting?

**Ms. Kareen Jabre:** No, I can check for you and get back to you on that.

**The Chair:** Thank you. And France too; our researcher could look at those too.

Mr. Lightbound, you're in a five-minute round.

**Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.):** Thank you all for being here. It's very interesting.

We've talked a lot about making Parliament more family-friendly. I think that's a worthwhile discussion. I have no family yet, but I still find the job very demanding, so I can only imagine those of us who have families.

However, I was very interested in what you mentioned, Madam Peckford, in your opening statement about having parity at the ballot box. In the last election, I became one of the youngest MPs in Parliament, and I tried to recruit very capable young women to run. What I witnessed is that even not really knowing the demands of this job, there was different thinking. They would first see if they had the means to run, if they had the support, and then take the decision. Whereas my decision-making was more that I'm running and then I'll find a way. I was wondering if you and Madam Jabre had any recommendations in how we could make the process more attractive to young women before they get here, so they get here.

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** I certainly think role models are incredibly important. I think it's true that some of the trail-blazing women believe the sacrifice has been so tremendous for them that they don't always seek out and encourage. Many other women and men do, as you say.

I think demystifying the nomination process is hugely important. It is the first barrier and the first opportunity. It's the only way you get on the ballot. I don't think enough Canadians understand what it means to run for nomination because there is a lack of regulation. It's up to every riding association in terms of timing, in terms of the rules

around when you can sell a membership and when you can't. We certainly think that the system, and women in particular, would benefit from much more clarity around the nomination roles.

But I would also say that women need to see that they can make an impact so it justifies what they believe is a sacrifice. I think women are motivated by impact, they're motivated by what they can get done. In the absence of truly understanding that, I think some women tend to be more hesitant if they're not familiar with the parliamentary process. As you may know, Equal Voice is launching a very ambitious initiative, Daughters of the Vote, to bring 338 young women to Parliament next March 7 and 8 to do just that, to connect them to the institution in a way that will hopefully motivate them in years to come.

● (1215)

**The Chair:** Ms. Jabre.

**Ms. Kareen Jabre:** I fully support that. I think, first of all, the image of politics needs to change. Again, I come back to heckling or the way politics or Parliament is presented. That is really a great deterrent for young women who are asking, why am I going to get myself into this? What's the point? They often seem much more interested in local politics, where maybe they have more direct contact with citizens. I think, to change that image and the usefulness of being in Parliament, that's key.

Role models and mentorship need to be promoted more in order to encourage young women to run. And I think there is a challenge in political parties, if I can say so, because they remain a bottleneck in terms of supporting women to run, and the rules are not necessarily always clear, as Nancy mentioned. They need more incentives from political parties, proactive measures, in order to say, we will support you. So before thinking of the means, if you're interested, then say it and we will support you, if I can simplify it. I think we need to change the culture in political parties as well and have much more proactive approaches to supporting women.

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** Can I just ask Grace if she wants to comment on this?

**Ms. Grace Lore:** I think with regard to the nomination process, some of the structural changes that we've talked about also work in that direction in that they signal to women that it is a space for them, that they can see that there is an opportunity for them to be there to balance these things. I think that at the stage of deciding to opt in, when others are encouraging women to opt into politics, some of those structural things being present signals the opportunity for them. So I do think that helps not just once people are elected but in who we get deciding to run for politics. Everybody might have their own personal way of balancing family and their responsibilities as an MP, but there is something that does deter women more than men, and some of those structural changes I think will have more women opting in.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Schmale for five minutes.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Thank you very much. I appreciate all of your comments so far. This is a very interesting debate. As you know, I have a young family myself, so I'm very interested in what's going on here. I appreciate those comments.

I just have a few things. Actually, I wasn't even going to go in this direction, but I just want to touch on the heckling part too. I don't think it's just parliamentarians; I think it's everyone. If you throw 338 lawyers into a room or real estate agents, or what have you, and say, discuss this very hot-button issue, I think you're going to have disagreements and rising temperatures. But I agree with your point about saying that you can heckle, but you shouldn't stifle someone's voice. I do get that point, but I do think heckling has its place, especially if you're not getting an answer you think should be coming your way.

