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# Board of Internal Economy

TRANSCRIPT

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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

**Honn. Anthony Rota (Speaker of the House of Commons):** We are beginning the 17th meeting of the Board of Internal Economy.

[*English*]

The first item on the agenda is the minutes of the previous meeting, on April 22. Are there any comments on that?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille has the floor, and she will be followed by Mr. Holland.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Whip of the Bloc Québécois):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a question. We've noticed that over the past two weeks there have been significant technological problems with interpretation, whether in the House of Commons or in committees. Last week, we were having difficulty going from French to English or English to French. This week, we're noticing that it's difficult to go from French to English.

Can someone explain the nature of the problem? Is it a technological or specific problem?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Aubé could answer that question.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons):** Thank you for your question.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, in preparation for the meeting, we always look at our statistics. Statistically, it's clear that we have had some issues in the past two weeks, but I would still say that the number of incidents this week is down from the beginning of April. This week, we've had some technical difficulties in the House.

We had technical difficulties in the House on Monday, and some difficulties this week in committees. As you know, we are in a very difficult time to do infrastructure maintenance. We're trying our best to resolve these issues in the evening, and we are on our way to a solution. We're trying to maintain the functional environment of the House and committees. We're working on it day and night, I assure you.

However, it's true that we saw five or six incidents in the House on Monday this week. We noted a few incidents on Tuesday in the House and in committees. That's more than normal, compared to past weeks. We have some solutions, but it's a matter of finding the time to do the maintenance. It's very difficult right now. We can on-

ly work on it at night and on weekends, but we're trying to make the changes. We're doing everything possible. The technical difficulties are with some of the equipment.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I'll ask another question.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Certainly.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** It's a question for Mr. Janse.

Mr. Janse, you sent all the whips' offices your desire, in response to the clerks' request, to hold virtual rather than hybrid meetings in committees. Some clerks would be at home or elsewhere, but not on site.

The Bloc Québécois made an effort to ask members who liked attending committee meetings in person not to do so, because you had asked us to. We found that it was not necessarily a directive or an instruction that was followed by the other parties. We've asked our members to do that, because we want to listen to the clerks, as you've asked. However, we see that members from other parties are physically sitting in the meeting rooms. It seems difficult for them to comply.

We in the Bloc Québécois have strictly respected what you asked for, but when we return from the break, some members will probably come and attend committees in person. I wanted to warn you of that. We've made our effort. I think that when we return from the break, some members will want to use their parliamentary privilege to be physically present in committee. It's not out of disrespect for the clerks, but in order to work better.

For them, it's a more efficient way of working. I wanted to formally notify you of this at the BIE. I'm proud to say that we made our effort when you asked us to.

**Mr. Eric Janse (Clerk Assistant, Committees and Legislative Services Directorate, House of Commons):** Thank you very much for the information, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

I'd like to make a small clarification. We did not request that members not come into the committee room. We only notified the whips' offices that we had given our clerks the choice of coming in person or working from home. A large number of committee clerks still come into the committee room to work, but others have taken up the offer to work from home. We're still here to see members, either virtually or in person, in committee rooms.

Perhaps the message you are referring to is about next week's meetings, next week technically being a break week, although many committees will be in session. When we talked with other departments and our partners, some questions arose about resources. We wondered if the whips would consider the possibility of some committees meeting only virtually, given that it will be a break week and most members will be at home. If no members attend in person, it's going to require fewer resources, so all departments will be better able to accommodate all meetings requested for next week.

• (1110)

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** All right.

The Bloc Québécois will support you on this. No problem.

**Mr. Eric Janse:** Thank you very much.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Thank you.

[*English*]

We'll continue with Mr. Holland, followed by Mr. Richards.

Mr. Holland.

**Hon. Mark Holland (Chief Government Whip):** I'm not addressing this matter. I believe Mr. Julian had his hand up. If either Peter or Blake has something related to this matter, I'll wait. I don't want to interrupt the flow.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Okay.

Mr. Richards is addressing a different matter as well.

Mr. Julian, are you addressing the same matter or a different matter?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Peter Julian (House Leader of the New Democratic Party):** It's about the same matter raised by Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Okay, go ahead.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I just want to say briefly that we know very well that we are in the third wave. The idea of having exclusively virtual meetings, in my opinion, is simply a workplace health and safety issue. So, we support the idea of limiting as much as possible the exposure of employees and members to the variants circulating in this third wave, which is proving to be extremely dangerous across the country.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards (Chief Opposition Whip):** I'll stay on the list for my other items—

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Yes, that's no problem. Go ahead.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** —but I'll address this point quickly.

I'm supportive of the way the administration has approached this. They've given clerks the option to be there in person if they choose or to be there virtually. I think all people need to be given the choice to do what they feel is safest. It sounds like that's what the administration has done, so I'm supportive of what they have suggested.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Very good. Thank you.

Now we'll go to Mr. Holland, followed by Mr. Richards.

Mr. Holland.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First, on that point, I would wholeheartedly concur with Mr. Julian that, wherever possible in this third wave, we need to avoid coming in. I understand there are challenges for all of us, but this is a matter of public health and safety. It's a matter of the security and health of people who work at the House of Commons, and it's a matter of risk for members traversing provincial borders. Hopefully, folks will take that into consideration, as we try to navigate through this global health crisis.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to speak at this point, if I could, on a matter arising from the previous meeting, as noted in the minutes.

In the previous meeting, we had a very lengthy discussion in camera with respect to the member for Pontiac and the terrible incident that occurred with the photo that was taken of him during private proceedings. I'm not going to have any questions for the House legal teams, so my comments here are not in any way in camera. This is a very troubling incident because it is.... Let's start in the ways in which it's different from what we have dealt with before.

In the thrust and parry of partisan politics, we are all used to our characters being besmirched or having our ideas attacked. Before we come to this place, we have an idea that's going to happen. That's not what happened here. This was a member of Parliament who, in a private proceeding, made a decision to take a video or a picture and then share that image somewhere. That was an image of another member naked. That image was then disseminated across the planet. Because of that decision, a member of Parliament and his family were subjected to the image of him naked on late night talk shows in England and the United States, and on social media sites around the world.

To date, the member of Parliament in question, Sébastien Lemire, has refused to say where he sent that photograph or what his intent was in sending it. And that matters.

Now, fellow board members, there is only one place that can adjudicate our own behaviour. That's it. We're it. If this were any other workplace.... When I headed up the Heart and Stroke Foundation, if an employee took a naked photo of another employee against the will of that employee and disseminated it, I can guarantee that an apology and walking away as if nothing happened wouldn't be the end of the matter. I can assure you that no workplace in this nation—

• (1115)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker—

[English]

**Hon. Mark Holland:** —would accept that as an outcome.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order.

[English]

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I believe we have a point of order.

[Translation]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille has the floor.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Yes, I have a point of order.

I don't understand. It's a very important matter, I agree, and I hope we have time to grant it the importance it deserves, but it's already an item on the agenda for the portion of the meeting in camera. So, I have a lot of trouble understanding why Mr. Holland is starting the discussion on this during the public portion of the meeting, because he is well aware of it.

So I'm asking you to rule on this, Mr. Speaker, because we're not following the agenda right now.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** It's a matter related to the business arising from the previous meeting. It was a little mixed up, but we let it go.

[English]

Mr. Holland, I'm not sure exactly how you would like to proceed right now. Would you like to withdraw and then come back?

**Hon. Mark Holland:** No, absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. There's nothing that I'm saying that needs to be put in camera. The process of in camera is not to hide matters. It is not to bury matters. It is not to avoid dealing with matters. The purpose of going in camera is to allow matters to be discussed that cannot be discussed publicly.

