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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 34 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee is meeting today to continue our review on the House of Commons' virtual hybrid proceedings provisions, pursuant to the House Order of June 23, 2022.

[*English*]

Our first panel consists of a mix of democratic engagement and media witnesses. Our second panel consists of experts knowledgeable on issues of auditory health and injuries. I would like to let the committee know that all of our virtual witnesses have undergone their pre-meeting connectivity and audio tests.

We're welcoming today, from Equal Voice, Eleanor Fast, executive director, and Maggie Patterson, director of programs. From The Honest Talk, we have co-founders Catherine Clark and Jennifer Stewart. From Samara Centre for Democracy, we have Sabreena Delhon, executive director, who is joining us by video conference today.

There are different people speaking, combinations and individuals, so we will time you. I will try not to cut you off—but I will, because time is very limited—so if you can help me help you, that would be great.

I would also request that all comments be made through the chair. I know that sometimes we like to speak directly to each other. I get that. As long as we're maintaining decorum, I'm good with it. Otherwise I will be the chair.

The last thing is on interpretation. If you can, just speak in such a way that the interpreters can do their work, because both of the official languages are very active in this committee.

With that, I'll pass it over to Equal Voice.

Welcome.

Ms. Maggie Patterson (Director of Programs, Equal Voice): Thank you, Madam Chair, for inviting Equal Voice here today.

Equal Voice is a non-profit, multipartisan organization dedicated to electing more women to all levels of government in Canada. For over 20 years, Equal Voice has been advocating for gender parity

by working with political parties to equip women for success in politics and to retain women as elected officials.

The year 2021 was the 100th anniversary of the election of the first woman MP. Still, only 30% of MPs are women, and Canada has yet to elect an openly non-binary MP.

Part of increasing the diversity of MPs is making Parliament a more inclusive and accessible workplace.

We recommend that Parliament continue to offer hybrid participation. I will briefly describe two areas of evidence to support our recommendation. More information on these studies is in our brief to the committee.

First, our research shows that hybrid proceedings support gender-inclusive legislatures. In February 2020, after three years of research, Equal Voice launched a report with 10 recommendations that federal, provincial and territorial legislatures can take in order to make them better places for women and gender-diverse people to work.

A major finding was that legislatures need to modernize. Modernization includes having remote participation for MPs who cannot or should not travel to Ottawa due to illness, pregnancy, caregiving or other circumstances.

Second, our research shows that hybrid proceedings have the potential to attract more women to politics. Equal Voice commissioned a public opinion survey, published in January 2022, to better understand views on politics. It was found that 86% of the public, of all genders, said that we need more women as elected representatives in Canada, and 85% of respondents said that having more women in politics would have a positive impact on government policy, actions and decisions. Canadians want more women in politics.

We also surveyed 1,500 young women from the general public about their views on politics. Sixty-seven per cent of women think that being an elected representative is one of the most impactful ways to serve their communities, yet only 39% say politics offers a work-life balance and 81% of women feel that running for office would be difficult to manage with other responsibilities in their life.

In addition, Equal Voice regularly meets with women and gender-diverse people from all political backgrounds across Canada. We consistently see women choosing to run at the municipal level, often in order to be able to stay physically close to their families and communities. This situation is in contrast to the exceedingly long travel times for some MPs. From our discussions, we have strong reason to believe that more women will seek federal office if hybrid participation is available.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to give these opening remarks.

We look forward to the committee's questions.

● (1105)

The Chair: Thank you very much for those opening remarks and using your time so well. That was really well done.

I will now pass it over to The Honest Talk.

Welcome.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Catherine Clark (Co-Founder, The Honest Talk): Good morning, Madam Chair, Vice-Chairs and members of the committee.

My colleague Jennifer Stewart and I are pleased to be here with you to express our thoughts on a hybrid Parliament with you today. Thank you for the invitation.

[*English*]

Jennifer and I are going to be sharing our time, but we are also the co-founders of The Honest Talk, which is a podcast aimed at telling the stories of female leaders across Canada from a variety of spheres of influence. We are also mothers and communications entrepreneurs.

We're delighted to be here with all of you today.

We'd like to begin by underlining our belief that continuing to embrace a hybrid approach for the House of Commons is not a partisan issue. Rather, it is an opportunity. It is an opportunity to attract to public service more women, more people from diverse backgrounds and more individuals from various regions of the country, and that can only strengthen democracy.

We all know that our governance structures are enhanced by diversity. We know that more voices in a room, voices representing different lived experiences, lead to overall stronger outcomes, whether that room is a boardroom, a classroom, a committee room or the seat of our Canadian democracy, the House of Commons.

However, up until the past two years, our governance structures have functioned on a one-size-fits-all approach—in person or nothing—and that approach, in our opinion, is the enemy of diversity. That is why we are firmly in support of a hybrid House of Commons.

It is 2022. We live in an age that puts a paramount and justified focus on fostering and ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion. Given that, why would we not strive to make our seat of democracy the most accessible, equitable place that it can be?

[*Translation*]

Over the past 31 months, we've seen businesses, organizations and governments propelled into a new way of doing things that would have been unimaginable before COVID-19. Most went entirely virtual, and successfully made that transition. And then they went hybrid, because that's what their modern workforce required.

[*English*]

This begs the question, why should members of Parliament always be required to fly, take the train or drive to Ottawa to partake in parliamentary business? If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that doing things one way because that's how we've always done them is neither efficient nor reflective of our new reality.

Ms. Jennifer Stewart (Co-Founder, The Honest Talk): The House of Commons did extraordinary work to adapt to health regulations put in place due to the pandemic. It took a lot of study, consultation and effort to shift policies that had not seen much procedural change since Confederation.

It also took major investments in technology to ensure that members were able to safely participate in conversations and effectively represent their constituencies. With all of this learning and technology now in place and with the money spent, why would our federal elected officials take a step back?

Instead, our parliamentarians have an opportunity to continue to demonstrate leadership from the top and to create a truly 21st century House of Commons. We have an opportunity not to just talk about diversity, equity and inclusion at the highest levels, but to make it a reality.

Of course, there will be roadblocks and learning experiences. Equal access to broadband Internet is not assured in many communities, especially those that are rural or remote; cybersecurity is an ongoing concern that requires serious thought and attention; and a member of Parliament participating remotely must be assured of the same access and opportunity as someone in person.

We are at a critical moment in time. We can learn from the past turbulent 31 months and continue to adopt new technologies and maintain positive change, or we can stagnate. The private and public sectors are embracing the flexibility of a hybrid structure, because, to put it bluntly, it is the new path forward. It's time for our elected officials to get on board and to do the same.

Thank you.

● (1110)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to The Samara Centre for Democracy.

Welcome.

Ms. Sabreena Delhon (Executive Director, Samara Centre for Democracy): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to speak with the committee today.

My name is Sabreena Delhon, and I'm the executive director of the Samara Centre for Democracy, which is a non-partisan registered charity dedicated to making Canada's democratic culture more accessible, responsive and inclusive.

We have also been studying the lived experience of elected officials for 15 years. Our recommendation is that the House of Commons maintain hybrid proceedings for both the House and its committees. This recommendation is informed by our MP exit interview project, which entails conducting rigorous, in-depth interviews with former members of Parliament. Our view is also informed by recent research on hybrid workspaces within the future of work discourse.

We advise maintaining hybridity for three reasons. It offers Parliament an opportunity to be more inclusive and representative, as my colleagues have indicated; to function as a flexible and contemporary workplace that can attract and retain top talent; and to increase efficiency by saving money and travel time.

Our conclusion is shaped by the under-representation of various groups in the House, including women and those in the LGBTQ+, indigenous and visible minority communities. Our interviews with former MPs over the years have underscored how the grinding schedule of weekly travel to and from Ottawa, particularly from regions situated far from Ontario, can create a barrier for women with families, particularly for women who lack abundant resources to put toward child care.

This aligns with findings of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which currently ranks Canada 61st in gender representation among national Parliaments. They recommend that gender-sensitive Parliaments allow teleworking as a strategy to increase equity. While there was initial concern that gender representation would be compromised with limited in-person convening, innovations in the function of hybrid Parliament have made it possible for virtual work to increase democratic representation across genders.

Our research also indicates that MPs from under-represented groups often feel alienated in Ottawa. We believe that if representatives have more opportunity to work from and within their communities, it will reduce that sense of alienation that they may experience in the House. There's also the longer-term effect of encouraging MPs from under-represented groups not only to enter into politics, but also to stay.

The retention of MPs from under-represented groups is worth noting. If the House wants to attract and retain high-quality individuals with varied training and innovative problem-solving abilities, it will need to be responsive to larger changes happening in Canada's new world of work.

Hybrid work options are an indicator of a modern employer, and workplaces across sectors are institutionalizing the option. Research shows that people who have worked in a hybrid environment over the past two years strongly wish to retain the option going forward. This is particularly true for those with disabilities, women of colour and LGBTQ+ individuals. Institutionalizing hybrid proceed-

ings for the House and its committees is a key way to demonstrate that Parliament is a responsive and contemporary work environment that is committed to attracting, retaining and supporting top talent.