I want to go back to a few things that you mentioned.

I do appreciate, Ms. Peckford, what you were saying about hiring staff. We all like to do that. Unfortunately, we just got a 20% increase in our budget, so I'm not going to go and ask for more money. I do appreciate that.

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** We're not saying that you have to ask. We're asking.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Okay. I think we're already borrowing on it to pay our bills.

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** That's the value of external voices. Yes, we understand that you have an increase, but after many years of a freeze. I think you can appreciate the merit of our point, understanding that not everyone would see it as politically tenable to agree with us.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Okay. Perfect.

Having said all of that, as we went through the process, and you say people need to learn how Parliament works, I think one takes it upon oneself, as an individual, male or female, if you want to get involved, to learn more about it. If you want to know how the nomination part works, get involved in your local EDA, whatever the political stripe, whatever party you feel best represents you, and learn how that works. I think that's how many of us did that.

• (1220)

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** Yes, of course, that's absolutely how you do it, but you might recall the Samara study that came out about three years ago and said that less than 15% of riding associations had websites. I think riding associations actually fly well below the radar of many busy women and men in our communities. Unless you're naturally connected to political brokers, you're not always sure about what's happening, or it's not always as transparent as it needs to be.

As a consequence, I think there's great merit in being clearer about the process from the get-go, so that women understand where the opportunity is. You can appreciate that most riding associations meet in the evening, as they would; they're volunteer-driven organizations. We all understand that, but I think information is power.

The studies out of the U.S., where they have far more resources to do this in a very intense way, show that women really value being asked and approached to run. You can't do it three months before an

election; you have to do it two years out. Because women plan, right? Often, that's because they are primary caregivers, or because they care significantly about their spouse and they want to ensure that it works for everybody. As a consequence, I do think better information, as well as outreach to key groups, would make a significant difference.

What we've seen through the NDP—and this is specific to their party and their culture, but it matters—is that they fielded 43% women. They have a policy that they go out to under-represented groups. It's systematic, it's thorough, and it has worked for that party. Is that the solution for every party? We don't know, but that shows it can be done. You can achieve better success.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives were the one party in this past election that dropped in terms of the percentage of women fielded. I think we do have to look systematically at where we can do better. But overall, clearly, with only 33% women on the ballot, I think this is a collective challenge and an opportunity to recruit more women.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** We all went through this process. We all are legislators, and we know that the majority of our work is here in this place. That's what we do. You did rhyme off a bunch of things that we are. We're fundraisers. We're advocates. That's all true.

I agree with what Mr. Reid said. I was a political staffer for 11 years before this and when I said that my previous boss couldn't attend an event because he was in Ottawa, nobody said, "Oh, well, that's it, this is ridiculous." I think they recognize that the job is here. You're a legislator. You need to be in that place doing your job.

I do agree with Mr. Christopherson. You can't be "Ottawashed", if you will. You do have to get back to your riding—

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** —but I think there's a delicate balance.

Also, I think that taking Fridays off or removing that sitting, with all that's going on around the country—job losses—just sends the wrong message. I think there are other ways to do this in terms of structuring votes after QP. We're all there anyway, and I think that's an easy way to rearrange your schedule.

Also, when we make changes, we have to recognize the flip side. There are a lot of people who already have moved their families here, and if we change something, that might affect the lives of those who have made that decision to bring them here to work. I agree that no solution is the best, that they all kind of suck, if you will, but "ya take the best ya got" and make a decision based on that.

I will also say, as a man, that family life did come in. That was the one thing that was thought of first. Before I ran for the nomination, before I ran for the election, and after I got elected, it was all factored in. I know there were a couple of men on our side—James Moore, Peter MacKay, and my predecessor, Barry Devolin—who made the decision not to run again because of their families. I think this is an issue. As times change, more men are getting involved in family life.