One of the reasons the Board of Internal Economy made its meeting public was specifically so the deliberations of this body could be seen by the general public. It would be a violation of that principle to move this matter in camera. There is absolutely nothing I am saying now, or that I will say, that in any way needs to be in camera. And that is why I will continue.

The problem that I have is—

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** If I could, at this point, because we had determined that this was an item that was in camera, and it is—

**Hon. Mark Holland:** Mr. Speaker, I never agreed to that.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'll refer to our legal team to comment on it, just so that we're not breaking any rules and to make sure that we're within our legal parameters.

Mr. Dufresne, would you like to comment on this?

**Mr. Philippe Dufresne (Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, House of Commons):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When we were reviewing the items for consideration, it seemed to us that the discussion could touch upon powers and legally available avenues for the board to deal with the situation involving use of House of Commons resources. It could give rise to discussion about scope and legal consideration about those powers. These types of discussions could normally involve receiving or discussing legal advice. Therefore, as a precautionary measure, the recommendation was that this be considered in camera.

The Parliament of Canada Act does have a presumption that the board meetings are in public, and it is only in stated circumstances that it is in camera. Those circumstances include matters subject to solicitor-client privilege and when legal advice will be obtained. The board can discuss matters in camera and make its decisions public after the fact. If the discussion does not involve the giving or the receiving of legal advice, then it could take place in public. It is also possible for a member to state their position on something that they would want the board to consider at a later stage.

Matters covered by solicitor-client privilege have to be discussed in camera.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Dufresne, based on what was just said, I want to make sure whether Mr. Holland can continue or cannot continue. My impression is that based on what you're saying he can continue and it won't be an infraction.

**Mr. Philippe Dufresne:** If Mr. Holland does not disclose confidential information or legal advice or seek or share, he can.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Holland, I'd ask you to continue, then, please.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, as noted, I'll be careful not to cross into matters that are legal in nature, namely any legal advice that might have been given on this matter.

The situation that we are in now, as in any workplace where a naked photograph had been taken without the consent of another employee and then sent out by email, is that there would be action taken. Let's consider what reasonable action would be taken.

First, *mens rea* would need to be established. What was the intent both in taking the photograph and in disseminating it? We know there were only about two hours between when Sébastien took this photograph and it appeared in social media by both Chris Nardie and Brian Lilley. There were about two hours between when he took that photograph and when it first appeared on social media.

The question is: How did it get there?

We know, and it's been well established, that Sébastien Lemire, as the Bloc has said, would have no relationship with these media outlets, so *mens rea*, intent, is extremely important. I would ask that he appear before the board in an in camera session to answer what his intention was when he sent this. What was his intention when he took the photograph? When he sent it, did he send it to a reporter? Did he send it to another MP? Did he send it somewhere where he should have known that it would wind up in the public domain?

It's entirely unacceptable for him to send it to a private individual, but if he sent it somewhere where he knew that the image of the member for Pontiac would be used and sent around to humiliate him, that is not an acceptable tactic.

I have had members from both sides of the House come to me and ask, "What does that mean for the lobby? If I've had a red-eye flight, and I come into the lobby, and a member of Parliament can come in and take an unflattering picture of me with my shirt dishevelled, perhaps my bra showing, or perhaps my underwear showing, is that now fair game?"

What we're saying is that as long as you say sorry, it's no problem.

Imagine if this were a female colleague. What would our discussion be? Would it be a month later? A month later, would we be saying that maybe we'd do something about this, maybe we wouldn't?

What is owed to the member of Pontiac? What is owed to his family? What lines do we have as an organization? At what point do we say that there are limits to partisan engagement? The naked body of a fellow colleague, I would say, is an absolute limit. Today we're establishing a precedent for how such a matter is dealt with. I think that precedent must be expunged. I think the idea that a member can take a naked photograph of another member and disseminate it around the world is wholly and entirely unacceptable.

We have to understand what Mr. Lemire's intent was in sending this message, to whom he sent it to, and to whom that recipient then sent it to and if they happen to be a member of our organization, so that their actions can appropriately be captured, because that all speaks to the damages that were done and, frankly, the consequences that should be faced. Right now, the consequence faced by Mr. Lemire for this terrible action is nothing—not a thing.

I would request, Mr. Speaker, that Mr. Lemire appear before this body in camera so that he could be appropriately questioned for the actions he took. I think it is a minimum action that any reasonable organization would take. We are the body that holds responsibility for that action.

With that, I'll make a request officially that Mr. Lemire appear before this committee in an in camera session to answer questions relating to his taking and disseminating of that photograph.

• (1120)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Are there any comments or questions from the other members?

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I do understand the clarification we received earlier allowing Mr. Holland the opportunity to speak to the matter, because it arose from previous minutes.

Now we're starting to get into some debate and discussion about potential remedies and things like that. I think we are now starting to get into where there would be potential during this discussion and debate about the motion—I don't know if he's made a motion to this effect or what has just happened—where we would be talking about legal matters. Even by establishing the very precedent that we have jurisdiction here as a board, we could be getting into where there are questions that could arise here about asking for legal opinions, etc. I do believe that then falls under what needs to be in camera.

I'm not certain, but my suspicion is that now, at this point, it probably is best to defer that to the in camera portion of the meeting. I'll seek some guidance on that, but it seems to me that it's probably the best course of action there.

• (1125)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I just want to clarify. Are you asking that we move this in camera?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'm suggesting that we get some better guidance. At this point, because we need to establish.... It's actually a legal matter to even establish whether we have jurisdiction here. There are many questions that arise then that could, in fact, fall into what the law clerk was telling us would then be the in camera portion, based on the decision made before the meeting that that would be where the discussion should take place.

I'm not suggesting that we move in camera now, but perhaps that this be deferred to the in camera portion where it was originally intended to be discussed, because I think we are now getting into.... Mr. Holland was able to make his comments, because we weren't falling into the discussion about jurisdictional and legal issues. A lot of the discussion that might now flow, I think, would be a better fit into the in camera portion. We will start to get into some pretty grey areas otherwise, right?

That's what I'm suggesting, that we defer it until its scheduled as part of an in camera meeting.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I have two more members to speak, but before we go to Mr. Julian and Mr. Rodriguez, I'm going to defer to Mr. Patrice to give us a legal opinion on what we're doing right now, or where we're at to make sure that everything is in line.

**Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It won't be a legal opinion, because I won't speak in my capacity as a lawyer.

Mr. Richards raises a good point about the grey area. Obviously, based on what the law clerk has previously said, if the board is of the view that it can have the discussion and make a decision on the motion presented by Mr. Holland without receiving, asking for or discussing legal advice, it can do so in public.

If, on the other hand, members want to receive legal advice and discuss it, then the Parliament of Canada Act and the prescribed regulations and bylaws that have been passed by the board come into play. The meeting should then proceed in camera in accordance with the bylaws.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** If I could add to that, because I think I still have the floor, Mr. Speaker, I can certainly imagine that there are some questions of a legal nature that I would have in order to establish where we should be going with this. I would imagine others will probably be in the same boat, because there are many questions about what we can and can't do that I would want to have answers to, and I'm sure I wouldn't be the only one.

That's why I made the suggestion that that's probably what we should be doing.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'm going to continue then. There's a fine line that we're stepping on here.

I'll let Mr. Julian go ahead, followed by Mr. Rodriguez, Mr. Holland and Madame DeBellefeuille.