The Samara Centre has long held the position that the House should foster a workplace culture that facilitates collegiality and informal relationship building. We believe that this can be accomplished through a combination of virtual and in-person interactions. Our survey of MPs in 2020 found strong support for a hybrid model of Parliament. This is readily within reach to set as a standard practice, now that our use of virtual technologies has evolved and become commonplace, adaptable, effective and user-friendly.

Beyond equity, hybrid proceedings offer incredible efficiencies. The transit time recovered each week for MPs who live in ridings located far from Ottawa is significant. Our research has consistently revealed the mental and physical toll that constant travel can take on MPs. Making hybrid proceedings permanent opens up considerably more time for constituency work, while protecting the health and well-being of MPs—

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you so much for those opening comments. We look forward to learning more during the question and answer sessions.

Ms. Sabreena Delhon: Thank you.

The Chair: With that, we will start our six-minute round. We will be commencing with Mr. Nater, followed by Ms. Sahota, Madame Gaudreau and Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Nater, the floor is yours.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our panel of witnesses this morning. It was quite an interesting commentary. I'm going to try to jump around to all three sets of witnesses. I'm sure the chair will give me lots of flexibility with my time.

I'll start online with Samara. In my past life, I had the great privilege of reading through the transcripts from a large number of MP exit interviews, which I found absolutely fascinating, for some research I was doing at the time. One of the things that struck me about the MP exit interviews was the focus that a lot of the MPs placed on the informal aspects of Parliament, such as the unofficial encounters, the hallway conversations and coffee in the cafeteria.

Yesterday in the House, we heard some wonderful tributes to the late Bill Blaikie. The leader of the NDP talked about the Robbie Burns nights on the Hill, when MPs could get together outside of the daily debate.

My question is, what challenges do you see with a shift to virtual? These kinds of informal interactions, informal encounters, events and activities that typically take place throughout the precinct.... People aren't able to have those interactions.

Ms. Sabreena Delhon: This challenge is not unique to Parliament. It's something that a lot of different workplaces are struggling with right now.

Our recommendation is the creation of an inclusive hybrid workplace that's agile and responsive. That entails getting feedback from parliamentarians about what is and isn't working, and we also advise on being particularly intentional about those in-person interactions so that you have those collision spaces, so that you have those informal opportunities to just be human beings together over a coffee.

Making these opportunities meaningful and productive will ensure that the hybrid culture is not only functional but also thriving. Hybrid is not just "all virtual all the time". It's really important for us to understand that. It's about making better use of the in-person time when it is available.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you for that. I may come back to that second point.

One of the challenges I've seen over the past couple of years since we've gone virtual is with civility within the House of Commons itself. I've actually seen a marked decrease in civility and an increase in incivility, partially, I believe, because some MPs don't see each other face to face.

Do you agree with that? Have you observed that as well, this incivility that has increased since virtual Parliament began?

Ms. Sabreena Delhon: Yes. We track toxicity in the online conversation through a project called SAMbot, where we use AI to monitor this.

I don't think an increase in the number of hours spent in the same room together can mitigate the increase in toxicity in the political conversation. It's about having a set of standards, an established code of conduct and culture. That will make the difference. Again, it's about using that in-person time with clear intentions and expectations of how contact will unfold and creating opportunities for civility to become the norm in a way that is aligned with the future of work in Canada.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you for that.

I'm going to turn to our guests in the room. I have only about three minutes left, so for an efficient use of my time, Madam Chair, what I'll do is give a couple of questions and invite both sets of panellists to respond.

First of all, Ms. Patterson's opening comments mentioned some of the considerations for when virtual Parliament would be an option. What struck me was that you made the comment about family responsibilities, caregiving and illness, which I think are very much common-sense ones. What you didn't mention were partisan considerations, partisan events. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I will ask the question as to whether or not you see this as an option for partisan-related events as well. That's a question for both sets of guests, on political events in ridings or in other peo-

ple's ridings across the country where one could take advantage of that.

That's the first question. I'll allow both groups to respond.

My second question is on the involvement of the whip. I say this cognizant that there's a former whip sitting two people over from me, but certainly there are always those unintended consequences. I would appreciate any input you may have on the inadvertent challenges we may have by giving the whip increased power, such as increased authority, whether formal or informal, over the activities of parliamentarians related to a virtual Parliament, and therefore giving the whips the authority to say when a member may or may not be there virtually, or when a member may or may not be in their riding or in another person's riding. What are the unintended consequences and how may we be able to mitigate those?

I'll put those questions out there. Maybe we'll start with Equal Voice.

• (1120)

The Chair: You have a minute combined to answer.

Mr. John Nater: I went as fast as I could, Madam Chair.

Ms. Eleanor Fast (Executive Director, Equal Voice): Thank you very much for the questions.

To focus on your first question, as to when hybrid should be used, our recommendation at Equal Voice is very much focused on hybrid participation when people either should not or cannot travel to the House for reasons related to illness, pregnancy or caregiving responsibilities, as you noted.

Beyond that, this is why the work of the committee is so important, obviously, for your colleagues and the parties and so on to think about these questions beyond the times when you actually can't come, when perhaps it's appropriate not to come.

Ms. Jennifer Stewart: Thank you for the question.

I think it's incredibly important that we don't politicize hybrid Parliament. This provides flexibility for women and men to come to Parliament when it works for their professional and personal schedules and, when it absolutely does not, to have the ability to participate in a hybrid environment.

I'm a business owner. I prefer being in a working environment, but certainly, as a mother, there are times when I need to be home with a sick child or to balance an appointment or the priorities that life throws my way.

I think it's truly about flexibility. It's not black and white. There are many shades of grey as to how hybrid should be implemented.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll pass it now to Ms. Sahota for up to six minutes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

What we heard quite a bit at our last committee meeting was pretty much an “all or nothing” type of mentality with some of the questions we were hearing, so I found it very interesting, Ms. Clark, that you mentioned that this is not an “in person or nothing” type of approach. We also heard quite a lot about how we will be giving away some of the benefits that in-person proceedings provide to a healthy democracy and a functioning Parliament.

I'm wondering if I could get some comments from all three groups today about how we can make it work within the grey, and about how we can approach this in a systematic, professional and responsible way without damaging our democracy.

Could I hear from Equal Voice first, please?

Ms. Eleanor Fast: Thank you so much for the question.

I think one of the important things about hybrid participation is that it actually allows people to continue to work at times when they otherwise might not be able to. Before we had this option, if people were too ill or were unable to come to the House, of course they weren't able to participate in the work of the House and be on the committees and so on. Obviously, hybrid proceedings give people an opportunity to do that.

I don't think it's a question of in-person versus virtual participation. It really is taking advantage of the opportunities that the technology provides us with. As we outlined in our opening remarks, we believe—and we have research to show—that people are more likely to enter politics and to want to be part of the system if they know that hybrid will be there for them at the times when they need it.

Thank you.

Ms. Jennifer Stewart: If I may, I think we need to adopt a 30,000-foot perspective on this. It is unfortunate to miss an event with colleagues. I appreciate that business can occur at those events or that key relationships can be built, but we're talking about leveraging the past 31 months, leveraging learning opportunities, and modernizing and innovating a process that desperately needs to be innovated to attract and retain the brightest to serve as parliamentarians.

Thank you.

• (1125)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Go ahead, Ms. Delhon.

Ms. Sabreena Delhon: Thank you.

Perhaps with the exception of select circumstances, we recommend that remote participation be available for all MPs at any time. This is to mitigate the liabilities of “in group” versus “out group” dynamics developing. I think it's important for us to think about the way we live in the context of how we work. We engage in a lot of virtual forums of connection and communication. Through group chats by text, for instance, a lot of us stayed connected, especially during the worst stages of the pandemic. There are parallels from that that we can bring into the world of work, where we can foster meaningful relationships, collegiality and connection. Just because it's virtual, that doesn't mean it's not real.

This is an important parallel to the online harms conversation. When we talk about toxicity online and we qualify it as online, there's a diminishing element to it, as if it isn't real. There's a profound and important way for us to build connection through virtual technologies, through text and through meetings like this, which are extremely valuable and efficient.

Another dimension for us to consider here is the incredible cost savings. It's wonderful for people to be able to get together with their colleagues, conduct business, share information and develop relationships, but with a reduction in travel comes an opportunity to reduce expenses to the public purse and an opportunity to redirect resources back to constituents and back to communities.

There's also the fact that a healthy MP, one whose health, mental health and overall well-being are cared for in a sustainable manner, will be a more functional and effective person. MPs are people, and we need to factor that into this design.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I have one quick follow-up for the witnesses from The Honest Talk. We also heard quite a bit about accountability and about how, if we stay in this hybrid format, there will be less accountability. As well, coming off what Ms. Delhon said about mental health, we've heard the opposite argument, that there should be a complete separation of family and the roles and responsibilities in the constituency versus here in Parliament as a legislature.

