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TRANSCRIPT

Thursday, April 11, 2019

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● (1145)

[English]

Hon. Geoff Regan (Speaker of the House of Commons): I call to order this meeting of the Board of Internal Economy.

I want to welcome Mr. Julian back to the Board of Internal Economy.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (Member of the Board of Internal Economy): Thank you.

[English]

Hon. Geoff Regan: It's the first time in this building.

First, of course, we have the minutes of the previous meeting. Are those approved?

Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chief Opposition Whip): There's one thing I'd flag for the table. I would like to get perhaps a briefing for the staff or ourselves, although not necessarily at the table here, to get an idea of what the governance structure looks like for the Centre Block. I know that Mr. Patrice appeared at PROC and indicated that the process was under way.

If we could just make a note that perhaps we could get more details on what that looks like and how we want to proceed with it, I'd appreciate it.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Duly noted—and will do, I'm told.

Are the minutes approved otherwise?

They're approved. Okay.

Is there any business arising from the previous meeting?

Not seeing any, we will now move on to the modernization of policies related to communicating with constituents.

[Translation]

During the board's meeting on February 28, 2019, changes to the ten percent program were presented for approval. Members discussed the introduction of a limit on the number of mailings that an MP can distribute under the proposed new program.

[English]

The initial proposal included a limit of six times the number of households in a member's constituency per calendar year. It was

agreed that further examination of this limit was required. It's my understanding that since the last meeting, a revised proposal to establish the limit at eight times the number of households in a member's constituency per calendar year has been put forward and is supported. If this is indeed the case, the administration will monitor volumes and financial forecasts and return to the board for direction in any given year, if required.

Is it the will of the board to approve this revised proposal?

I think I'm seeing “yes”, so that's agreed.

That finishes point number three. You guys are really good.

Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Perhaps we could just have some clarification. I have the package of the different constituency mailers that are now available. Obviously, the 30-day rule now comes into effect, which we're used to having with our householder package.

Could you maybe just describe for our members, who I'm sure will be watching and also reading this transcript later, the differences between a constituency mailer and a householder, and whether or not the 30-day exclusionary period will apply just for certain types of mail? For instance, could you do two householders 30 days apart and a constituency mailer in between? Is there a coordination of those printed pieces, or are they on separate tracks?

Mr. Benoit Giroux (Chief Operations Officer, Parliamentary Precinct Operations, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Strahl. Indeed they're on separate tracks. They are two different programs and they will remain two different programs. The main difference is the householder. You use one year of your allocation of a householder and you can cover your full riding. If you decide to do less in the householder, then it's your allocation. You use your allocation even if you do less.

For constituency mailings, you can break it out. Let's say you have a riding of 50,000. You can decide to send 5,000 in a given area of your riding, the next day 10,000 somewhere else, and so on and so on, up to your full household. That resets every 30 days. You can indeed do one householder and a full constituency mail at the same time, because the counter is for each program. They are not dependent on each other.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much.

Is there anything else?

Thank you, gentlemen.

[English]

We'll move on to point number four, which is transition support, or resettlement provisions, for members not re-elected and not seeking re-election.

[Translation]

The presenters are Mr. Paquette, Mr. Parent and Ms. Daigle.

Go ahead, Mr. Parent.

Mr. Pierre Parent (Chief Human Resources Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am accompanied by Robyn Daigle, Director of Members' HR Services.

The purpose of this submission is to seek your approval for the modernization of the current resettlement provisions. The objective is to facilitate access to transition support services comparable to those generally available to executives for members not re-elected and not seeking re-election.

The current resettlement provisions provide for the delivery of advice on finances, retirement, career reorientation, occupation transfer services, education and training, as well as the payment of certain travel expenses.

The proposed policy changes take into account comments received from MPs who were leaving politics, including members of the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians. They told us that some resettlement provisions and how they were applied were no longer met the needs of MPs leaving politics. The proposed changes would provide transition support measures that would reduce the administrative and financial burden imposed on MPs, while allowing them the flexibility they need.