Mr. Julian, please go ahead.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I listened very attentively to Mr. Holland, and I certainly have a lot of sympathy for his views, and the importance of coming to terms with this issue. There's no doubt that there was a pretty profound violation that took place.

That being said, at the end of his comments, he very clearly stepped to the issue that raises a whole range of legal concerns. There's no doubt that any further discussion really needs to be taking place, as was foreseen on our agenda, in the latter part of the meeting.

There are a whole bunch of legal ramifications, of course. Those need to be considered, and I think the direction that we've gotten from the legal adviser to the BOIE is that we should be proceeding in camera to have that discussion later on.

We do have a number of other items that need to be discussed in public, and then we should move to the in camera portion of the meeting.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** We'll go to Mr. Rodriguez, followed by Madame DeBellefeuille, and then come back.

We have some different interpretations here.

• (1130)

[Translation]

Mr. Rodriguez, you have the floor.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons):** Mr. Speaker, I feel like we're complicating matters. Mr. Holland is simply asking that Mr. Lemire appear in camera.

We all know that what happened is extremely serious, and that it had a huge impact on Mr. Amos's life. We have to be able to say that there are limits in politics as well and that the line has obviously been crossed.

We're not having a legal discussion today, or a discussion about solicitor-client relationships or anything of that nature. All Mr. Holland is asking is that the committee call Mr. Lemire to appear, and there is no question that he has the authority to do so. In fact, recently, on several occasions, the committee has called individuals to appear before the Board of Internal Economy to explain themselves.

I would point out that when an in camera meeting is recommended, it is done under section 3.1 of the Board of Internal Economy Rules of Practice and Procedure, which I will read to you:

The Board must hold a meeting or portion of a meeting in camera in circumstances where it considers:

- (a) matters subject to solicitor-client or litigation privilege; or
- (b) sensitive matters respecting the health or family situation of an identifiable individual.

This matter has nothing to do with either of those things. We're simply looking at whether or not we should call Mr. Lemire to appear in camera to come and explain himself. I feel we should vote on it.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Thank you.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille has the floor, and then it will be Mr. Holland's turn.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** I'd like us to exercise caution.

The April 14 incident is unprecedented, and it is an important matter that we need to address, I agree. However, we should not set any more precedents on the Board of Internal Economy, the BOIE.

Since I have been on the Board of Internal Economy, all the more personal discussions that involved members who had broken the rules have been held in camera. I don't want to minimize this event, but I have a lot of questions about Mr. Lemire's potential appearance before the BOIE. Mr. Holland says we need to define what his intent was, and a member's intent is a legal concept.

I do not consider the Board of Internal Economy to be a court of law and it has no authority to define an individual's intent. I myself would like to ask a lot of legal questions. This isn't a refusal or a desire to hide anything on my part. To suggest otherwise would be to imply very bad intentions on my part, and I sensed some suggestion of that earlier. I simply want to ensure that the BOIE does not become a body used for political and partisan purposes. I want to ensure that we maintain our usual working methods when dealing with important and confidential matters involving members and their personal lives.

Of course, this event has had an impact on Mr. Amos's personal life, and I can assure you that it has also had an impact on Mr. Lemire's life. So I would prefer that we avoid setting a bad precedent and get to the bottom of this event in camera. Like Mr. Richards and other colleagues around the table, I also have legal concerns about the implications of this appearance and the nature of the questions that might be asked. So I feel this appearance should be in camera. I am cautioning us against turning this committee into a tribunal. That would set a precedent, and when future events occur, it will be difficult for us to sort out what should be dealt with in camera and what should be dealt with in public.

I understand Mr. Rodriguez's comments, which are based on the Board of Internal Economy's Rules of Practice and Procedure. However, as we have been saying all along, we're managing a new and exceptional situation and we need to be open to the possibility of managing this incident in a new way. I strongly suggest that we meet together at the end of the meeting, as planned, to have a substantive discussion in camera. That way, we can ask all our questions to the law clerk, to the IT staff, to all the people around us who are providing support and advice. That's what I encourage us to do.

• (1135)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Thank you, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

[*English*]

We'll go to Mr. Holland.

I believe you had your hand up.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** I did. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to start with the intention of moving the proceedings of the Board of Internal Economy into public. The Parliament of Canada Act is clear that the deliberations of this body should be public. The exception that has been indicated is where we are seeking confidential legal advice for having a discussion that would preclude the proceedings from being public.

That question before us right now is whether Mr. Lemire is going to appear before this body to be accountable for his actions. Yes or no?

This body has answered the same question regarding the actions of other members many times—if we're talking about precedents—even within the last year or last several years. Certainly in my time here, this body has publicly said that it would have, in camera, members come before this body to be accountable for their action. Why? Because this is the only body that can take action.

Certainly, I believe that Canadians have a right to know how we comport ourselves as a workplace. They need to hear this discussion. No element of what I'm saying deals with any matter that is legal.

It is very simple question: yes or no? Should Mr. Lemire come before this body, as other members have in the past, to be held to account for his actions, and for us to ask him what his intentions were? Or, are we not treating him the same as we've treated other members who have engaged in problematic behaviour, which we've dealt with at this body?

I think that's an important thing for folks to hear, because being in camera is not an opportunity to avoid public scrutiny or to hide from difficult conversations. It is a tool to be able to ask scoped and direct legal questions, of which none are pertinent to the question of accountability and the presence of Mr. Lemire before this body.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I point to the fact that we have a scoped and direct matter before us, and that is the appearance of Mr. Lemire before this body, as others have done, to answer for the actions he took, and for that proceeding to be in camera.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Julian, I first want to give a little synopsis of where I believe we are.

We have a motion asking us to request Mr. Lemire's presence in front of the board, in camera, to find out general information about what happened and to see what we can discover. The issue, before it comes to a question of the board, is that we do have two members I've heard from so far who have some legal concerns about doing that.

I'm proposing that maybe we should go in camera to discuss the legal matters and then come back out and make a decision on whether to invite Mr. Lemire. That decision is a public one. The legal matters—the questions that can be asked—would have to be in camera.

Does that sum up where we are? Does that make sense?

Based on what I just said, I guess, Mr. Julian seems to have a question on this. Then we'll go to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** The legal advice we've gotten is very clear: there are a whole range of legal questions that come up. Again, as I mentioned, I'm very sympathetic to Mr. Holland's concern—which we all share—about what happened and how best to deal with it.

There are three things that I think need to be brought forward. First, there are a number of other ways this whole issue can be approached beyond the Board of Internal Economy. There is the procedure and House affairs committee, and there is the House of Commons and you, Mr. Speaker, as well as the group of whips who get together on these kinds of issues.

Mr. Holland did raise the fact that on financial issues, we have in the past called upon members to step forward to meet in camera with the BOIE. I'm not aware of any situation beyond those financial issues.... Where the Board of Internal Economy comes from is, of course, the administration and the administration of parliamentary resources, so I'm not aware of precedents around that.

The third question, which is an important one that Peter Milliken was so very straightforward on in his years as Speaker is that the Board of Internal Economy functions as a board by consensus. That is an extremely important component of the board's function and mandate. Peter Milliken was always very clear that we have to look for a consensus on how to deal with the issues that come before us, particularly when it comes to the administration of parliamentary resources.

Those are all critical elements.

I'm glad Mr. Holland brought this issue forward. I do think we have a number of other elements to consider on the agenda, and we also have a discussion that is already on the agenda by consensus following when we move to in camera. There are so many questions, particularly legal ones, that have come up, and our legal advice has been that those questions be explored and answered in camera.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the meeting proceed as planned.