What would you have to say about that?

Ms. Catherine Clark: Perhaps I'll start with that last question first.

As a person who spent the first 16 years of her life as the child of a federal politician, I can say that it is impossible to separate your personal life and your professional life all the time. I don't think it's reasonable to expect that in 2022 we would ask anyone to try to do so. Everyone is a professional when they come to Ottawa, but life intervenes.

The point of a hybrid Parliament is to allow the kind of flexibility that ensures that the House of Commons becomes a modern workplace and that it is the kind of workplace that people want to join. The reason they want to join is so that we can strengthen democracy.

This kind of change is hard. Any challenging changes are hard to do, but they are also the right thing to do.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Madame Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses, who are all women. I love to see that.

Many questions have already been asked by my colleagues. I would now like to address accountability in greater depth.

As you know, ladies, parliamentarians play their role 26 weeks a year, not year-round. We already have a set calendar and we can organize our use of the time accordingly.

I would like to ask Ms. Delhon a question about accountability and democracy.

When an event occurs in front of the media camera, journalists are able to speak with MPs and draw information out of them. Obviously, virtual meetings do not allow for the same proximity or the same dialogue.

How can we maintain a healthy democracy in this context, when someone is able to slip away behind a monitor or disconnect?

• (1130)

[*English*]

Ms. Sabreena Delhon: In terms of accountability to the electorate, to the public, it lies in the evolution. If Parliament isn't able to adapt and align with the future of work in Canada and with the way the rest of the world is looking to conduct work, there lies a lack of accountability within that reluctance.

It's important for us to remember that Parliament Hill is not a static institution. It has adapted before to the changing needs of the country and to technology. We saw this during the Second World War and with the advent of more affordable air travel. It's that evolution that has the accountability baked into it.

To be certain, in-person interactions are valuable and critical, and we're talking about combining the two. The alternative here is that if we remove virtual completely, it's in person or nothing. This option is about in person and something.

With the increasing normalization and socialization of how we use technologies like Zoom today, it has become more immediate and human in the way we're able to speak and communicate with each other. We've seen this in our exit interviews with MPs. This is the first time we've done.... Over the last few months, we've been working on our third iteration of this study, and all of our interviews have been on Zoom. We take care to establish a rapport and an atmosphere that enables our respondents to feel comfortable being forthcoming and sharing their lived experiences with us. There are ways to draw from that in professional contexts.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: You have hit precisely on a point that I would like to hear you say more about.

As they say, since everyone can use Zoom, we can create outreach events, and we can adopt procedures to have a good atmosphere and for it to be constructive. I heard Ms. Clark, for example, say that it was important to ensure diversity. Personally, when I am sick, I am sick. I look after my health and I do not want to have to work because a hybrid model offers me another option for working.

With that said, how can remote participation ensure inclusion when informal conversations happen at after-five get-togethers like the one I was at yesterday with representatives of Quebec universities, for example, or after testifying at a committee? If I decide to work from home more, for example, I am going to miss out on these informal conversations. I am hearing about various benefits,

but how do we counteract the disadvantages of working remotely, when we know that it will not be possible to adhere to the principle of inclusion?

Ms. Catherine Clark: It is essential to retain these various kinds of conversations, no doubt about that. What we are proposing is not that people participate in proceedings only in person or only virtually. We are very definitely proposing a hybrid formula.

I know that in your role as a legislator, you are going to miss out on some conversations that will take place in person. The thing that is key is flexibility. We have to create a modern environment where people are able to work.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: You agree that there is a real difference between what can be done in committee, what can be done in the House of Commons, and what can be done in our ridings. I assure you, personally, I hold virtual meetings with people in my riding.

With that said, I really do put the emphasis on the role of legislator. For the 26 weeks when the House sits, all parties and their whips have to juggle members' presence, particularly for votes.

I am not opposed to technology; quite the opposite. In fact, amazing success has been achieved using the app.

However, we have to adopt very specific parameters to avoid situations where a person ultimately decides to stay home, for example, just because they don't want to travel.

Can you tell me more about that?

• (1135)

[*English*]

Ms. Eleanor Fast: Thank you for the question.

You talked about the successes we've seen with hybrid Parliament in the last two years. Obviously, COVID was really terrible, but Equal Voice had been advocating for some kind of remote participation for several years before COVID. We were always told that it was absolutely not possible. It was tradition that you had to be in the House.

But COVID made it happen. I think we have this wonderful opportunity to build on the technological advances during COVID to see that the success is carried forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Blaney, the floor is yours for six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I thank all the witnesses for being here today. I find this incredibly interesting.

It really brings to mind a day that I spent in the riding with a woman named Karen, who invited me to spend the day with her. She lives her life in a wheelchair. She put me in one too, and we rolled around a small part of one of the communities I represent.

First of all, I have muscles in my arms and my shoulders that I didn't even know existed until that day. But what was really powerful about that was just looking at all the small things that really excluded her. One of the things she sent me home with that I always carry with me is that when you make things accessible, it's better for everyone, regardless of whether you're able-bodied or not. That really hit home for me. Everything that we can do as human beings to make life more accessible opens doors that we may not know are closed.

We have heard here today about the importance of relationship building and the challenges that can be provided if you're not together. I really appreciate what people are saying, that this is not all or nothing. This is about creating a way to include people who might be excluded because of things beyond their control.

To all three of you, beginning with Ms. Delhon, how is this going to open doors? What are the codes of conduct or practices we can do that will create opportunities for relationships? I keep hearing about this blockage to relationships. How can we explore how to build relationships even if people participate sometimes virtually?

I also want to recognize two things. First, most of our members are sitting in the House. I mean, people look at the camera every day and see people. The majority of our members are already here from every party. The other thing is that when we were totally in virtual Parliament, I found that the decorum went up in some ways. If you were yelling at someone, you had to turn on your mike, and your picture was in front. There isn't the same mentality as when you're in a group yelling. I just want to acknowledge those two things.

Specifically, then, do you have recommendations about how we can make relationships if we're virtual, how we include people and how this will make it accessible?

Perhaps I could start with you, Ms. Delhon.

Ms. Sabreena Delhon: Thank you.

It's an important observation that the performative aspect is diminished when people are joining from home or from a different location. When you're joining through a remote context, you're more focused on the task and you're bringing a form of yourself that is not tied to looking or sounding a certain way, or participating by default in, perhaps, an adversarial manner. That performative approach is harder when you're on your own in an office, for instance.

I think there's a real opportunity to increase relevance and responsiveness, demonstrate evolution and showcase Parliament as a

modern and contemporary democracy by drawing on technologies and testing and seeing what works, as I mentioned. Do a pulse check of what is and isn't working for MPs.

There is a range of different tools available for communication. It's not just virtual meetings. There are instant messaging platforms that you can use for this. We have seen an increasing number of companies, non-profit organizations, universities and other entities draw on technologies like Zoom, Google Meet, Slack and other project management types of software. These are not expensive tools. They are worthy of testing. Again, bringing that intentionality to the in-person opportunities is key.

It's also important from a democratic perspective to offer the choice. That is the dominant theme in the future of work discourse right now. If we're looking to bring the best and the brightest to lead us in our democracy, it is a non-starter not to have a hybrid option to the conditions of work. It's important for us to consider that in terms of relevance, evolution, modernization and efficiency, as well.

• (1140)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

I'll go to The Honest Talk. Go ahead.

Ms. Jennifer Stewart: Thank you for the question.

I come back to the notion that hybrid Parliament is covered by a number of grey areas, in the sense that it's not black and white. I very much doubt that parliamentarians will elect to stay home when they have a duty to serve their country and strengthen their democracy. This is about flexibility. It's about options and being able to work remotely, if that's what needs to occur to accommodate personal or family obligations.

We can look to corporations all across Canada that have modernized their workplaces and have done so very successfully and in a fiscally positive way. Adopt those models and utilize those best practices.

Ms. Eleanor Fast: We've had women in the House of Commons for 100 years and still only 30% of MPs are women. I think we should all be concerned with how to increase representation. That comes into inclusion and accessibility. Of course, when we talk about the number of women with intersectional identities, like Black women, indigenous women, women of colour, LGBTQ and so on, they are even less represented. It is about accessibility, to some extent.

Statistics Canada tells us that women are twice as likely to take on caregiving responsibilities, even if those women are working full time outside of the home. I think this an issue that can help increase representation in the House.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're now going to the second round, starting with Mr. Cooper, followed by Mrs. Romanado.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for their thoughtful presentations.

I'm going to pose my first question to Equal Voice.

You cited some data around work-life balance. I will challenge that a bit. I agree that it's very important that we try to strive for work-life balance, to the degree that it is possible in a demanding job like that of a member of Parliament. The reality is that it is tough on families. It is tough on couples. There's no question about that. At the same time, we sit for 26 weeks a year. For nearly half of the year, we're not sitting in Ottawa. We can be back at home in our ridings. There are constituency weeks.