We propose the following.

First, we propose extending access to the employee and family assistance program, the EFAP, from 6 to 12 months for outgoing MPs and their families, as well as for terminated employees.

Second, we propose being proactive by ensuring that EFAP counsellors are on-site during transition meetings and providing EFAP information packages through various means after elections.

I'll turn things over to Ms. Daigle.

● (1150)

[English]

Ms. Robyn Daigle (Director, Members HR Services, House of Commons): We would also propose to offer career transition services through a third party outplacement company contracted by the House administration. Members will be able to choose one of several standard transition packages. Members will also be able to use alternative career transition service firms by submitting for consideration a request with justification to the chief HR officer. We also propose to remove the provision for expenses related to secretarial services as these types of temporary help services will be offered through the third party provider being proposed.

We propose to increase flexibility for departing members who wish to receive alternative forms of education and training by allowing the chief HR officer to review, assess and approve, where warranted, education or training that does not meet the usual training parameters. An example would be training that is not necessarily offered by a recognized institution in Canada.

We propose to maintain the availability of travel options currently used by departing members, while specifying the purpose of travel and providing supporting documentation as with existing members.

We propose to provide increased flexibility to members by extending the start, completion and claim submission dates for transition-related activities and clarify what expenses are included in the \$15,000 transition support amount.

If these changes and improvements are accepted, they will be communicated to members through the transition support process. We are happy to answer any questions at this time.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Madam Bergen.

Hon. Candice Bergen (House Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you for this.

I think it's really good that you're looking at this. I've heard from members of Parliament, especially those who lost. Obviously they were not expecting it. It's a terrible blow to members of Parliament. I'm hearing about the impact it has. It really is hard on individuals. In the spirit that we're all team players here, I know a lot of Liberals will be going through this after the next election. I'm joking.

Seriously, I'm wondering about two things. I heard some discussion previously around one of the problems. When an individual is defeated, their emails and their contacts get cut off very quickly. For a lot of MPs, their phone is their life. I wonder if there's some thought around that and how they could be helped in getting that important information. I know you mentioned you had talked with former parliamentarians. I think they're doing some work. I think Dorothy Dobbie is the new head of this. She's been doing some work on some practical things that could help parliamentarians who are leaving, but not because they want to be leaving. I wonder if a few more practical things might be added that would help individuals.

I wonder about the whole counselling part of it. People go through a really hard time when they lose an election. Imagine losing your job, getting fired by basically your entire riding. Your whole life has been serving these people, and a lot is wrapped up in it. I wonder if there may be some discussion, some counselling or some will to help former MPs who have lost their riding to transition back.

Thank you.

Mr. Pierre Parent: I know we've been in discussion with the Association of Former Parliamentarians. We'll continue discussions, and we spoke with several members who were in contact with members who were defeated. You're right that for members who are defeated, we've been told, it is a shock. That's why, for instance, we're saying that the employee assistance program should go from six months to 12 months. We've been told that the first six months there is a shock to absorb, and then they're ready to look at the future.

I can't comment specifically on the email, so I don't know. We can come back to you, but that's something that we'll consider.

• (1155)

Hon. Geoff Regan: We'll look at that, and I can assure you.... It was such a shock to me that I still call it my involuntary sabbatical, and not my loss, you see?

Mr. Holland.

Hon. Mark Holland (Chief Government Whip): I, too, Mr. Speaker, enjoyed an involuntary sabbatical and so speak with some experience on this.

I agree absolutely that it is an incredible shock for people who go through it, because it consumes all of your life. It becomes more than a job; it becomes almost your identity, so it becomes a very trying experience. I think the extension of the employee assistance program from six months to a year is very important because of the fact that in the first six months people are often still just absorbing what happened. It can take some time to do that, so I think ensuring that people are in a good mental state is incredibly important.