• (1140)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** There's been another motion put forward. Do we have consensus to proceed with that before we go to...?



I know we have Mr. Richards and Mr. Holland, as well, who have a few comments to make.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'm, I think, almost completely in agreement with what Mr. Julian just indicated.

I understand that your thought, Mr. Speaker, had been potentially to go in camera to ask legal questions about Mr. Lemire's possible appearance here, and then come back and make a decision. However, I think that's a difficult way to approach it, frankly. Mr. Julian has outlined quite well how there are a number of different potential remedies, different aspects to this that are also tied together, and I think it's difficult to make a decision about potentially just one part of what the discussion would be. I don't see how that would work practically.

I think the administration suggested what they did for a reason, and I do think we have a number of other agenda items that we would deal with far more quickly than we would with this one. They have laid it out in such a way that I think it does work best for this meeting, and it would also allow us to ensure that we don't start to get into areas where.... It might be difficult to make this decision without getting into some of the other discussions about this matter, and there are a lot of legal questions related to this.

If you look at the section of the Parliament of Canada Act that governs what the term "in camera" means, one of the other matters relates to security. When we start to talk about some of the things that we would be looking to follow up with regard to Mr. Lemire, I think those delve into that area as well. So I think we're getting into a couple of different areas where we would have difficulty discussing this without being in camera—even to follow the Parliament of Canada Act.

I really do believe that, as Mr. Julian has indicated, we should follow the agenda that's been set out and recommended by the administration, rather than trying to differ from that and deal with one piece of one item separately. I just don't think it makes any sense, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Holland,

[*Translation*]

Next, Mr. Deltell will have the floor.

[*English*]

**Hon. Mark Holland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Your suggestion is a good one. It makes pre-eminent sense that the board can go in camera for the questions that are related to in camera matters, and then it can come out of camera to deal with the matters that don't belong in camera.

Let's be very clear: The matter of accountability and whether Mr. Lemire appears before this body is not in camera. That is a question of whether this body wants to take its responsibilities, as it has in other matters.

To Mr. Julian's point, it is absolutely not just financial matters that this body has dealt with, with respect to other members. Mr. Julian will recall Mr. Weir. Mr. Julian will recall Mr. Kang. Mr. Ju-

lian will recall many other instances where we were dealing with the behaviour of a member that was non-fiduciary, that had to do with their comportment in relation to other employees, to people in their employ.

The thing that makes this situation difficult is that this is one of our own colleagues who did this. Just as one of our colleagues did this to another employee and that matter was before this body, this is unfortunately a situation where Mr. Lemire has done this to another member of Parliament. We don't know if he sent this image to yet another member of Parliament who might also have participated in that.

We are the body ultimately responsible for that. I think, and I would hope, that all members of this body, once their questions are exhausted in camera that actually relate to in camera matters, would want to demonstrate that we are a workplace that does not allow this behaviour. Certainly we would condemn this behaviour in any other workplace. Would we not want to demonstrate to Canadians that we did everything that we could reasonably do to ensure that taking naked images, private naked images of colleagues and sending them all around the world, is inappropriate behaviour? Certainly that is not something that belongs in camera. That's a basic statement of values.

What I heard mostly today is about the need to talk about legal things and go in camera, but I haven't heard a lot about that principle. Mr. Amos is here today. He's listening to this.

There's a lot of time spent about why we need to go and hide this conversation, and not a lot of time talking about the damage done to Mr. Amos.

You have an elegant solution. We can go in camera. People can pose their questions as they relate to legal matters. As is required under the Parliament of Canada Act, matters that are not in camera, matters that don't have to be in camera, should not be in camera. We have a duty to make sure that those matters are public.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

Then it will be Mr. LeBlanc's turn.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell (House Leader of the Official Opposition):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My counterpart on the government side, Mr. Rodriguez, said something that I agree with, that we are complicating matters. We are complicating matters because we have been called into this meeting today which includes an in camera portion for us to address this issue. Let's follow the agenda for the meeting to which we have been called.

Presumably, we are complicating matters by trying to find a way to deal with a matter that obviously raises some very important legal issues. The Bloc Québécois whip, the official opposition whip and the NDP House leader have raised questions that need to be addressed.

In closing, I urge all my colleagues to be cautious. When I say cautious, I also mean refer to the facts. Earlier, Mr. Holland drew a parallel between the incident that occurred and someone taking a picture of a member of Parliament snoozing in the lobby with their tie askew. The parallel is null and void. The lobby is the lobby. However, in hybrid Parliament, when a member turns on their camera, their location becomes an extension of the House, with all the consequences and responsibilities that implies. The lobby is not an extension of the House.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Mr. LeBlanc, you have the floor.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I apologize for being a little late to today's meeting. I was in the House to give a speech on the opposition motion. I was a few minutes late, but I've been listening to the discussion for about 20 minutes already.

[*English*]

I am entirely of the view of Mr. Holland in terms of the time we're spending now in discussing whether this matter should be addressed in public. Mr. Holland has made a very compelling case as to why this circumstance is extremely serious, and I think we should be in a public meeting. We would invite Mr. Lemire to come and discuss this in an in camera session.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** If I can go back to Mr. Julian, the tradition with our decisions has been to have a consensus. If there is no consensus, there is no decision.

The motion is to invite Monsieur Lemire to an in camera session.

Do we have consensus to do that?

No. I see as many heads shaking one way as the other, so we do not have consensus.

• (1150)

**Hon. Mark Holland:** Mr. Speaker, I'm going to seek a recorded vote on that. I want that vote to be recorded.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I mentioned Peter Milliken earlier because the Board of Internal Economy has a long history of consensus. It has only really deviated from that one time in our history, and that was a profoundly sad moment at the BOIE.

We have a different function from committees. Folks wear their partisan hats on committees. There is no doubt that we're members of Parliament representing our parties. At the Board of Internal Economy, we are supposed to take our party hats off at the door and consensus is absolutely essential. If we move from the consensus principle that BOIE has always had—with that singular exception—we're turning the BOIE into a completely different body from what it's intended to be and from what the Parliament of Canada Act directs us to do.

I am viscerally opposed to turning this into a non-consensus body.

I think, Mr. Speaker, you've made an appropriate ruling that we move now to the agenda. We'll have further discussion in camera. That's where I think we can start to get the legal questions answered—and they are considerable—and then potentially move to consensus decisions on how best to deal with the serious and important situation that he's brought forward.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Just to clarify, mine was a suggestion, not a ruling. I really am at the mercy of the board in what they decide.

Like I said, the tradition is consensus. That's what we're striving for.

Mr. Holland, you have another comment.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** I do, Mr. Speaker.

I belabour this point for a reason, which is that I do not have a partisan purpose in this argument. I have a duty to lead human resources for our caucus, to protect my employees and the employees who work for our organization, and to protect members from what the Bloc whip has described as “an unprecedented situation”.

Let's be very clear. This did not happen in public. This camera was not on for the public. This was in a private session, only viewable to people who saw that Zoom screen. It is absolutely the equivalent of being in a lobby, only virtually. It was rendered public by Mr. Lemire. It was ripped out of private existence and put into public.

I have spent many years here and I absolutely concur with the idea of not forcing votes or not operating by consensus. However, with respect to what happened to Mr. Amos, at what point do we say this crossed the line? At what point do we, as a body, agree around the table on whether or not somebody should even answer what's before us? Does Mr. Lemire answer basic questions in camera about what he did? That's all that's before us.