When we are here, the days are often incredibly long. I got into the office at 8 a.m. this morning. The House is sitting until 10 p.m., due to a take-note debate. I'm going to be participating in that debate. I don't expect that I'll be out of here before probably 10 p.m.

My constituents appreciate that when I'm here, I'm debating legislation and studying legislation at committee. When I'm back in the riding, I'm attending events and meeting with constituents. Of course, my staffers are meeting with and helping constituents every single day.

From a work-life balance standpoint, how does it enhance the work-life balance, given the demands of what happens on a day-to-day basis when the House is sitting, and coupled with what will inevitably be the expectation that you're at community events at the same time?

Ms. Eleanor Fast: Thank you.

MPs work incredibly hard. All of us are incredibly grateful for the service you all give to the community and the country.

Certainly, we think the recommendations that Equal Voice is making benefit everybody, men and women. From the surveys we've done, 81% of women feel that running for office would be difficult to manage with other responsibilities in their lives. We did not survey men as well, so I don't have the comparable number for men, but work-life balance is really important for everyone, certainly.

When we think about the benefits of hybrid participation, what we're talking about is that when people cannot or should not come to Ottawa, they're able to do that and yet are still able to fulfill their responsibilities as MPs with things like voting. If, for example, someone has a very ill family member whom they absolutely need to be with, and yet they are still able to vote and make that decision, they can do that. They're not required to be away from that person.

• (1145)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

As you said earlier, it would be in limited circumstances that you would contemplate members taking advantage of using the virtual option as opposed to being here in Ottawa. Am I correct in that, or do you have any specific ideas around that? If we were to maintain the hybrid model, are there some limitations that you would recommend? I think most members of Parliament try to do their best to be here to represent their constituents, but what do you do if some members simply don't show up in Ottawa?

Ms. Eleanor Fast: With regard to the full parameters of when hybrid would be used, I think that's really a question for this committee, I guess, to make recommendations on, as well as your col-

leagues and the parties and everything. We certainly think that those situations should include times like pregnancy, illness, caregiving and so on.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Michael Cooper: My time has expired, then.

The Chair: I really enjoy your generosity. Thank you.

Mrs. Romanado, go ahead, please.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to welcome all the witnesses here today. Thank you so much for your expert insight.

I want to focus on two things. First, I want to follow up on Mr. Cooper's comment.

There's a report entitled "The Remotely Representative House? Lesson Learning From the Hybrid Commons", by Dr. Jessica Smith and Professor Sarah Childs, with regard to what you do with a member of Parliament who decides to participate virtually only. I'm wondering if you would agree with this statement: "As is now, the electorate will decide whether they are well-represented by their...MP's way of working."

Ms. Catherine Clark: I believe that we live in a democracy, that the electorate is intelligent, and that if their member of Parliament is not doing their job, they will know it. That person will swiftly learn the will of the people.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

On that note, I'm glad we're talking about the opportunity to reform the way we do what we do. We've been talking a lot about flexibility.

I want to thank you, Ms. Stewart, for bringing that up, because we're talking about a hybrid Parliament, which is a blend of virtual and in-person. We seem to be always talking about these two extremes, but what we're talking about here is "life happens". If something were to happen and you need to be in your riding.... Day care calls; your child is sick and no one else can watch the child, so you need to be there. Things happen in life.

Ms. Clark, you mentioned being the daughter of a parliamentarian. We've heard from other parliamentarians and we've heard from other witnesses, but we haven't heard from a family member of a parliamentarian. In your expert opinion, having lived through this, would you recommend a hybrid Parliament in terms of assisting parliamentarians and their families in being able to still continue to do what we need to do in both parts of our lives?

Ms. Catherine Clark: Yes. In fact, not only do I recommend a hybrid Parliament in terms of assisting families, but I also believe that it assists the electorate. I believe that having a member of Parliament who is able to represent the people of their constituency from home, if in fact they cannot for some reason make it to Ottawa or from Ottawa, allows them the best of both worlds.

In fact, that is what a hybrid system is about. It is not about never showing up in the House of Commons. It is about allowing people to have the flexibility to do their jobs to the very best of their abilities.

• (1150)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'm not sure if Equal Voice and Samara want to jump in on that as well.

Ms. Sabreena Delhon: If I may, I think it's important to understand that the virtual option is not a means to shirk your duties. In our considerable interviews with former MPs, the commitment and dedication to public service are paramount. It rings true across all of our respondents.

However, we have seen a level of frustration with the lack of standardization in administrative and operational processes in the House, and a sense of shock and surprise, particularly from those in the field of business or other entrepreneurial areas, about why cost-effective modern tools to organize calendars and schedules are not being better utilized in this space.

There's a real opportunity here to increase the contributions from MPs, to see to their mental health and well-being and to foster new norms for cohesion, collegiality and connection among MPs and their colleagues.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

Equal Voice, would you like to jump in? If not, I have another question.

Ms. Eleanor Fast: I agree with what's been said and, please, your other question would be great.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: In terms of hybrid, we have extended the motion for hybrid Parliament until June 2023.

Every member of PROC is sitting here today. We have the option right now, yet it's not all anarchy; we're not all on a screen right now. We're here with you and we're able to hear from witnesses who are participating virtually today because we have the technology. Do you feel that this committee would turn into pure anarchy because all of a sudden we allow for hybrid, when we already have that in place?

Ms. Jennifer Stewart: I do not. I think it's extremely important to remember that people who seek to serve their country are doing so altruistically, and they want to serve their constituency. However, as a businesswoman, I have taken calls from the hallways in CHEO before. I'm still able to conduct my business, and I'm still also able to attend to a family emergency. I think that is really the crux of the issue here today: it's flexibility and it's ensuring that you modernize and truly create a 21st century House of Commons.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, I would like to tell you that I am an MP, a mother of two children, and an entrepreneur. I have two businesses. At present, I

look after my 15-year-old child, since my husband is out of the country while I am here. I am able to travel and I have solutions.

There was mention earlier of the 26-week parliamentary calendar and questions of accessibility and facilitation. Why should this be a two-tier system? We had a colleague explain to us how she had been reprimanded and criticized because she had her baby with her in her work as an MP.

I am afraid, and I would put the following question to you: if my husband is out of the country, do I have to stay home with my child and fulfil my role as an MP via Zoom, when there are a lot of other options? What message does that send to people about the dual role some people play? Does this mean that we cannot mix our responsibilities to our business with our role as parliamentarians?

On that point, I would like to hear comments from representatives of Equal Voice.

[*English*]

Ms. Eleanor Fast: Thank you.

Yes, I think that hybrid really.... As has been said, everybody is here today, and yet, if there were a circumstance where someone simply could not be here, you would still have the opportunity to be participating in this meeting, hearing from the witnesses and not missing anything.

As has been said by my colleagues here as well, hybrid has been adopted very widely around the world, in the business world and in academia. Actually, I'm giving a guest lecture at Queen's University this afternoon, and I'm able to do that remotely because I'm here.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have to stop you there, Ms. Fast, because I do not have a lot of time.

I agree completely, but we have to say it like it is. As an entrepreneur, I hold a majority of my meetings in the evening or at night by Zoom. As a parliamentarian, I sit 26 weeks a year. We were talking about convenience and arrangements. If moms or even dads were offered everything they needed, tomorrow morning, to support them and facilitate their role as parliamentarians, which requires that they be present 26 weeks a year, I would remind us, would that change things?

We all agree that it is possible to work in hybrid mode. However, people must not have a tendency to say to themselves that they are going to stay home in case something happens, nor must that mean that people have to work even when they are sick.

I would like you to tell me quickly what you think about that, Ms. Clark.

• (1155)

The Chair: I am sorry, but your speaking time is up.

Ms. Blaney, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm married to a politician as well, so I have a husband who is rarely home because of his political commitment. One of the biggest challenges when our kids were still young enough that they needed caring for was trying to figure out how to balance that when I had to physically be away.

I also want to add—and I think this is what I really would like to hear you talk about—that I represent a rural riding. It's the third-largest in British Columbia, and really, by any standards, it's not that huge. It's just under 60,000 square kilometres. There are many times when I would come home for the weekend and wouldn't get to be with my family because I was landing in a different community, doing all the work that I needed to do in that area and then coming back.

I'm wondering if you could speak to the reality of the benefits that it would mean for people if they had at least an opportunity to work virtually if there is high need in their riding and if they have a large riding, because right now we know that flights are getting harder. Some of the ridings across this country.... Last session, I was not able to go home very often. It's much better now, but things happened that made it really hard for me to get home, so I was actually not at home as often, because I couldn't fly until Saturday and would not get there until the afternoon, and then I would have to leave first thing on Sunday morning.

I'm wondering if we can talk about the challenges that families experience because of this distance, and how most of the time people are still here, but this allows for those moments in life when you just need to be there because your partner is on an emergency somewhere.

I don't have a lot of time left. I'll start with Equal Voice.

Ms. Eleanor Fast: Yes, distance is a big issue for women who are considering running for office. We hear from many women who attend our training and campaign schools that they're choosing to run at the municipal or provincial level because of the concerns about both the time it takes to fly and also how far away from home they will be if they're running federally.