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** Just to be clear, we think that what's key is flexibility. Whether it's Fridays, or Mondays, or some combination, I think it's the flexibility that matters. I would also suggest that I think Parliament has an obligation to structure it, and to not leave it to the subjective discretion of a whip that somebody gets a Wednesday off if they need it. I actually think it's incumbent upon you to create structures that are tenable for all 338 of you. As for what that comes down to, that is really your purview. Friday is one way to potentially accomplish that, but it's not the only day. I think it's the flexibility that's important.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor, for five minutes.

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.):** First of all, thanks to all of you for your presentations today. It's certainly food for thought, and even though perhaps it's not all one-sided—it's a mix of information—it's really good for debate.

First and foremost, the government right now is not looking at eliminating Fridays as the absolute option, or having Fridays off. I really have a problem when I hear "Fridays off" because, again, it's going home and working in our ridings. But rather, our goal is really to achieve gender parity in the House, number one; and number two, to make sure that our Parliament is more inclusive. To achieve that is to have more family-friendly policies put in place.

I have no children, but six years ago I was asked to run for office and the reason I didn't was that I was taking care of my elderly mother who suffers from dementia. At the time when I calculated everything I just didn't think I could do it.

This time around I was asked again and I still had to shuffle things around, but I was encouraged that our party was looking at going towards these more family-friendly policies.

I just wonder if perhaps you could elaborate on the positive impacts that a compressed workweek or more family-friendly policies would have on recruiting more women in politics, having a more inclusive Parliament. How would it also benefit a work-life balance for the present parliamentarians who are here?

● (1225)

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** I think anyone who is running doesn't want to shirk caregiving responsibilities, whether it's with a young family.... I have three small children, now four, six, and eight, and of course have the luxury of living outside Ottawa, but I still do a commute. Obviously I think we're trying to balance women being seen as professional women, as well as caregivers.

Obviously the work women do in this House is moving that stick forward because women are able to take up that professional and occupational space and show other generations of women that it's possible.

In our view, a compressed week that has been undertaken in other parliaments, combined with some technological innovation, allow you to be effective and engaged in your riding and could potentially allow some of the work that's happening in the House, be it at committees like this, where we're hearing from Ms. Jabre from across the world.... I think there are ways to lever technology so you don't always have to do the commute on a week where, in fact, your

intensive caregiving responsibilities are amplified for some reason or another.

I think it goes back to flexibility and ensuring that MPs are able to achieve a very difficult balance. Nobody believes this is a utopia. Everybody understands that you all stood for election of your own volition. But that doesn't mean that we punish people who are here because of particular life circumstances that allow them to be human, that allow them to be the reasons they're here, which is as parents, community activists, caregivers, good neighbours—all of those things.

That's why the compressed week is interesting to us. It's been undertaken in other parliaments. It seems to have some use and effect. It's not deteriorating debate in any significant way. But it's one option of several.

We want you to be the best you can be as both a member of Parliament and as the person you are in the lives you lead with families and in your communities.

**The Chair:** Ms. Jabre, do you want to comment on that question?

**Ms. Kareen Jabre:** No, I don't have much to add. I think you've said it all.

Again, I come back to the compressed week issue. It's how you organize it, how much you allow for flexibility, and how much you use potentials that are out there. It's to strike a balance between being present in Parliament, being present in your constituencies, and being present in your families.

There is no miracle solution, that's for sure, and there are always going to be some people who will benefit more or not from any system you adopt. But I think the question is to offer opportunities and use tools that are out there. As Ms. Peckford said at the beginning, it is an opportunity today to reform the way you do your work, and maybe by organizing the debates differently, by fixing things in a different way, by allowing MPs to be visible in a different way by not necessarily being in the room, that will allow us this communication and this presence both in the media and in the constituencies. There are many ways to creatively meet the same objectives, but in a different way.

I don't have the right solution for you, but I do think there are ways of using the advantages of our time today to better meet your needs.

● (1230)

**Ms. Grace Lore:** Perhaps I could just briefly add something.

In addition to thinking about compressed workweeks or flexibility, Nancy mentioned in her opening presentation the accommodation during critical care periods, whether caring for newborns or for terminally ill family members. This does disproportionately fall to women. Having some accommodation over a set period of time, for specific small groups that need it, can leverage that technology, can use creative solutions to enable that and make it possible.