There's no purpose in saying that we're going in camera to talk about that. Either we are going to have a conversation with him or we are not. We've dealt with this on many other matters. That is why I'm forcing a vote here. I'm saying that I, very reluctantly, break with tradition, but I have an obligation. When I was head of the Heart & Stroke Foundation, there was an issue that came forward and I had an obligation to ensure that questions regarding an egregious action were answered. I feel that I have an obligation here to do the same. Therefore, I'm requesting that this be a recorded vote.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Richards, you have a comment as well?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I do, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Holland asked at what point do we make a decision. Well, it's at the point where we've been able to gather all of the information that needs to be gathered, at the point at which we have asked all of the appropriate questions that we need to ask and are able to make an informed decision about what the appropriate course of action will be.

What all of us, other than Mr. Holland, are asking for here is that we have the opportunity to do that.

Putting anyone in a position of having to vote on something without having all of the information, without having all of the questions answered, and without having the legal advice that might be required to do so puts everyone here in a very unfair position. It puts everyone in the position of voting on something they're not prepared to vote on because they don't have all of the information required.

What I think all of us are asking for here is to have the proper opportunity to have those discussions and to get the legal advice we're asking for. Nobody is necessarily seeking to deny the request; it's simply to make sure that we have the appropriate information and answers before us before we make a decision. Otherwise, everyone is put in an incredibly difficult position.

I certainly would agree with what Mr. Julian said earlier: That is the way this board operates. It's the way it should operate, and we should all be taking our partisan hats off. I think if everyone were to really look at that principle, they would understand that it is exactly what everyone here is seeking to do. I think calling for a vote when you are fully aware that people are not prepared to make a decision because they haven't had a chance to get all of the information they need to do that, not having had the in camera portion of the meeting, cannot be seen as anything other than partisan, Mr. Speaker, and that's really unfortunate. It would put us all in the awkward position of going to a vote on which we would much rather be fully informed, and of making an unfortunate decision.

• (1155)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Very good. We'll now go to Mr. Julian.

[*Translation*]

Then Mrs. DeBellefeuille will have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Just briefly, Mr. Chair, this is a serious situation. Nobody denies that. There are serious legal ramifications and there is a whole range of questions that need to be asked. I don't disagree with any of that.

I profoundly disagree with turning the Board of Internal Economy into some kind of majority body in which we cast votes. Doing that would destroy the spirit and the intent of the board.

We are not here for this. We are here to establish a consensus. We have worked over decades through very difficult issues and ultimately almost always have come to a consensus.

You, as Speaker, as the holder of the responsibility of those decades of consensus-based decision-making, have the role and responsibility to say no if a member puts you in an awkward place by

trying to change the intent of the Board of Internal Economy. This is a consensus body. There is no consensus on changing the agenda, so we will move through the agenda as it has been presented. There is no consensus on this issue at this point, so we will take the time to get all of the questions answered that people have quite legitimately asked about the legal ramifications, so that ultimately, hopefully, we can come to a consensus.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Very good.

The list is growing again. I'm going to ask one more time, to use Mr. Holland's word, whether we can use the "elegant solution"—and just so that you know, it was not my idea. We had some wonderful legal minds around the table who proposed doing that, namely, going in camera to ask the questions to cover the legal areas and then coming back and making the decision publicly.

I'll just put that out there again if anybody would like to proceed that way. I'm just putting it out there as a possibility. If there is any objection to that, please voice it now.

Are we okay? Do we have consensus before we go that route?

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I know that I was—and I believe others were—speaking to that very point.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I understand. I'm looking for consensus because that's normally how we do things. It is a tradition that I want to make sure remains.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I understand and I think what we're saying is that there are pieces that tie all together. I think to make a decision about one element of this just won't work. I appreciate the suggestion and I know you're trying to get there, but I don't think—

• (1200)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Okay, so we don't have consensus about going in camera. Very good.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille now has the floor. She will be followed by Ms. Petitpas Taylor, Mr. Rodriguez, Mr. Deltell and Mr. Julian.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, go ahead.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As you know, for as long as I have been part of the BOIE, I have always sought compromise and tried to mediate when there were opposing suggestions or positions. So I am deeply saddened by Mr. Holland's request to force a vote. I know he has an important job. I understand that. He knows that I am empathetic and understanding of the fact that he has that job and that the incident that happened on April 14 deserves to be discussed by the BOIE. I don't deny that.

I am deeply troubled by the fact that he is trying to use the BOIE for political purposes to make these discussions public, when all opposition parties have already made it very clear to the BOIE that they want to thoroughly discuss this issue in camera. How will the Chair decide that this discussion is legal in nature, but another is not?

We need to take the time to discuss this incident in a portion of the meeting in camera that is on the agenda. There is no question of hiding anything. The incident is well known. An apology has been made to the House. The Speaker has made his ruling. Now we want to study the incident further. It is scheduled on the agenda; that shows that the BOIE wants to discuss it.

It is not appropriate to call for a vote and break with the important customs of the only body in Parliament that is supposed to be non-partisan, to remain calm and to handle difficult situations. I repeat, the incident is very important, I am not denying that.

I call for calm. I, for one, wish to discuss this thoroughly during the in camera portion. I don't want Mr. Holland to think that I'm trying to hide anything. However, even faced with the incident of April 14, we can't afford to set precedents that would be detrimental to the proper functioning of the BOIE and its performance. Even though we have strong opposition in the House of Commons, strong government, and good debate, the BOIE is our non-partisan bulwark for dealing with the toughest things.

I call for calm. Please, let's stop this discussion, let's not go to a vote, and based on the agenda, let's go in camera to discuss this item, as it was scheduled. No one is refusing to discuss it. No one is refusing to make decisions. What is being refused, and it seems pretty clear, is that we handle this matter in this way, because it involves all kinds of issues, some of them legal.

I would very much like to see Mr. Holland reverse his decision and not call a vote. It would be really distressing if the BOIE were used for political reasons. I'm sure that is not his original intent, so I would ask him to reconsider his request.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Ms. Petitpas Taylor, you have the floor.

[English]

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Deputy Government Whip):** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

There are a few things. First of all, I think we all agree that the incidents that happened on February 14 this year were extremely, extremely serious. As Mr. Holland indicated, if this had happened in any—any—other workplace, serious and swift action would have been taken. I think I told you at the last meeting what my previous role was and how we would have reacted. I think for Mr.

Amos and his entire family, we can't minimize what they have been going through over the past month and a half.

I take a bit of a different approach. I have to agree with Madame DeBellefeuille: I don't think we want to provoke a vote here at the BOIE. What we want, however, is a consensus to move forward on inviting Mr. Lemire to the BOIE to answer some questions. At the end of the day, I guess I really challenge all of the members of the BOIE here to really rethink their positions on this. At the end of the day, we want to work as a consensus body, but we also want to send the message loud and clear to all of our members, whichever party they are from. I'm probably one of the most non-partisan MPs you're going to meet, but at the end of the day, I really want to make sure that this situation does not happen again; that our members of Parliament know that they have a safe place to work; and that they know that we, as the Board of Internal Economy, are taking this matter very seriously and will get to the bottom of things.

At the end of the day, I just plead with all of us to come up with a consensus to move forward on this. I also believe that we could go into an in camera session to answer perhaps some legal questions that people may have, but then from there, let's move forward in agreeing on the next step. Let's have that conversation publicly. I think Canadians want us to have an effective and healthy workplace for all Canadians. They want to see that we are taking this matter seriously.

Thank you.

• (1205)

[Translation]

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Rodriguez has the floor. He will be followed by Mr. Deltell and Mr. Julian.