Obviously, that doesn't apply to everybody, but it is something that we repeatedly hear.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I think this is really about just providing a little more choice, and I think that is really important.

Oh, my time is up.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Stewart.

Ms. Jennifer Stewart: I think it's just about the flexibility. Again, as a mother and a business owner—my husband is also a business owner—and the daughter of a pretty incredible mom who was a judge and a mother to four children, you want to be present in your professional life. You want to put in place concessions, like babysitters and relying on family and your partner, when at all possible, but there are those moments when it's not possible.

In those moments, we require this flexibility, and that's why I strongly support the hybrid Parliament.

The Chair: Just so you know, I keep time for everybody's round, so when somebody gets a bit of extra time.... In the first round, Ms. Blaney was done within 18 seconds of it, so I just let her have the generosity that I gave everybody else. Thank you.

I really do want to say that this was fun. It was really nice to have everyone here, and I loved the exchange of questions, but our time has run out. If there is anything else you want to add, you can always send it in writing to the clerk, saying, "I know that Madame Gaudreau would like the answer to her question."

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: If you want to contribute something, please just send us a note in writing.

Thank you so much for your time today. Please keep well and keep safe.

We're going to suspend for a minute ahead of the next panel.

● (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

● (1200)

The Chair: Welcome back for our second panel.

Joining us today are Philippe Fournier, assistant professor, audiologist, Université Laval, by video conference; Kilian G. Seeber, professor, University of Geneva, also by video conference; and Darren Tse, assistant professor, department of otolaryngology and head and neck surgery, University of Ottawa.

Welcome.

We will start with Professor Fournier.

Please go ahead.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philippe Fournier (Assistant Professor, Audiologist, Université Laval, As an Individual): Members of the committee, it is a privilege to be invited to appear as a witness.

My name is Philippe Fournier. I am an audiologist and a professor and researcher in the rehabilitation department of the faculty of medicine at Université Laval. The objective of my research is to better understand the mechanisms and consequences of various hearing disorders, such as tinnitus, which takes the form of whistling or buzzing in the ears, hyperacusis, which is reported as hypersensitivity to loud sounds, and other symptoms such as the feeling of having blocked ears and ear pain.

Because of my research in this field, I have an interest in the population of interpreters who reported experiencing these symptoms following brief, loud and unexpected acoustic events. Although there is no clear consensus, acoustic shock is generally defined as the appearance of auditory and otologic symptoms such as tinnitus, hyperacusis and pain, following brief, loud and unexpected exposure to a sound. The symptoms may appear immediately or after several days or even weeks. It should be noted that the nature and intensity of the symptoms vary widely from one individual to another. This phenomenon was first described among call centre operators. They reported the appearance of distressing symptoms following acoustic incidents in their listening device system. The pathophysiological mechanisms responsible for the appearance of these symptoms are unknown at present.

In the course of my research, I have collaborated with the International Association of Conference Interpreters and the Translation Bureau of Canada. They have reported a rise in the prevalence of these symptoms among interpreters since the start of the pandemic, and, coincidentally, after web conferencing platforms started to be used. The phenomenon at the source of this increase is not known, although various hypotheses have been formulated.

I am also collaborating at present on a research project with the aim of assessing the hearing health of Translation Bureau interpreters. The project is led by my colleague Josée Lagacé, who is a professor at the University of Ottawa, and her team.

I am prepared to answer all questions that committee members ask me today as best I can, based on my knowledge.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fournier.

[*English*]

Welcome, Dr. Tse.

Dr. Darren Tse (Otolaryngologist and Neuro-Otologist, Assistant Professor, Department of Otolaryngology and Head & Neck Surgery, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair and honourable members, for your invitation to appear today as part of the study on hybrid proceedings.

As mentioned, I'm an otolaryngologist and neuro-otologist at the Ottawa Hospital, and assistant professor at the university. My clinical and research foci are mainly on the inner ear, encompassing everything from hearing disorders to dizziness and balance disorders. I've been in practice for almost 10 years.

Dr. Fournier stole some of my thunder. You'll see on the list of references that I posted for you guys that his work with the AIIC is one of the references. It's the report from last year.

Over the past two years, there's been a widespread adoption of virtual meetings in all fields of life. There have been some publications and media entries specifically about parliamentary interpreters suffering from something called acoustic shock injury.

ASI has not been specifically defined, but it is described as a phenomenon occurring in people who do jobs requiring prolonged periods of concentrated hearing and attention, usually through headsets, and who can be subjected to sudden and unexpected loud

noise spikes. Examples of these occupations include air traffic control workers, military radio and communication operators and call centre operators, all of which I have experience working with. Very similar symptoms occur in anybody exposed to prolonged periods of noise exposure—such as first responders, police and industrial workers—and/or intense but short-duration noise spikes, such as people using chainsaws, power tools and firearms.

In my practice, I simply referred to these patients as having noise damage or acoustic trauma, and did not necessarily label them in the past as having ASI. Most likely, this is a case of medical professionals in different fields labelling the same problem with different names.

Examples of these loud noise spikes include feedback loops, sudden changes in volume, acoustic pops, tapping on the microphone and other things happening around the speaker and the microphone. I'm sure we've all experienced this over the last few years. Many of us have likely encountered these sounds many times before.

Symptoms of ASI can range from mild to severe and from temporary to chronic. They can include tinnitus, which is an intrusive or ringing noise in the ear; hyperacusis, which is sensitivity to noise; oral fullness, which is the feeling of plugging or pressure in the ear, like when you are on an airplane; and ear pain. More severe and chronic cases can have symptoms like headaches, nausea, dizziness and balance dysfunction. It's recognized that ASI can also cause psychological distress, including sleep disorders, anxiety and depressive symptoms.

From what I've read in the media, there currently seems to be a not insignificant portion of parliamentary interpreters who are suffering from or who are off work due to symptoms of ASI right now.

ASI was first coined, from what I can tell, in Australia in the early 2000s by audiologists. There was no real, clear publication regarding ASI until Myriam Westcott published in 2006. There is a large body of evidence on noise damage and its resulting short- and long-term symptoms. There's long-standing legislation surrounding at-work exposure to loud noise levels at both the federal and provincial levels. There are well-established mechanisms of compensation for on-the-job sufferers of noise injury through agencies like the WSIB.

Despite all of this, there has not been much research on ASI specifically, especially in the literature outside of audiology. Most recently, as I mentioned, Dr. Philippe Fournier published a project that highlighted the high prevalence of ASI in interpreting staff around the world. In fact, Canada ranked 13th out of 81 countries surveyed in the number of interpreters currently suffering with ASI, which is not great. This publication includes a call to action, steps for interpreting staff to safeguard against ASI and a call for further research.

To that end, I would recommend that the government send afflicted interpreters for full audiological, otological and psychological assessment and management—

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you. We look forward to hearing more from you during the question and answer round.

Now, we'll go to Professor Seeber. Welcome.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Kilian G. Seeber (Professor, University of Geneva, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the committee for inviting me to this meeting and giving me the opportunity to speak about hybrid proceedings.

Unfortunately, I cannot be with you, but believe me, I am in a rather good position to understand the additional workload that my virtual presence creates, especially for the interpreters. It is that additional workload that I would like to talk to you about today.

[*English*]

My name is Kilian Seeber. I am an associate professor at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting at the University of Geneva. I have spent the last 15 years, give or take, trying to better understand the construct of cognitive load, especially cognitive load as it relates to simultaneous conference interpreting.

We do know that the human brain has an extraordinary capacity when it comes to the storage of long-term information, to the tune of roughly seven billion gigabytes, but when it comes to short-term storage, and particularly when it comes attention or cognitive control, it is unfortunately rather limited. Our working memory, which we believe to be the system that is responsible for short-term storage and manipulation of information, is finite.

This is where three important notions come in that I would like to cover before I tell you about the empirical studies that we have just concluded: cognitive capacity, being the processing resources that can be deployed by the system; cognitive load, being the processing demands that are imposed on the system; and cognitive effort, being the processing capacity that's actually allocated to a task. When the imposed load exceeds capacity, or when the invested effort doesn't meet task demands, the process will slow down and eventually break down. Interestingly, in cognitive terms, simultaneous interpretive training, rather than focusing on language training, aims at acquiring the skills required to strategically allocate resources to accommodate this increased task load.

As I was saying before, we very recently carried out some studies at the University of Geneva where we looked into the relationship between deteriorated sound and cognitive load in simultaneous interpreters.

In the first study, we observed interpreters and their psychophysiological response in the field to what I would call “frequently occurring salient triggers”, or events that you'll run into time and again when you have online meetings or hybrid meetings such as this one. Interpreters show significant psychophysiological responses. Their body responds to instances of bad sound, including echos, distortions, pops, clicks or background noises.