I agree, as well, on the point about contacts. The cellphones that are allocated come from a central bank. When you arrive here, you have to give up your cellphone number and get a new cellphone number. For people who are trying to establish themselves thereafter, to lose that phone number is particularly challenging when they are making a transition. I can understand when you're coming in that you're trying to guard a certain number, but I wonder if there's a way of releasing those numbers on the other side so that members can maintain the same contacts.

Similarly, I can understand that we don't want people advertising that they have a parl.gc.ca email address, but there should be a way, when emails go there, because they're effectively dead, for the server to reroute them. In other words, for at least a period of time, that email traffic coming through their P9 and only their P9 could be rerouted in some way, because that's limited and personal traffic. I think that's a very key point. After two or three weeks suddenly all of your contact information is gone, and it becomes hard for people to maintain contact.

Mr. Pierre Parent: I see my colleague, the chief information officer, taking notes, so I'm sure this can be addressed.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Julian.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's really a pleasure to be back here.

[English]

Thank you for the presentation.

I think everyone would understand that the intensity of the job means that the transition is particularly difficult for somebody who's defeated. They've been going basically seven days out of seven, for 16-hour days, and then they get through the election, and then they have to wrap up their constituency office if they've lost. They have to wrap up their Ottawa office. They're basically putting years of their life in boxes, and for somebody from British Columbia, it means having to move right across the country.

After all of that is done, that intense period of another month, then they finally have a chance to concentrate on themselves. For anybody, losing a job is intense. For anybody, it's a particularly difficult time of their life, so I would agree with Ms. Bergen and Mr. Holland about the communications aspect. For them also to be cut off from their friends, their contacts, and the people they've worked with is difficult. So having provisions for those communications to continue would be important.

The counselling is important too. I gather from Ms. Bergen's question that the counselling isn't necessarily a big part of what is provided in the assistance packages, so perhaps you could elaborate a little bit more on the employee assistance plan, what that means in terms of, let's say, the following year for that individual. What would they have access to? What would they not have access to in terms of mental health supports? All of us who've been here have known colleagues who have taken it very hard. They need those supports. In many cases, sadly, it means that maybe things they thought they'd conquered previously come back, so having that counselling in place can make a real difference for that person to be able to get back on their feet again.

Ms. Robyn Daigle: I think one of the pieces to highlight in the submission, too, is around the more proactive approach with the EAP. Right now, it's been more positioned as being available. We're going to be doing a couple of things to position that service more appropriately. In the transition centres, there will be EAP counsellors on site to meet with members who may want to avail themselves of counsellors at that time. They might not be ready—we recognize that—but we at least want to have that in place.

Then we'll be doing outreach to the MPs within that 12-month period to let them know what's available through the EAP and also to highlight the career transition service packages that are available to them. In there, it might not necessarily be the personal counselling, but there might be other pieces they can focus on. Through the EAP, there's a variety of services available. One of them can be access to counselling, and some of them can be around mental health, financial pieces as well, and that's also in supplement to the career transition service.

• (1200)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you very much.

I'm glad we are having this discussion. I've spoken to many colleagues who were not re-elected in 2015 who said their plan A was to win and plan B was also to win.

When that doesn't happen, there really is a period of scrambling around trying to get your feet under you. It's different for different people. Some people might have an opportunity to get back into their trade or profession, but for others that's not the case.

I think part of the issue is that, as Mr. Julian has indicated, when there is an unexpected career transition given to you by your neighbours and community, there is an overwhelming amount of work that has to take place. Getting this package sent to you after you have just suffered a soul-crushing defeat—perhaps it's not the best time to get that information into the hands of members. I would suggest it be sent out to all members prior to the dissolution of this Parliament. Some people might laugh it off, saying they'll never need that, but at least it would be there for their consideration. They might be looking at it when they are in a better state of mind than after an election. So I hope it's possible to kind of package this up and send it out. I know there will be a board notice that will come out, but maybe there could be a more comprehensive package.

The second thing I would say is that, while it's good that we're having these discussions right now, also at the same time this is happening, there is a mad dash to get the dozens, if not hundreds, of new members of Parliament into their place. They are just as eager to get here and settled as the people who are getting punted are wanting to have the last moment here. I know in the last Parliament there were some cases where it was literally down to the last hour, like "We are going to kick you out of your office now."