Go ahead, Mr. Rodriguez.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am both troubled and saddened that members would link what is happening right now to partisanship. Mr. Amos is not a Liberal. He is first and foremost a human being, a father, a son and a husband. I would say the same thing about anyone else. What happened to Mr. Amos should not happen to anyone, regardless of their political stripes. We should be basing our discussion on that premise, rather than following our party lines.

He is a human being first and foremost. The photo was taken and distributed, and it changed his life. Mr. Lemire has admitted to taking the photo. That's the only information we need in order to decide whether to call him to appear or not. We don't need to have partisan discussions. If that's not enough for you, I wonder what it is you need in order to decide whether or not to call someone to appear in camera to explain themselves.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** We'll continue with Mr. Deltell, followed by Mr. Julian.

Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The current debate in this major meeting is whether or not to respect the consensus. A consensus is a consensus, full stop. We can sometimes give qualified support to a consensus, but a consensus is black and white. You either accept it or you don't.

The reality is that the Board of Internal Economy has always operated by consensus. You mentioned the legal knowledge of the people around you; let me mention the historical knowledge of the people around me.

On June 18, 2015, a similar situation occurred here at the board. I will read an excerpt:

[*English*]

The Board discussed the current policy of allowing annual and compensatory leave to be taken by Members' employees during a period of dissolution. There being no consensus on possible modifications to the current policy, the status quo was maintained, with Messrs. Duncan, LeBlanc and Van Loan and Mrs. Ambler noting their disagreement.

[*Translation*]

So a consensus is a consensus. You either agree with it or you don't. If some people have a problem with it, let them say so, but we feel that there is no consensus on this.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** We'll continue with Mr. Julian, followed by Mr. Holland and Mr. LeBlanc.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What is extremely important in all this is how the Board of Internal Economy proceeds. Everyone says that we need a consensus. The agenda clearly states that a period has been set aside to get all the answers to our legal questions about the extremely disturbing incident that happened to Mr. Amos.

We all want to find answers to our legal questions, but I do not understand why we are still discussing a change in the agenda for which there is no consensus. We could be more productive. We can't accept the idea of abandoning consensus and asking for a vote.

I understand Mr. Holland's point of view very well. He is not the first member to try to force a vote in the Board of Internal Economy, but the chairs have always said that in the absence of a consensus, the status quo is maintained. This has been a tradition for decades. On the one hand, we have an agenda and no consensus to change it, and on the other hand, we are going to have a discussion and get answers to our extremely important legal questions.

Mr. Chair, as chair of the Board of Internal Economy, you have the right to say that there is no consensus to change the agenda and that we will follow it.

• (1210)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** We will continue.

[*English*]

You had your hand up, Mr. Holland. I just want to make sure....

**Hon. Mark Holland:** I was deferring to Mr. LeBlanc.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Okay, we'll go to Mr. LeBlanc.

After checking, I just want to clarify that consensus is a tradition in the Board of Internal Economy. It is a tradition that is very strong, but a forced vote is also something that is allowed, depending on what the board decides.

Monsieur LeBlanc.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was just going to note exactly what you said.

Mr. Julian and I had the experience, at least for some time, of being together on the Board of Internal Economy when another great Speaker of the House of Commons, Andrew Scheer, was in your seat, Mr. Chair. I listened to my friend, Monsieur Deltell, and the Conservative whip talk about the importance of consensus. They're right; the board usually functions and that's a good thing. It's an efficient way to do business.

I also remember those board meetings where Peter Van Loan, who was then the Conservative House leader, or John Duncan, who was the Conservative whip, were very happy to force recorded votes—as were the Liberals—on a difficult matter involving the use of House of Commons funds for satellite offices.

The board was having regularly recorded votes on a matter around using House of Commons resources for satellite offices. I would think the inappropriate distribution of an intimate image over the Internet and social media that affected one of our colleagues in a very significant and enduring way feels perhaps more serious than what was the right procedure to use House of Commons resources for opening satellite offices in Montreal.

Around that issue, we regularly had recorded votes. The board continued to function. Members continued to work on matters important to the financial administration of the House of Commons. I don't think it's a huge traumatic moment that we might take a recorded vote and move on. Parliament survived. Mr. Scheer went on to be leader of his party after he presided at the Board of Internal Economy during many of those votes.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that our whip Mr. Holland had a good suggestion. We should move on to the agenda following a vote on this matter. For a group of people who get elected, we shouldn't be afraid of votes.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have some experience, but I don't have as much as all the people gathered around the table.

To my knowledge, everything is done by consensus. I would like to call to witness Mrs. DeBellefeuille, who always works in a spirit of consensus, by the way. I recognize her professional background in the field.

You mentioned earlier that it was a tradition and not a rule. What I understand is that we would be breaking with tradition. Before proceeding to a vote, I would like to be told when there was a vote at the Board of Internal Economy for the last time.

• (1215)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** We will look for this information.

[*English*]

Mr. Holland would like to say something as well, followed by Mr. Julian.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very comfortable, as I said before, with your solution that we go in camera. You can have everybody ask any questions they want, and then we would come out of camera for this vote. There is absolutely nothing about the vote that should be held in camera or that has any reason to be in camera. I would hope that after questions are asked it will be a very simple matter and we can operate on unanimity. I would rather not move a motion. I am just saying that if we can't get consensus for something as simple as Mr. Lemire appearing before this committee, I will be forced to do that.

What I will move instead is that this body go in camera to deal with this item and that at the conclusion of its in camera proceedings, we come out of camera to have a public vote with respect to Mr. Lemire's presence. I think that should answer all the questions around the table.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Do we have consensus for that?

No, I don't see that.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** Okay, then I seek a recorded vote on that motion.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Okay, very good.

Sorry, we'll have Mr. Julian followed by Mr. Richards. We still have some questions.

Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have to disagree with my colleague Mr. LeBlanc on his perception of history. Very few votes have been forced at the BOIE. The one exception, of course, is after a period of a number of meetings when there is no consensus possible.

This discussion has started, and it's a fundamentally important issue; there's no doubt. It's scheduled on the BOIE agenda and we have time available for it. There are a range of legal implications, as our legal adviser has pointed out. There is no question that the way to proceed, given the tradition and history of the BOIE, is to simply, since we have no consensus, move to the agenda as written. This important discussion with these important legal ramifications can then take place.

I'm surprised at what has transpired. It is a pretty fundamental shift in how the BOIE operates. It is something that Peter Milliken was clear about in his interventions both at the BOIE and at numerous committees when he was called upon to testify on the importance of the consensus-based decision-making of the BOIE. Peter Milliken was always very clear: There are always some exceptions, but those exceptions need to be considered extraordinarily seriously and only over time.

I would like the opportunity to have the discussion as you, Mr. Speaker, and the House administration have put forward on the agenda. We have the ability to do that, and I believe there are ways of coming to a consensus. That always has to be the preferred road for the Board of Internal Economy to take, and for you, Mr. Speaker, to take as the presiding officer of it.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Now we'll go to Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I find myself in agreement with Mr. Julian here.

On the suggestion being made now—and I have spoken of this a couple of times—the problem is that we're taking one element of a discussion and pulling it out of the discussion, and it just doesn't work that way. There are implications for other parts of the discussion on this. To try to pretend that you can pull out the one element and have a discussion about it and then vote on it, and then come back later to what the administration has suggested we do—which is to have the full discussion in camera, with the ability to ask the legal questions, etc., and then make decisions about the matter more fulsomely—I don't see the logic in that. It doesn't do this important matter justice.