In the second study, we measured the interpreters' psychophysiological response to deteriorated sound. We artificially deteriorated the sound by reducing the frequency response. We found that interpreters showed significant cognitive and emotional response during low-quality sound. There was a significant increase in the subjective load they perceived during low-quality sound. The increased load sets in as early as after the first 10 minutes on task. The experiment was designed in a way where they would be on task for 10 minutes, off for 15 and on for 10, in an iteration of four times. Interpretation quality, importantly, decreased significantly with low-quality sound. Of the three parameters analyzed, it was not style, not presentation, but content that suffered significantly.

In the third study, we then measured cognitive load as it changes with artificially deteriorated sound with, again, reduced frequency response. We found that cognitive load as measured with pupil dilation—again, psychophysiological—didn't significantly change when interpreters just had to listen to that sound, but the cognitive load did significantly increase when they interpreted. Taken together—

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you for those introductory comments, Professor. We look forward to hearing more from you during the question and answer round.

Members, we will begin our six-minute round with Mr. Calkins, followed by Mr. Fergus.

Go ahead, Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Dr. Tse, would you like to finish your thoughts, please?

Dr. Darren Tse: Yes. Sorry, I timed myself, but I guess I spoke a bit more slowly in the room.

As I mentioned, much research needs to be done, especially in this setting of interpreters. As I mentioned, I've treated patients in other fields who suffer with similar symptoms.

I was just talking to one of the interpreters outside, before I came in. I've never met a single interpreter, in 10 years of work, and neither have any of my colleagues who are also ear specialists at the hospital. It's a little bit interesting. Certainly, lots of research needs to be done. I think it would only be comprehensive if it involved specialists like me, audiologists with an interest like Dr. Fournier's, and cognitive specialists as well, because that's a big part of it.

We see a corollary in these kinds of symptoms in the dizziness world, where patients are exposed to certain noxious stimuli and end up having chronic dizziness from that. Many of the symptoms in ASI are very similar. The trigger was just an acoustic injury. There's probably a lot of cross-learning available on that side.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Using the precautionary principle, should the Canadian Parliament continue the use of hybrid Parliament? It's one thing to institute this while you're dealing with a pandemic, but if you're not dealing with a pandemic, this appears to me to at least make life easier for MPs, which is a debate that we will have with the public.

In the interest of the health and safety of our interpretative staff—whom, in a bilingual country, we depend on immensely—should we, in your opinion, using the precautionary principle, proceed with hybrid Parliament without actually having these studies done first? Or would you suggest that we actually get some of the evidence before we continue with hybrid Parliament?

Dr. Darren Tse: I think it is well shown that there is harm, so I don't think there's too much point in waiting and causing more harm while we're doing studies—the studies won't happen overnight. If there's no convincing reason, say, COVID-19-wise, to continue with hybrid meetings, then I see no reason to continue to expose people to harm.

Having said that, they are still exposed to harm from interpreting just as they are now. It's just that virtual meetings and the technology to do that very well had to catch up very quickly over the last two years. They will still be exposed to such harm, to a lesser degree, even with in-person meetings, and that's shown by evidence going way back, long before COVID-19 was a problem, but you can try to minimize that exposure as much as possible.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I'm looking for an opinion, and any of the three witnesses can feel free to chime in on this if they choose to.

Prior to COVID-19, committees such as this would offer video conferencing for guests, but it was not over Zoom, and it was not over the person's individual Internet connection. They would have to go to a place that actually offered that video conferencing capability. Now what's being proposed is continuing on with the Zoom version—not the pre-COVID-19 video conferencing version, where we had much better access. People would only have video conferencing in places where they had high-speed access, for example.

Would your recommendation be that it would be okay to return to that style of video conferencing, because we didn't have those problems? We never heard of these types of hearing injuries or problems in that particular style. I would argue that the technology, even though it's caught up and come a long way, has still not caught up to where we were with the pre-COVID-19 video conferencing.

Does anyone want to weigh in on that?

● (1220)

Dr. Darren Tse: The technology is definitely one part of the exposure problem, but any kind of over-ear or in-ear noise or pops, which happen in any kind of remote conferencing, can still expose people to problems, as we see by those who do those other occupations that I mentioned. I know we haven't heard of it here; that does not mean it was not happening and not recognized.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Dr. Fournier, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philippe Fournier: I wanted to add that there are several factors to be considered. Yes, there is the technological aspect, but there is also the work environment. A person is in a certain work environment and tries to regulate the sound in the room. For example, I am at home right now. I would have liked to be at Parliament, but I was only given the notice to appear yesterday. When you are at home, you try to control your sound environment to some extent, but there are limits. Someone may come in. Just now, there were grounds keepers blowing leaves with a blower. So apart from the technology, we have to take factors associated with the work environment into account.

The technology will be improving, but there are also factors that we can control better when we are in a silent location, arranged for the purpose, and have a proper internet connection and headset, for example. That can all reduce the risk of being exposed to sound volumes that are higher than necessary.

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Seeber, do you have any comments on this?

Mr. Kilian G. Seeber: Sure. Very briefly, I think one factor that needs to be considered is volume and frequency. We know from surveys that were carried out among AIC members, for example—members of the International Association of Conference Interpreters—that the frequency with which they would be asked to interpret remotely, and to be in hybrid settings, was extremely low. It was proportionately higher in a country like Canada, where over-the-phone interpreting, in particular, was more widely spread, which was actually the genesis of one of our experiments.

After that, as soon as you can control the environment, I think you can control some of the factors that are of negative impact to both the psyche and the hearing.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor.

We will now go to Mr. Fergus, for up to six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses who are here today. This is an excellent panel of witnesses who are providing us with important views.

You have all said that this problem did exist before the hybrid format in Parliament. The problem affected everyone, especially our interpreters, who do work that is exceptionally difficult but is absolutely essential to the functioning of Parliament. Wearing headphones always has physical and cognitive consequences, whether you are participating in a meeting physically or virtually.

I do not imagine that you are going to suggest we stop providing interpretation for in-person Parliament. However, what should we do to reduce the repercussions on the interpreters as much as possible, when they not only have to listen to us, but also have to provide the interpretation at the same time? What should we do to minimize the impact on their ears, which are the tool they work with?

I will put the question to Mr. Fournier first, then to Mr. Seeber, and then to Dr. Tse.

Mr. Philippe Fournier: The first thing to do is listen to them. The interpreters who report symptoms are the ones who know the symptoms best. After how much time, and after what kind of meeting, are they most likely to experience them? So you have to start by listening to the interpreters when they report symptoms.

I also believe that adjustments can be made. As my colleague was saying earlier, more research has to be done. Obviously, adjustments can be made, for example regarding their working time and their work environment. Again, it takes a bit of research to determine this exactly.

We are looking for a miracle solution or a technological miracle, but my feeling is that there isn't one. I would tend to try to understand the situation and the factors that generate these kinds of symptoms and try to adjust the situation so the interpreters do not have the symptoms.

I don't know whether that answers your question.

• (1225)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Yes, that answers my question.

Mr. Seeber, you have the floor.

Mr. Kilian G. Seeber: Thank you for your question.

I agree entirely; more research is needed. In our experiments, we have always worked with frequencies, but that is just one small part of the parameters that influence sound quality. We have little knowledge about many parameters.

If we were able to know more, we could then try to control the part of the software and hardware used by everyone affected by this communication process in order to have the best equipment on site. However, people connect via their mobile devices or from their cars, where we cannot control anything.

In my opinion, for the moment, the only possible solution is to reduce the time that the interpreters are exposed to these parameters.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

Dr. Tse, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Dr. Darren Tse: I'm going to point to the other side of the equation, which is what happens after they already have symptoms. From what I can tell, these patients don't really get referred to see us.

After speaking to interpreters outside in the hallway here before I came in.... They are having a lot of trouble having their symptoms recognized for what they are, getting the appropriate treatment and

referrals and getting compensation, like other workers would do, through the WSIB or similar agencies. They have not been able.... Because they can't get recognized that they have this problem, they cannot then go further with trying to help improve their quality of life and get back to work.

I think the other side of the problem is that we have to recognize that this is happening and help these people after they've already suffered symptoms.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: I do not have a lot of speaking time left. I would like the witnesses, in turn, to give a very short answer.

If I summarize what you are saying, the interpreters' work is necessary and carries its share of consequences with it. You would really like us to remedy the situation in order to minimize the repercussions, even if they cannot be eliminated completely.

Have I understood you correctly?

Mr. Philippe Fournier: I will answer quickly. It is up to the committee to decide whether that is to continue or not. There are a host of variables associated with democracy and with other parameters.

In terms of health and safety, if we continue going forward, I think it will have to be adjusted better to minimize the risks to the interpreters. That is my very short answer.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Could we get a short answer from the other witnesses?

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We cannot take the other answers at this time. We will definitely welcome them after.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Madam Chair, we do not have time to hear the other two witnesses' answers. Is that correct?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

I'm going to continue with Madame Gaudreau for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Our colleague, Mr. Fergus, will have time to come back to his question, anyway.

I sympathize with the difficult work done by the interpreters, who have to constantly adapt. For example, my colleague across the way spoke very slowly, which is not the case for me right now.

I want to thank the witnesses very much for being here.