I'm hoping there are two different teams, that the team that's transitioning people out is not the same team that is transitioning people in, and the people who are transitioning out have a specific point of contact, that everyone knows the rules of the game and the time frames and everything, and that there's not a pressure point where the same group is perhaps.... I think there needs to be a group tasked with taking care of those people who are leaving, who don't care about the other pressures that someone else has to care about. Maybe that's already happening, but that would be my advice.

Mr. Pierre Parent: It's already happening. We have a group of employees who are trained specifically for the transition of those who are not re-elected, and we have a group of employees, who have been assisting members in the past election, for those who are new members and want to have the orientation. This is happening. Also, we're very mindful that these two groups are different, so we're making efforts so these two groups do not necessarily interact. We're being very mindful of that reality.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Patrice.

Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons): Just in terms of your first comment, in terms of informing MPs now of the various programs that exist, it's actually in the plan that our Sourceplus team members are going to go through all offices to inform them of the various resources available. Thank you for the suggestion.

In terms of the communication, I've just been informed that the phone numbers and emails are kept for 30 days, but we'll review that and we'll also look at the transferability of cellphone numbers, because we do understand these devices....

• (1205)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Madam Chagger.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Thank you.

Just to build off that, I agree with, prior to the dissolution of Parliament, being able to share information. I think it's also

important that we perhaps request a next of kin or somebody else. As somebody who got to see a colleague who did not get elected again, I understand that the experience can be quite isolating.

I think people oftentimes contact their member of Parliament more because of the position than because of the individual. During the time served here, you learn quickly who your friends are and who they are not, so I would agree with that.

I do believe that the two transition teams—incoming and outgoing—should have some communication, so that when it comes to pressures of vacating an office and so forth, they understand the reality of the individual. If we're bringing compassion into the system, I think it's important that there be some communication regarding who's in and who's out—that kind of thing. How do we perhaps cater to them a little bit more? I hope you have the resources, looking at the fact that the number of members of Parliament has increased to 338.

On the emails front, when you graduate from post-secondary school, you have an email that's part of your post-secondary institution, and then you become an alumnus. As alumni, we could have a way of transitioning it. I think we have to be mindful of the role of a member of Parliament versus someone who is no longer a member of Parliament, and to have respect and regard for the institution.

I think it could be quite a seamless process to provide someone an email address and transition them there so that correspondence or information gets forwarded on. I know when I graduated from the University of Waterloo, my UWaterloo account automatically got moved into an alumni account. My emails continued, and it was quite a seamless transition. I have confidence that Stéphan and his team will be able to do that.

Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: That's a good point.

I remember when I graduated—email? What's email?

Mr. Holland.

Hon. Mark Holland: I have one other thing—and I'll raise this with the Association of Former Parliamentarians—but what happens when somebody loses? Only somebody who has lost can really understand what that process is and what it means.

I think it would be very helpful if, in a volunteer capacity—and I'm sure it can be arranged—there was some sort of proactive reach-out after a certain period of time from former parliamentarians to connect with people who've lost, to talk about their experience and how they were able to successfully navigate it.

Maybe you could work with them to formalize that process, because I think it's a unique experience. For me, having contact with people who had lost, and who navigated that, was enormously helpful. I didn't find anybody else who quite understood what I was going through. I think some sort of formalization of that would be important.

I think that those of us who remain after these events—and I've gone through many events where I've lost a lot of colleagues—realize that the madness of the job continues. We're continuing to be pulled between our ridings and Parliament here in Ottawa. To carve out the extra time to reach out to colleagues is incredibly difficult. Former parliamentarians, I think, would be the right group. You get a letter saying, "Welcome to Former Parliamentarians". A lot of people don't really want to be in that group. It's not an exciting email or letter to get. Reaching out differently, I think, would benefit them as an organization and would benefit members as well.

Mr. Pierre Parent: We'll reach out to the association.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thanks.