I noted the examples used, I think by Mr. LeBlanc, from previous Parliaments, where there were in fact some votes that occurred. I believe I know the circumstances, and it was simply a matter of one party seeking to avoid being sanctioned, I guess, for what the board was finding as wrongdoings.

When we're talking about something like that, I can understand and appreciate why there might be a need to remove the principle of consensus that we operate, if it's just a matter of someone trying to protect themselves. We're not talking about something like that here. We're talking about three parties all agreeing that we need to follow the suggestions that the administration has made and have a proper discussion about a matter and move forward with the agenda as presented by us.

That is very different from what those examples were. To differ from the idea of consensus here on something like that, where you have three parties all in agreement that we need to do things the way they've been suggested by the administration, and one party is suggesting we disregard the advice we've been given and proceed to break up a matter into little chunks and deal with it separately, is not the same thing, in any way.

It puts everyone here in a very difficult position, because we all want to try to do this in the appropriate way, have all the facts, and to make sure that all of the questions are answered and deal with this fulsomely. We're being put in a position here where the expectation is to do otherwise. I just think that's very unfortunate, and not a good precedent.

• (1220)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** The proposal seems to be—and I'll see if we have a consensus on it—to continue with the agenda and deal with this item in camera, and then come back in public and make a decision then.

I see some puzzled faces. Maybe that's not the next step. I see heads going back and forth, and that we don't have consensus.

Mr. Holland.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** Of course, it would make no sense, and let's be very clear, I'm not going to put Mr. Dufresne.... Mr. Dufresne can correct me—and I'll put it this way—if I am misspeaking.

There is absolutely nothing out of order for this body to go in camera and ask all of the questions it wants to. Any legal question, any matter that has to be dealt with in camera, can be exhausted in camera, and then we can come out of camera and then vote on whether or not Mr. Lemire will appear before committee. There is absolutely no violation of...

I realize we don't have a consensus. I'm saying that I am moving a motion that we go in camera. People can ask all of the questions they want in camera. We can exhaust all of the in camera questions, and then we can come out and answer publicly the matter of whether Mr. Lemire will appear before this body.

I'll move that as a motion.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** We don't have consensus on that.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** I am seeking a recorded vote on that, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I think that's where we're going to have to go, then, because we don't have consensus on that item.

Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, I have point of order.

I understand the importance of the issue that Mr. Holland has raised, but he is throwing aside the whole approach that the BOIE must take and has taken for generations. As Peter Milliken so clearly lined up—he's the former speaker who provided such great guidance for parliaments, both majority and minority—there isn't the forcing of the votes; there isn't the calling of motions; there aren't amendments. There is a different approach within the BOIE.

I think what you're hearing from a number of members of the BOIE is a concern about how Mr. Holland is bringing forth this issue. It is not the issue itself. The issue itself we are all seized with. It is an important one. There are important legal ramifications that we absolutely need to be asking questions about and getting answers to, but the idea that you can simply move a motion as if the BOIE were just like a standing committee is simply inappropriate. That's the point I've been stressing repeatedly, and as our presiding

officer, Mr. Speaker, you simply have the right and all of the precedents to say, "There isn't a consensus. Let us move to the agenda as written."

This issue of course is not going away. I think every single member has expressed its importance. We want to start to get to the next steps, and the way to do that is to have the legal questions answered. We got advice at the beginning of this meeting that this type of legal advice, which is so important, is for an in camera portion. That is the very clear guidance. We have it as part of the agenda.

We don't force votes. We don't try to impose a majority view. We seek to come to a consensus. On this issue, which is so important, it is even more important to come to a consensus about next steps.

• (1225)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'm just going to move on to Mr. Holland, followed by Mr. Richards.

Mr. Holland.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As has already been mentioned, this is a convention. It's one that we all try to follow. It is one that sometimes has to be deviated from. What we don't do is take naked photographs of one another and post them all over the world. What we don't do in a reasonable place of employment is allow one person to take a photograph of a fellow employee naked, against their will, and put it in the public domain. What I don't do is accept that this issue isn't important enough, simply because we have a tradition of doing things a particular way—even though that tradition has moved many different ways in other instances—and say, "Sorry, Mr. Amos". The really confounding part about this is that my motion is very simple: We move in camera. You can ask every question you want in camera.

You can exhaust all questions, Mr. Dufresne. You can examine every angle of this. I have a simple request on behalf of Mr. Amos and the offence that was done to him, one request to demonstrate to Canadians that we take this matter seriously. That is the very simple matter that, after all of those legal questions have been exhausted, we take a vote as to whether Mr. Lemire should appear before this committee or not, just as we made a decision with respect to Mr. Weir, just as we made a decision with respect to Mr. Kang, just as we made a decision with respect to Ms. Ratansi, just as we made decisions that were very public on whether or not other members would come before this body, in camera or not.

I'm simply asking that the vote take place publicly so that we demonstrate the seriousness with which we take this matter—and yes, I'm willing to deviate from tradition. Yes, I'm willing to do what other members have done in this body before and, in exceptional circumstances, move it.

It was Madame DeBellefeuille herself who said that this circumstance was without precedent. If it is without precedent, then it demands that we take action. On that basis, Mr. Speaker, I ask that we vote on the motion that we go in camera, that this matter be fully exhausted, and that we have a simple vote as to whether or not Mr. Lemire will appear before us, in camera or not, and that it be public.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Okay. We have Mr. Richards next.

Before we go to Mr. Richards, I just had some information given to me that we'll try this one more time. What's being proposed—and again I'll need your consensus for this—is that we continue with the agenda and when we go in camera we have a chance to discuss this further, and then come back out of camera once that's done and vote on the item at hand.

Is that acceptable to everyone? Basically, we're continuing with the agenda. It shouldn't take very long. We'll go in camera and then come back out to make a decision. Do we have consensus?

Yes, we will continue with item number two, which shouldn't take very long.

Do I have consensus? Okay, we have consensus. There have been different variations of it, but let's continue.

On item number two, business arising from the previous meeting, are there any items? Seeing none, we'll move on.

On mental health and wellness resources and professional development for members and their employees, Madame Laframboise and Robyn Daigle have a presentation.

**Ms. Michelle Laframboise (Chief Human Resources Officer, House of Commons):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Our submission today is to provide the board with information—

- (1230)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'm sorry, Madame Laframboise. I'm going to have to interrupt you for a second. I'm sorry.

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order. With all of the extended debate that occurred around that, I actually had my hand up to deal with something related to the business arising from the previous meeting.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Oh, I'm sorry. Okay.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I think I just got lost because of the fact that there was such a long discussion there that flowed from the first person to put their hand up.

If you don't mind, it really is a brief comment and a quick question.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Okay. We'll be very brief, if you don't mind, but thank you for pointing that out.

Madame Laframboise, I'm sorry.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** From the previous meeting, I had made the suggestion that we seek to have you send letters to Quebec and Ontario ministries of health to make sure that we can have vaccinations for essential workers here in Parliament.

I see that what you have done is written to the federal Minister of Health, which so be it, I suppose. However, I wonder if you had a response to that letter and if you can share that with us.

Obviously it's critical that we ensure that these workers who are essential to the functioning of our Parliament and our seat of democracy here have the opportunity to be considered essential workers and get their vaccinations so we can keep them safe.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** There is no response as of yet.

Monsieur Patrice, has there been a response yet? No.

Maybe we'll push a little harder. I'll instruct our team to push on it again.

That's very good. Now we'll continue.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laframboise, you have the floor.