I am left speechless by the information being given today. How can we find a winning formula, considering all these obstacles?

You say that the time the interpreters are exposed has to be reduced.

Where can we find interpreters? Where is the next generation?

We do not have full interpretation capacity right now for want of human resources. How could we manage to make up for this shortage, in the interests of the interpreters?

You have answered numerous questions. I take their situation very much to heart. I wanted to tell you that.

I am going to come back to the subject of sound quality not being adequate.

Madam Chair, you and I both know, unless a member points out that the interpreter is saying the sound is inaudible, the conversation continues. It is not easy to do our work properly in this situation. That sometimes happens with the French to English interpretation.

The interpreters tell us that they do not have control over their work environment. Could we acquire a different technical means to replace the tool that is causing them problems?

Can our witnesses suggest means that could be implemented to avoid the interpreters suffering these acoustic shocks and to give us assurance that they are able to work effectively?

• (1230)

Mr. Kilian G. Seeber: I will answer those questions, if I may, Madam Chair.

It is hard to manage this when there are very few factors that we can affect. First, there are technological factors we have no control over, because we cannot control the Internet. Even if I have a high-speed connection, the person I am talking to might not. So I can never control this.

Second, I cannot really control the part that comes under human resources. Interpreters, like parliamentarians, keep working despite a heavy cognitive workload. That may be what explains, in part, the emergence of essentially medical manifestations that we were previously not aware of, because remote interpretation was not something that happened regularly.

Unfortunately, I cannot suggest a solution to you, because there are so few factors on which we can have an effect.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, I think it is important to say that we would like to do things, but our capacity to act is limited.

Do other witnesses want to speak?

[*English*]

Dr. Darren Tse: I don't really know the best solution to the problem. However, I will point out that in terms of manpower, part of the issue is that these people are off work and are not getting treatment and they can't get back to work. Probably, like people in most lines of work, they want to work but they cannot tolerate the conditions and the symptoms that would result from working.

If we can recognize the problem and get patients the right treatment and get them back to work, that would go some way toward solving the manpower issues, for sure.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, I am very concerned that the symptoms and subsequent problems are not adequately recognized. We are going to receive the official report showing the number of incidents and accidents. We should have it shortly. I am noticing a direct correlation with the tools that were used in the past, for videoconferencing, that my colleague referred to. That can definitely create some problems. There is a direct link with the use of various bandwidths, software, hardware, and so on.

Do you think, as I do, that if Parliament decides to continue with some type of hybrid formula in an environment that we do not control, we would have to be extremely vigilant with respect to the volume of the interpreters' work?

I would like you to answer quickly, in turn.

Mr. Philippe Fournier: I will start.

I think we have to be vigilant and proceed carefully, because there are risks for the interpreters.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you.

Mr. Kilian G. Seeber: I think the challenge is a global one. With that said, other organizations have found formulas that work, at least for them, by trying to act in various ways, particularly by reducing interpreters' working time, but also by allowing passive hybrid participation. The effect of that is to relieve the interpreters, because then it is not their work that is affected by the poor quality, which may be tied to the technology currently available.

Obviously, that has repercussions for other political issues.

• (1235)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Yes, it touches on the issue of inclusion, which was addressed earlier.

Is there time for one last response?

The Chair: Maybe next time.

We will continue, with six minutes—

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Could we ask, on the other hand, for additional information to be sent to us?

The Chair: Yes, that is always the case.

Ms. Blaney, the floor is yours for six minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I really appreciate the testimony that we're hearing today.

Perhaps I could start with you, Professor Seeber. One of the things that would be helpful, just for clarity, is if you could talk about the difference between the cognitive capacity load effort as opposed to what it means to talk about acoustic shock.

Mr. Kilian G. Seeber: Yes. If you want to find out more about acoustic shock, I think you're best advised to talk to my colleagues, who are experts in the field. I am not a medical expert. I can tell you that from the literature I have read, I am unaware of any direct link between cognitive load and acoustic shock.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Okay, that's fine. I'll ask you a question you can answer, then. I apologize for that.

You talked about cognitive load. I'm just wondering if you could talk to us about what is specific to this in interpreting from remote participation as opposed to seeing the person right across from you.

Mr. Kilian G. Seeber: We're still in the process of finding out what the factors are that do change. What certainly does change more often than not is the makeup of the sound signal. I'm deliberately not calling it "quality of sound", because that's a laden term in itself. There might be other factors as well, including visual input or the necessary multi-tasking, which increases tremendously when you have to interact with a platform set-up like the one I'm using right now. I have to process at the same time signal forces in different modalities that come at me, which they usually do not.

Some of this might be a matter of training, but I am afraid to say that the human brain, most likely, did not make as great a stride as technology did over the past few years.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: What safeguards should be put in place to protect interpreters from the problems associated with audio from remote participation?

Mr. Kilian G. Seeber: Is this a question for me?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Yes, it is.

Mr. Kilian G. Seeber: I'm not sure I'm best placed to talk about the safeguards in terms of their potential health issues, because the link between cognitive load and the potential cognitive overload, and the resulting health issues, is still under-explored. Obviously, we know it is not a good thing for you to be overexposed to overload for an extended period of time, and this is the kind of overload that you would experience if you encounter such parameters as deteriorated sound for an extended period of time.

Again, for right now, my only and perhaps trivial answer is reducing time on task, because we do not know a whole lot more, and there are certain parameters that we can't act upon.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much for that.

I will go now to Professor Fournier, if I could.

You said earlier "adapt better". If you could explain what that means, it would be helpful.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philippe Fournier: Again, as long as we do not know the exact cause of the symptoms, it will be difficult to know whether one thing or another has to be reduced. Is it the quantity, the volume, the exposure to loud sounds over a long period, or exposure to noise spikes, as was mentioned earlier?

We can adjust if the interpreters report problems. Because we do not have enough data to know the exact cause, we rely on what is reported. One of the things reported by the interpreters is that certain meetings or the length of certain periods of interpretation gen-

erate more symptoms. So we can try to reduce the length of meetings. That is a form of adjustment. I am not saying that it is a miracle solution or the best solution, but based on the data we have at present, it might reduce the interpreters' symptoms. So we have to rely on what they report. Again, however, as was said earlier, it will take more research to understand what is going on.

I know the interpreters can use a limiter to limit the volume of sound that is transmitted through the headsets. In concrete terms, it seems to work, but if the sound quality is poor, the interpreters tend to raise the volume anyway, because they have a job to do and they have to hear the signal clearly. So again, they may be exposed to more dangerous noise levels.

In addition, interpreting what is said is not like passively listening to a sound. You have to speak, so you have more of a tendency to increase the volume.

So there are a lot of possible factors, but there are ways to adapt. I reiterate that it will take more research to ensure that the right adaptations are applied.

• (1240)

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: You keep referencing research, which is really important. We have a report from the NRC and we have a report that this committee is still waiting to see from the House of Commons administration on the AV system. With respect to that, do you have any comments on those two reports and what their impact is? What is the difference between translation provided in person versus in virtual participation?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philippe Fournier: I have not had an opportunity to read those reports. I participated in a meeting with the NRC, at the outset, when it created its protocol, but I have not received or read the report, unfortunately, so I cannot comment on it.

However, I think that all the research initiatives are heading in the right direction. There are multiple factors, and the NRC project is very useful for understanding the system and the signals that are sent.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will continue with Mr. Berthold, who will be followed by Mr. Hanley.

Mr. Berthold, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. I will go quickly.

I would like to recognize the interpreters who are interpreting what we are saying right now. I want to thank them very much for their work. I can be a nightmare for them, particularly during question period, where I ordinarily speak very fast. This meeting has made me aware of the issue and reminded me to pay a bit more attention to their work.

I am going to ask a very important question and I would like to get a fairly short answer from each of the participants.

Does the desire to make life easier for members justify our maintaining a work environment that is dangerous for the interpreters, without knowing the results of the studies that will tell us how we can make sure we are not causing more damage to their health?

My question is for Dr. Tse, Mr. Fournier and Mr. Seeber.

[*English*]

Dr. Darren Tse: As I mentioned earlier, you can minimize harm as soon as possible and still carry out research. In my line of work, if it's a matter of convenience versus harm, I always pick no harm with a bit of extra inconvenience.

That's a pretty easy decision, to be honest.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I am listening, Mr. Fournier.

Mr. Philippe Fournier: I agree entirely with my colleague. It is a matter of due diligence.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I am listening, Mr. Seeber.

Mr. Kilian G. Seeber: I am entirely in agreement. It is not part of my experience or my technical expertise, but from an ethical point of view, the answer is pretty clear.

Mr. Luc Berthold: As we can see every day, the interpreters' work, at present, is more difficult when people participate via Zoom. The damage is attributable to poor audio quality, technical difficulties, and the environment.

I must admit that last week, I made a speech, not while in the House of Commons, while there were workers rebuilding the roof and hammering. I never realized that I could have been causing damage to someone interpreting what I was saying. That is not something that comes automatically to mind. You have smacked me right in the face today by telling me about this damage. I too am going to hurry up and talk to some interpreters, after our meeting, to get to know the problems they are facing.