Madam Chagger.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: When I made the point about the next of kin, I was thinking that sometimes the individual may not recognize that they require some assistance, or that they feel isolated. It would be nice just to have a check-in with someone else. I recall an experience when the people around the person also felt isolated. So maybe someone could check in to make sure the family's okay or whatever.

Hon. Geoff Regan: With all those suggestions for the administration to further consider, does the board wish to adopt these recommendations with a view to having other things looked at in the future? Is that the wish of members?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

• (1210)

Hon. Geoff Regan: I think Mr. Strahl is smiling, so I take it he agrees too. Good.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

We are at the fifth point on the agenda: occupying, managing and vacating constituency offices.

On that topic, we'll hear from Daniel Paquette, Chief Financial Officer, Philippe Dufresne, Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, and José Fernandez, Deputy Chief Financial Officer.

Mr. Paquette, the floor is yours.

[English]

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm here today to seek the board's approval on policy changes that we hope continue to contribute to support members in operating their constituency offices.

Our consultations with the members indicated that some current policies are unclear to them and could be more effective in providing that necessary support to manage their constituency offices. During our consultations, members expressed the need for increased support in vacating, moving, occupying and managing their constituency offices.

Specifically with these proposed policy changes, we aim to increase flexibility for members who are moving offices, ensure a smooth transition for office moves at the time of an election, clarify

constituency office-related policies, and provide tools and support for the preparation of their office leases.

[Translation]

After reviewing all the information that has been compiled, the administration proposes certain changes regarding constituency offices.

[English]

Our first proposal is to allow more time for newly elected members to make decisions about their office locations. Members do feel pressure to select a new office very quickly after an election, and they find that the current four-month window for deciding where their office is going to be is not enough time to find that suitable office. We propose extending the period of centrally paid moves, following the election, to one full year in order to provide that additional flexibility.

Our second proposal is to align the winding-up period of both the parliamentary and the constituency offices to 21 days.

[Translation]

This is based on previous decisions of the Board of Internal Economy regarding the allocation of constituency office leases to the House of Commons Administration and on recent decisions of the board to allow members of Parliament to retain their employees up to 14 days after a general election, to better support members when closing and vacating their offices.

The administration should be allowed to propose that resigning members and members who are not re-elected vacate their parliamentary and constituency offices no later than 21 calendar days after the date of their resignation or the date of the general election. This would allow newly elected MPs to access offices earlier, without imposing an undue burden on MPs who have to vacate offices.

[English]

Additionally, we propose to provide additional support to members in selecting the appropriate office space. Members are encouraged to choose an existing office space that is already set up as an office to be used for that purpose. We propose to assist members in choosing a suitable office location by listing elements that an existing office should contain, such as a reception area, security measures and network capabilities.

To further help members choose that suitable location, we also encourage members to use a professional appraiser. This is a flat-fee service, and it would provide an estimate of an office space and its market value, and evaluate whether it's compliant with the necessary office elements previously mentioned.

Additionally, some office spaces chosen may require extensive renovations, creating long-term pressure on the member's budget. We propose that a priority be, before initiating the renovations, that the member be required to negotiate with their landlord and see whether these kinds of renovations really should be part of leasehold improvements, which are typically paid for by the landlord, although there are renovation expenses that are not covered by the landlord, and these would be charged to the member's office budget in the fiscal in which they are incurred. This would reduce the long-term pressure on the member's budget.

We are also proposing to amend the timelines for completing renovations.

[*Translation*]

Members of Parliament can currently undertake renovations at any time. As a result, there may be situations where MPs undertake renovations just before a general election. If they are not re-elected, the return on investment is not necessarily advantageous.

Our proposal is to limit the completion of renovation work to no later than three years after the date of a general election, or 12 months before the expiry of the lease. This would protect MPs from excessive use of resources that would not be available to them.