I'm actually eight months pregnant, so I couldn't be there in person, but I am able to call in today, right? There are options, in addition to the compressed workweek, that I think would be beneficial at critical periods.



**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Christopherson, three minutes.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** I'll give just a few thoughts, then, and if there's time for some comments, fine. We see the end coming fairly soon.

First of all, I think one of the best things we've done is a simple matter: having more votes right after question period. What a difference it is not having to come back or to break where you are for 6:00 or 6:30, which just takes the guts out of the evening when you still have receptions. That was a great move, and it didn't cost anything. The surprising thing is that we didn't do it a long time ago. It just makes so much sense.

Next, I appreciate the shout-out on the NDP procedure. I was trying to figure out a way to do that without looking like I was bragging.

There are two things on that. One is that there is also a reporting obligation on the part of the riding back to the party where they haven't gone, where they don't have candidates from under-represented groups, showing what the search procedure was, just to ensure that it actually was done.

The second thing I'll say, just to put the human angle in here, is that not all the ridings are real happy about that. It's not an easy one. There are a lot of ridings where they know who their candidate is, or they have an idea, and they look at this thing and go, "What's this nonsense they're sending us now? We have to do all this kind of stuff." You will get that kind of push-back, and it's no different in the NDP.

It comes down to leadership. It takes the top-of-the-house to lead it at a conference or convention, to get it as part of the fabric of the party, and then it's baked into the way you do things. My understanding is that there are fewer and fewer complaints now as we've gone on. It's just become part of the culture. But I'll tell you, in the beginning, holy smokes; you'd thought you'd ask them to give up their firstborn.

Next is the flexibility. I just wanted to mention that I was talking to our whip's assistant, and one of the advantages of having Friday the way we do it—I just put this out there to chew on—is that in and of itself it provides some flexibility. Because we don't hold voting that day, it's the same as every other day, but it does allow people different opportunities to come in and make speeches they otherwise wouldn't, or to trade off days so they can go back into their ridings. We never have enough time in our ridings. You can set up a meeting. You can maybe set it up for a Friday and get a switch, even if you're scheduled to be on House duty. There is some flexibility that the Friday being in there provides us, which we would lose if we took it out.

The other thing on that is, look, colleagues from all parties are workaholics. You know what? It's really geographically disadvantaged no matter how you do it. I can work late, late, late, staying in with family members at a barbeque or something, or hitting a backyard thing, or a 50th anniversary on my way out of town. I can massage it, because relatively I'm not that far, compared with some.

There will always be those who are coming in on the red-eye. My heart bleeds for my colleagues from B.C. when I see them on a Monday morning. Without saying a word, I can tell which ones went home and which ones stayed, just by looking at their faces.

So a lot of this is really the disadvantage of being further away from the capital, in that you'll always have more of these problems than we will.

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** Let's come to terms with that. We're the second largest country in the world. Maybe that does mean that you condense and cluster your Hill weeks to maximize time and to ensure that everybody gets their turn to debate. I think we come to terms with it. I don't think we need to passively accept that one of the largest countries in the world has to fling their MPs from coast to coast to coast on such a regular basis. That may not have a meaningful impact on sitting days, but I think you can do it differently.

I would beg everybody in this room, please do not be partisan on this Friday issue. I know it's turning partisan, and we are not taking a hard and fast line on whether it's Fridays or Mondays but for the women and men who are in this Parliament and in future parliaments, do the right thing, whatever it is, and find a way to make the commute tenable. I think that is the ask from the outside as the organization that sees and is saddened by a very slow and incremental rise in the percentage of women in this House. Ten years ago it was 22%, and now it's 26%. That is not huge movement. That's a slow movement.

I don't mean to intervene, I respect you greatly, but I think we have to deal with it. The human cost is, in our view, on all MPs. It's not fair, and the price is extremely high.

• (1235)

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Thank you. You ended my remarks. I appreciate you jumping in.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** That's a good way to end.