To make sure that people understand clearly, I would like you to explain the main difference between interpreting what someone says using Zoom and interpreting what someone says on site.

Mr. Seeber, you are a specialist in interpretation; can you answer?

• (1245)

Mr. Kilian G. Seeber: Thank you, Madam Chair.

There are a lot of variable factors. Some are relatively visible and obvious to everyone, even to people who are not very familiar with the interpreter's job.

When you are in the room, you see the participants more directly. When you are using Zoom, a degree of fatigue settles in. That is a concept we started talking about a year and a half ago now. It is a reality. Fatigue associated with interacting via a virtual or digital interface is apparent among the communicators, and even more among the interpreters.

Apart from that, there is the fact that interpreters work in pairs or groups of three, depending on the meetings they are assigned to. All of that work has to be transferred and dematerialized to achieve what is sometimes a digital collaboration, depending on where the interpreters are. Sometimes, they stay on site, as is probably the case in the House of Commons, but there are other cases where the interpreters are not in the same room.

Not being able to use my sense of sight in the same way can also play a role. In person, I can focus on a single speaker and see all the others in the background. Remotely, there may be 20 speakers, and each one is a talking head that I see in front of me. That is potentially a factor that contributes to this Zoom-generated fatigue.

Those are not all the factors that have been explored and tested, but we know there is a long list of potential and varying factors. It is really a completely different environment.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you.

I have one last question.

Interpretation in Parliament is mainly from English to French. Given the factors you have just described, for example, the fact that it causes more damage to short-term memory, do you think that the people who listen to the interpretation into French lose a bit of the content of the speeches and are at a disadvantage?

The Chair: That is a good question, but you have no time left to hear the answer, Mr. Berthold. Perhaps you will get an answer later.

Mr. Luc Berthold: The witness agreed by nodding his head, however, Madam Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Hanley, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you to the witnesses for this really interesting testimony. It's really important to hear, to listen and to understand.

I want to second Monsieur Berthold's thanks to the interpreters for all the hard work they do.

Hearing deficits are definitely preventable. At times, we're certainly unaware of the effect of noise on our hearing, but I wish the precautionary principle could be applied so simply. In any setting, there are harms and there are harms. After listening to our witnesses from the first hour, do we really think there would be no harms associated with scaling back from hybrid to in-person Parliament only? The simple solution may be to recoil from uncertainty and lack of data, but the more complex solution may be to better understand the issue so that we can go forward.

In that context, I have a few questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fournier, I think you said there was no consensus as to the prevalence of acoustic shock among interpreters. Did I understand you correctly?

Mr. Philippe Fournier: In fact, I said there was no consensus as to what constitutes an acoustic shock. Acoustic shock is not recognized as a clinical entity by everyone. My colleague said earlier that different terms are used. For example, we might also talk about noise trauma.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you.

[*English*]

I think it's really important to try to understand the scale and scope of acoustic injury. I recognize that this is an emerging field.

Dr. Tse, I think you already answered this to some degree. You brought up the important point that symptoms may be varied and under-recognized. Nevertheless, you mentioned that you have not seen, in 10 years of practice, an interpreter with auditory problems. Is that correct?

Dr. Darren Tse: Yes. I've seen people who work in air traffic control, obviously military radio, and people in all lines of work exposed to industrial noise, such as the armed forces, police officers and things like that. I've never seen a single person who works in interpretation.

• (1250)

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you.

You cited a study that ranked Canada as 13th out of 81 countries. Can you briefly elaborate on that? I may not have caught it all. Can you also reflect on whether this reflected the adoption rate in Canada of virtual technology? In other words, was that number adjusted for the denominator or does it speak to the amount of usage in Canada?

Dr. Darren Tse: I'll defer to Philippe Fournier on that, because that was his study.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philippe Fournier: The question is whether it was adjusted for the number of interpreters in Canada, is that right?

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Philippe Fournier: It was a survey done online with the International Association of Conference Interpreters, the AIIC. They are interpreters from all fields, people who work in the private sector or at Parliament. No study has been done relating precisely to parliamentary interpreters. As well, people were free to respond to the survey or not. I do not believe that all interpreters in Canada responded to the survey, but a number of AIIC members did respond.

There are a lot of reasons why interpreters are not going to consult. That is also part of the report. Among other things, interpreters are afraid they will not be taken seriously. Often, when ordinary clinical testing is done, no abnormality is found, so they get the feeling they are not being taken seriously.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you.

Since I do not have much time, I will conclude with an observation.

[*English*]

I think we really want to protect our interpreters and make sure that they have access to appropriate technology and that acoustic etiquette, as I'll call it, is observed. Regardless of whether Parliament maintains hybrid or not, we will always be using translators for a variety of functions, including the various settings and meetings that we have.

If I'm understanding this correctly, it's not an issue of whether we should or should not do hybrid based on concerns about the well-being of interpreters. That would be a bit like saying that air traffic controllers should perhaps, if they're susceptible to ear shock, stop managing air traffic, get outside and wave their arms around. I think it's more about identifying and understanding a hazard that we must recognize, address and prevent.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Hanley, that was a great first appearance at PROC. Thank you.

We will now go to Madame Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

From what I see, if we had the technology, the next generation, and the available resources, I think we would have a consensus around the table. The information we have received clearly shows the rise in problems caused by interpretation and the declining availability of our resources. Choices will have to be made, and they will be political choices. I am anxious to see what will happen once the documents have been tabled.

Dr. Tse, I am going to offer you one minute to conclude what you had left to say in your opening presentation. I think you had one more item to present. Just before that, however, I want to make sure I have understood something correctly. Did you say that you had never had interpreters as patients before, and that now you do have?

[*English*]

Dr. Darren Tse: I've never seen a single interpreter as a patient, and I still have not to this day, although I understand that the nice lady who spoke to me outside will be contacting my office.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Right.

While you are a scarce resource, I would like to know about your colleagues. Given the nomenclature that must surely exist when it comes to recognizing acoustic shock problems, I imagine it affects quite a few people. Have a significant number of interpreters consulted your colleagues about a problem of this type?

[*English*]

Dr. Darren Tse: Before today, I did speak to one of my colleagues who is also a neuro-otologist at the hospital. We're the only two at the hospital there. He has never heard of this problem before, or the problem known as ASI.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Right.

[*English*]

Dr. Darren Tse: Obviously, as I mentioned, we've treated noise damage in the past.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I am sure there is information you have not been able to submit to the committee today, so I would like to offer you the little speaking time I have left to let you tell us about it. I think you have written a document, but it has to be available in both official languages for us to be able to receive it.

And now I have no more time left.

In that case, I would like you to provide us with your document in both official languages, please, for the purposes of our report.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

Ms. Blaney, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I really appreciate the testimony today. More importantly, I really appreciate the incredible work that the interpreters do in this House. They are so kind, and they do such a great job of making our voices understandable to people who speak one of the official languages. I am always grateful to them. Personally, they've always been very good to me.

I think we have to take what we're hearing today really seriously. I've had many conversations with interpreters, and I hope today that we really do make sure that our recommendations clearly support what interpreters need in order to do their work as effectively as they do it now.

I have one last question for you, Professor Seeber. I'm coming back to you again because I'm still trying to wrap my head around this cognitive load. Could you talk about what you've seen from your own experience? Has it become more of a widespread issue or

something more impactful because of the pandemic? Is there a direct correlation to this? What can you tell us about that?

Thank you.

Mr. Kilian G. Seeber: I would bring that back to the studies we've run and the results we've gathered, rather than anecdotal evidence that I might have seen in walking about interpreting booths and behind the scenes. I think there is one result that should concern everybody who sits in the room and who listens to interpretation. It is one whereby deteriorated sound quality leads not necessarily to something that sounds off, and not necessarily to something that is off stylistically, but to something that is missing important—or not important—content.

When we do not know, as people sitting in the room relying on interpretation, whether the interpreter is actually able to provide all of the content, then I think I would leave that in the hands of people who do research into politics and other fields to see whether that is something you would deem appropriate or acceptable. That, I think, is one of the big and obvious dangers for the people in the room.

For the people in the booths, I think we still need to find out more about the extent to which increased and sustained cognitive load or overload might lead to medical manifestations or physiological manifestations. At this stage, we do not have any real long-term study. We don't have any longitudinal study. Even our study only had exposure on task for 40 minutes, with a 15-minute break every 10 minutes, which is far less than the average interpreter has to do in a working day.

The Chair: Thank you so much for that answer.

On behalf of PROC committee members, I want to thank the witnesses. Thank you for joining us and for the extent of the information you have shared.

[*Translation*]

I would like to point out that Mr. Fergus, Ms. Gaudreau and Mr. Berthold asked questions for which we requested answers in writing. We would be grateful if you will take the time to send them to the clerk.

[*English*]

With that, I will wish everybody a good day. We'll see you next Tuesday for PROC again.

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

Keep well and safe, everyone.

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