[*English*]

Next, we propose providing members additional mandatory and recommended clauses for inclusion in their constituency office leases. The proposed clauses allow members to terminate their constituency office lease in the case of landlord wrongdoing. They allow the House administration to be notified of any changes to leases, which will allow support to members in managing their lease and ensure the constituency office meets new accessibility and occupational health and safety standards.

Both the members and the House of Commons will benefit from the additional protection these clauses will afford.

● (1215)

Members who encounter difficulty including these necessary clauses in the given lease will need to consult the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel for further guidance.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my presentation on this topic. We're ready to answer any questions.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much.

Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Just quickly, I recognize that the three-year guideline works very well in a majority Parliament situation. Obviously, it's more challenging in a minority. I guess that would fall back to the 12 months. I'm not familiar with this, as both of the times I've been elected, it's been in a majority setting. I know that there are challenges with signing leases with landlords for an indeterminate period of time.

I'm a little confused, though, about members being told to pick an existing space, but then they can have leasehold improvements built into their lease, and renovation costs assigned to their budgets. Those all sound contradictory. Is that just encouraging people, or will the bylaws—the policy—actually prevent some cases where someone

might be going into, for instance, a brand-new building, built to suit, with lease incentives and all the rest of it? I'm unclear, from how you described it there. It seemed like there were three or four different options. The first thing said was, "Please choose something that's already built."

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: One of the objectives we're trying to help with here is to provide guidance to members so they are up and running as soon possible. Clearly, if you are not going to be assuming an existing office, you need to find something that is ready for you to move into quickly, that is already an office space and has the basic elements that you need. Minor renovations could be needed to fit your functionality. That's the first step we're hoping members will take, and then be operational as quickly as possible.

After that, clearly it's not always possible, depending on the scenarios, the constituency and finding those offices. The ability to do renovations is there. We want to make sure they are reasonable. We've had situations where members have had to incur significant renovations, and are paying for those over the term of the Parliament. It does tax their office budgets. Then they are limited in being able to do other things.

The guidance will be to talk to us so we can assist you. We have created some additional capacity within my team to provide that. There are experts in this field to help make sure that we do find the right office with you, and that it's up and running quickly.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I think what you're telling us is that whether they use an existing space or a new space, you're going to provide more suggestion than direction.

Is that right?

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: That's right.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Okay.

Mr. Julian.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the guests for their presentations.

I have two questions, and perhaps some comments to follow up on your answer.

You mentioned that MPs had done renovations just before an election or that they had done so in order to increase the cost of their leases for each month that followed. Has this really been a problem? That's my first question.

My second question concerns the 21 calendar days. We have just discussed what happens to MPs who aren't re-elected. They have a job to do here: they have to box up everything they've accumulated during their work, which may be five, 10 or 15 years. It's the same for constituency offices; they have the same requirements. However, as I understand from this proposal, the period during which they can use an employee is limited to 14 days, but members have a 21-day period to do all this work.

Is it true that, according to the provisions, outgoing MPs can use an employee for 14 days?

• (1220)

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: As for the first question, current policy requires that MPs consult us in advance when renovations are major. We have already had requests from MPs for renovations shortly before an election year. We were able to work with them and the renovations weren't done. In other cases, major renovations to the premises they occupied should have been made at the beginning of their term of office, for example, but this would have put them under budgetary pressure. We want to work with MPs to try to avoid these situations, where possible for them. For this reason, we want there to be guides and tools to support them. Since I have been here, I haven't experienced a situation where such renovations have been made. We want to try to avoid them, to ensure good management of public funds.

The 21-day period creates a balance. According to the existing policy, it is 17 days for the Ottawa office and 30 days for the constituency office. In addition, MPs are alone to do this work, unless volunteers can help them. The new measure allows MPs to be well-supported during their transition and to use employees for a period of 14 days, and these expenses can be charged to their office budget. This provides a more stable transition period. We consider a 21-day period to be reasonable.

Because the constituency office remains open, we want to ensure that the newly elected official can move into that office as quickly as possible. We are really trying to take into consideration both the difficult situation of the MP who has not been re-elected and that of the new Member who must be up and running quickly. During the consultations we conducted, the majority seemed to consider the 21-day period acceptable.