Before we ask the witnesses if they have any last quick closing comment on something they missed, does anyone have a pressing question on the committee they didn't get in?

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** I want to go back to this idea of spending time in the constituency versus on the Hill and ask about the fact that the modern era, particularly the era of social media and participation... I mean, internationally, IPU now talks about participatory politics.

The expectations on the part of the population of citizens to be engaged, to have a voice, and to have a say, have gone up significantly in the past decade or two. Not being in the constituency today, as opposed to 20 years ago, has far more implications because people do expect that kind of engagement. When you can talk a bit about the trends over time, I remember Ms. Jabre said that internationally the trend is that more time is being spent in constituencies and engaging populations because of this change toward more participatory politics and the involvement of citizens in politics.

**Ms. Kareen Jabre:** The trend has been to acknowledge there has been a gap and a weakness in politics. The way it is done is that you need to be much more inclusive and bring in the voice of your constituencies in your work.

That's been more present as you say, but what parliaments are doing more and more is using IT to get this participation in. That's where even Twitter is used in a constructive way to listen to people and to get their feedback and their input in whatever work is being carried out in Parliament. This is a way to respond to this need for a more inclusive political process, both in terms of being more present, but also compensated by a better use of IT and new tools of communication in order to bridge this gap.

This is definitely the next challenge for MPs. In part it's to remain relevant to their constituents and to not be completely an elite that is up there on the Hill and not present. That's definitely a challenge that you're going to have to constantly address. That's why transforming the way you work, the way you communicate, and how you reach out using tools is considered very crucial in making work more effective and more relevant.

**Dr. Gary Levy:** I think Ms. Vandenbeld may well be right in her analysis of the impact of social media and the need to be in the constituencies, but I'm not sure that is going to lead to better Parliament or better public policy.

Since we're nearly at the end of the meeting, let me toss out a controversial idea and say that I'm heartened by what's going on in the Senate. Maybe we'll have a Senate with people who will have expertise and who will have the time to spend studying public policy issues and doing it in a less partisan way. This may devolve more to the Senate and less to the House.

That's an ongoing issue, and I'm sure that will set Mr. Christopherson off.

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

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** I know Grace wanted to add something to this.

**Ms. Grace Lore:** Someone mentioned that some MPs have their families move to Ottawa. My research suggests this is more common among men, both in Canada and in the U.K. It's easier for them to move their families than it is for women, so I think there again the flexibility and thinking more broadly about ways to combine families does matter for a number of women in politics.

I think we also talked a lot about compressed workweeks and hours and Fridays, but I think there is still the critical question about critical caregiving time, either at the start or the end of life. Because this disproportionately falls on women, it should be addressed to make a more inclusive parliament. It can be done using technology and by recognizing the work that's also going on in the constituency at the time.

● (1240)

**Ms. Nancy Peckford:** To add to this very briefly, Sheila Copps is on our national advisory board; she's one of the reasons I'm in politics. She was one of my role models when I was growing up in Newfoundland; I have tremendous respect for her. I believe her experience of a family-friendly legislature is unique to her because at the time, she was the only woman in the House with a baby.

Obviously, people were very personable and human and compassionate about her need to juggle in an age where you couldn't even bring an infant into the House of Commons.

It was said last week with one baby maybe you can make something relatively family-friendly, but try five babies in the House; it's not going to work. You need to anticipate the very real possibility that women will give birth during this Parliament; men will become new dads, and there is a need to be in close proximity to your small child in those very early months. It is about the children too, and having had three children, I can tell you that access to primary caregivers in those very early weeks and months is critical. Having to go back and forth from the Hill to your riding, especially when it's very far away, has as much of a toll on a small child, on a baby, as it does on the MP.

It's not ideal; I don't believe it's ethical to be requiring women, postpartum, to be doing that kind of commute. I think it's incumbent upon you to come up with the solution that won't only meet the need of NDP Christine Moore; her kid will age out and she'll be able to manage what she's been doing now. Upon the birth of any other child to an MP in this House, I think you're going to have to deal with it, and I would hope that this committee has the courage to anticipate and put structures into play that make sense for mother, dad, and child.

**The Chair:** Do any of the witnesses have any closing remarks or something that hasn't been covered already?

Thank you, everyone, for being here. It's been very enlightening with a lot of diverse opinions. We really appreciate it, and if you forgot something feel free to send it in writing to the committee.

We will excuse the witnesses.

I've raised this a couple of times and we've all had the chance to look at it, but I'm wondering if it's possible to deal with, as the Speaker suggested, giving him the ability, in a very short time, I think it's within a week, to set the hours that make sense when there's an emergency in Parliament. We could have an emergency any day.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I was supposed to talk to Andrew Scheer and I forgot.

**The Chair:** Okay. Let me ask you another question.

We got a letter this morning—it seems fairly administrative to me—from the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, who would like to reflect the change in wording that's used with the department to change to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. Basically changing the word “aboriginal” to “indigenous”, which is a standing order change, so we have to recommend it.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** To the unanimous recommendation of the committee. It kind of matters.

● (1245)

**The Chair:** Yes, we have a copy of the letter. We'll pass it around. I'm just seeing if it says what the vote was.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** I believe it's unanimous, from what I heard from colleagues and staff, but it's something we should look up.

**The Chair:** Is there anyone in the room from whips' offices or anyone who knows this?

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** It was unanimous. That's what I heard and that's what we're also hearing from other colleagues right now.

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld:** Our staff was in the room and said that it was unanimous.

**The Chair:** Okay, we had a member who was at the committee, and it was unanimous.

Mr. Reid, are you going to move that?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Sure.

**The Chair:** We'll do a report that basically recommends to the House that the committee name be changed to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs in Standing Order 104(2)(a).

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** We have 15 minutes left.

One of the outstanding things we're working on is another way of dealing with conflict of interest. Did you want to speak to that, Ms. Taylor?

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor:** I believe that we've reached a date that we all can meet and just have an informal meeting per Mr. Reid's good suggestion last week. We've come up with, I believe, May 3. We could meet for supper and have a discussion about the policy. I can make reservations in the Parliamentary Restaurant, if that's okay with everyone.

**The Chair:** Just as far as structure goes, this would be an informal meeting, would it?

**Mr. David Christopherson:** It would be illegal.

**The Chair:** Not at committee.

We'll bring the recommendations back here.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Bring your chequebook.

**The Chair:** It's a no-host dinner, so everyone bring money for dinner.

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

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Come on, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** No, the clerk won't let me, you know. I would love to.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** If one of us paid for it and there was an expectation that we would act differently, we would all turn down the invitation.

**The Chair:** Yes, but if we go, it would be a conflict of interest.

Great. So, we'll do that. Seven o'clock, Parliamentary Restaurant, Tuesday May 3, and bring your documents.

The next meeting is Thursday, and we have some more witnesses in the first half and then Elections Canada on the main estimates in the second hour.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I don't want to move it today, I just want to draw to your attention a notice of motion that the committee invite the Minister of Democratic Institutions as well as her officials to appear before the committee to discuss the main estimates for 2016-17 sometime before the end of May. I can give that to the clerk.

**The Chair:** Can I just let the clerk speak to that?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Joann Garbig):** This committee has been referred estimates for the office of the Chief Electoral Officer for the House of Commons and for the parliamentary protective service.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Have you been given anything with relation to the conduct of the department, including the \$10 million that is going to be allocated?

**The Clerk:** No, I believe it's been referred elsewhere to a different committee.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Do you mind finding out where it has been referred?

**The Clerk:** I can check.

**The Chair:** We'll let you know on Thursday.

Does anyone want to do anything else today?

• (1250)

**Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.):** Yes. The Speaker's...

**Mr. David Christopherson:** We had to bump it to Friday.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Arnold, this is my fault. I took it to our former Speaker, Mr. Scheer, and gave it to him to give him your comments. I meant to get it back yesterday and I simply forgot, so I'll try to get him today at the House after this meeting.

**The Chair:** Is everyone all right? There is nothing else for today.

The meeting is adjourned.





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