[English]

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Julian.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you for your answer.

I would recommend that this be more of a warning, so that the policy is clear to everyone. I fully agree with that. Other than in difficult situations such as a flood or the like, offices should not be renovated. I find this practice commendable and support it.

For the 21-day period, I find this practical, but only to the extent that MPs can have employees to help them. We set a 14-day limit for doing all this work, but we allow a 21-day period to empty the premises. This seems problematic to me. As we have just talked about, we must consider all the other things that the person is going through. Mr. Holland and Mr. Regan are well aware of the requirements that accompany this. I think it would be desirable for an employee to be able to help the member so that the work can be completed in 21 days. This facilitates the transition, as well as ensuring that the work is actually done. So, as Mr. Strahl mentioned, the new MP can move into the office and continue his or her work in the riding, which is very important.

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: I understand the situation. The 14-day period is a form that we had submitted to the Board of Internal Economy. Members of the board had determined that this was appropriate. If you have another need, we are here to support you and try to help you. If it seems to you that the 14-day period could be

adjusted to better align it with the policy, we will certainly be able to consider this possibility.

[English]

Hon. Geoff Regan: I should point out to Mr. Julian—and he may know this—that one of the things the board decided not that long ago was that a defeated member would have the benefit of one paid employee for 14 days afterwards, to assist with that process. It's just an element that needs to be kept in mind. That's all. It might be of some interest.

I'm not suggesting that your point isn't well taken, by the way.

Mr. Peter Julian: We're making the period shorter, from 30 to 21. I'm suggesting that if we're shortening the period—and I think there are very good and solid reasons for that—we end up now in a situation where that newly defeated member, who is struggling with a whole range of things, is also endeavouring to meet that new deadline but without the new resources, or at least a few more days from an employee who can assist them in doing that.

I think that if what we are all seeking is a smooth transition, that seems to me to be a bit of a weakness in the proposal. Everything else I absolutely support. If we're moving the dates closer, I think it makes sense to allow that person to have somebody who can assist them in achieving that deadline.

• (1225)

Hon. Geoff Regan: I do want to make it clear. It's an important point that, previously, members couldn't pay a staff member afterwards and now they can. I didn't clarify that before. That's a significant point. However, if other members have a view on this that they want to change something, I'm open to hearing their arguments, of course.

Ms. Bergen.

Hon. Candice Bergen: We may need to come back to it. I'm not sure where we are with the bells.

Hon. Geoff Regan: We are due to suspend the meeting, but maybe on this item we can come back and discuss further. Do members wish to approve the recommendations as they are and come back and have further discussions later on this matter, or do members wish to hold off on approving them?

Hon. Candice Bergen: I do have some issues around the whole 21 days in relation to our previous discussion around members who lose their ridings, so I think we should put this on hold and come back.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Okay.

Hon. Mark Holland: On that point, though, if I could very quickly... Perhaps we could converse immediately before the vote, and hopefully come to some sort of consensus on that point. If we do come back for 10 minutes, perhaps we can clear up this item before we come to the next meeting.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I would suggest that we do come back after the vote, but that we immediately proceed to matter 10, which is an in camera portion, because I believe it's a time-sensitive matter.

Hon. Geoff Regan: So, you'd want to suspend this issue until another meeting of the board? That's fine.

Is that agreed? Does everyone want to come back with point number 10?

Hon. Mark Holland: Can we just canvass if we have consensus? If we have consensus, then we can clear this item and go.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Why don't we come back to it?

Hon. Mark Holland: We'll come back, and we'll make that decision right after.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Very good.

We'll suspend, and we'll see you right after the vote.

• (1225)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1250)

Hon. Geoff Regan: We will resume.

We're going to go back to point number five. I think there's agreement to approve the recommendations in number five. Is that correct?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Geoff Regan: That's agreed, and now we'll move in camera, because we have some things that have to be discussed in camera. We'll take a moment to do that.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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