**Ms. Michelle Laframboise:** Thank you.

[*English*]

Our submission today is to provide the board with information on the mental health and wellness, as well as professional development resources, currently available to members and their employees and to seek the board's direction on whether they feel that additional resources are required to meet their needs.

In regard to mental health and wellness, there are currently several different venues to access their resources.

First, there's the employee and family assistance program, which provides confidential and immediate support for personal, work, health and well-being issues. This support service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at no cost to members, House officers, research offices, their employees and members of their immediate family.

Then there are the services and offerings provided by the wellness team of the House administration, including programs and services to support a healthy lifestyle and general well-being, and access to nurse counsellors who specialize in mental health, coaching and support, as well as referrals to external resources for health issues.

The health and wellness team offers yearly lifestyle improvement programs, wellness webinars and virtual conferences.

If members or their employees require access to specialized medical services for wellness, such as massage therapists, physiotherapists and others, they are often able to claim these expenses through their health care insurance plan.



[*Translation*]

In addition, the House Administration has offered a number of mental health and wellness training opportunities to the members and their staff in the context of COVID-19, such as information sessions, webinar series and virtual conferences. Finally, under current Board of Internal Economy policies, members may use their office budget to participate in workshops, conferences and courses offered. The cost of attending mental health and wellness workshops is an eligible expense, which may be reimbursed.

Recently, some caucuses have considered offering additional mindfulness resources to their members and staff, and plan to offer weekly mindfulness sessions to this group. If the board so wishes and requests, the House Administration can offer this type of service to all members of Parliament and their staff, taking into account such factors as technology needs, method of supply, and other resources currently available.

[*English*]

With regard to the issue of professional development, the House administration provides a number of training programs to members' offices, many of which are primarily offered by House resources with no charge to the MOB. In addition, members and their employees may attend external workshops, conferences and courses, such as language training, media relations and presentation skills training, and computer software training, and charge allowable costs to the MOB.

If so directed by the board, the House administration could explore additional options for providing professional development opportunities to members and their employees as well as additional resources. In exploring this possibility, we would determine if there are specific requirements for professional development that should be addressed through the House administration that are not currently being addressed, as well as how these additional professional development offerings would be financed and whether or not additional funding would be required.

As such, we ask the board to provide direction on whether to explore offering additional mental health and wellness resources to members and their employees as a service provided by the House administration, and whether to explore changes to the existing professional development regime.

*Merci.* I remain available to answer any questions.

● (1235)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Are there any questions?

Mr. Holland, and then Madame DeBellefeuille.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** Thank you very much.

I want to take the time thank you, Madame Laframboise, and the whole team for the additional tools and support that you have been bringing on board for our staff—the staff of all parties. It is sincerely and deeply appreciated. This period of the pandemic has been particularly challenging for our employees. These resources have been an enormous help to them in doing their jobs, and in doing their jobs in an environment that supports them and is healthy. Thank you for everything you have done.

I have two observations. I know that I have made these to you elsewhere. One is that we have work to do to now socialize everyone to all of the tools that are available. We're all going to have to take those on. There are two areas that I am particularly interested. For the sake of scope, I will focus only on those for today.

One is that we have embarked on having mindfulness sessions for our employees across the country. We've already done a couple of days. We're doing that on our side, on the caucus side. I would commend it to the use of other parties. It has been a wonderful tool. We've had a great pickup in participation. It's been a wonderful tool of wellness.

I'm very much vendor-neutral on who that would be, but I appreciate your saying that you would consider exploring that as being something that is available to employees from all parties. I am very encouraged by that. I'll let that come back at another date and other parties to indicate if they have an interest in it. Perhaps you could canvass them.

One matter that I wanted to put specifically to the board today is in the realm of professional development. I had a look at the utilization of MOB's for the purposes of professional development, and it's almost nil. It makes sense, because the pressures on MOB's are absolutely enormous right now. The last thing that happens, unfortunately, is dollars for the professional development of employees if you want to go further than some of the excellent training modules that you have. This can be in conflict resolution. This can be in mental health and resiliency. It could be language training. Right now we're hearing from employees across the country the frustration that they don't have access to what is normal in other workplaces.

I have a specific suggestion for the board that we could do on a trial basis of a year and then examine its efficacy. Particularly given the year our employees have had, as a demonstration of our support for the work they do and our commitment to their well-being and professional development, we would establish \$10,000 that would be added to the MOB that could only be used for the professional development of staff. I had an opportunity to talk to all whips about this. Those dollars would ensure that employees across the country, with an average of five people working in an office, would have about \$2,000 per employee to build resiliency, to build their strength in conflict resolution and to have additional language training. That would go a huge way toward demonstrating support for the work they do.

When we're talking now about a performance management system, typically a performance management system has organizational goals that you set and also professional development goals that should be part of any employee's development and goal-setting. Right now there are no dollars for that. That's something that I think we need to change. I would seek the support of other members to add that as an additional support.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** All right.

We'll now go to Mrs. DeBellefeuille, followed by Mr. Richards.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Laframboise, I would also like to add my voice to that of Mr. Holland to tell you that your entire team was able to offer support and, above all, adapt to the particular context of the pandemic.

I dare to name Ms. Mercier, from your team, who is the human resources advisor for the Bloc québécois. We asked her for specific training on mental health, because the employees needed tools and intervention strategies to detect or screen for signs of distress among our fellow citizens who call our offices, who call for help, and who may even resort to suicide.

Many citizens in our constituencies phoned our offices. Our staff were completely overwhelmed because they didn't necessarily have the professional foundation or skills, or haven't developed clinical skills to be able to take these kinds of calls.

Frankly, I did not experience this during my first terms of office. This is the first time that such a large number of citizens have called us and expressed distress and great despondency. This requires our teams to be informed about mental health resources in their respective constituencies. They also need to develop first-line intervention skills, to be able to assess the seriousness of the call and the level of distress. Our staff need to be able to make connections to protect the person and offer a little more support than is usually available in the constituency offices.

I wanted to thank you, because you offered the mental health training to all caucuses. About 60 people, members of Parliament and staff, participated, including 26 members of the Bloc teams, whether members of Parliament or staff. That training was great. It was so well designed that after only one hour, everyone came out 100% satisfied, with better tools to intervene.

I think it shows that your organization is very nimble, very flexible, able to adapt to changing needs, and able to deal with the issues that our teams face in Ottawa or in our constituencies. So, I know this is a long speech, but we don't take enough time to thank you for the really important work you do.

I now turn to another subject.

When I read your presentation, I realized that there are several services that I didn't know existed, even as a whip. You know, we don't always have time to go to the House's Source site and to look at everything you offer. I was surprised to learn a lot of things that I couldn't share with my caucus. I'm sure they're not even aware of this, nor are the staff of all our teams.

So, with your permission, I would be grateful if you would make the summary of your presentation available so that I can first promote what is being offered free of charge, what is being done by your teams, so that we can find a better way to disseminate this information in our caucuses. I don't have as much experience as some of the other people around the table, but I do have some experience, and I have learned things that I want to share with my caucus and my team members. If the members of the Board of Internal Economy agree, we could make a summary available, which you could share with us, and we could make a presentation to our own caucuses. This is my first request.

On another note, I understand Mr. Holland's request to support the professional development of our teams, our workers, our caucus members, and our employees on the Hill or in our ridings. I completely agree. Personally, I am currently on leave without pay, for civic duties, from the Quebec public service. All employees had about \$1,000 or \$1,200 a year to upgrade their skills and get additional training. I wonder about the \$2,000 and \$10,000 amounts, because I know that a lot of training is offered free of charge.

• (1240)

If a survey of members of all caucuses showed that many of them wanted mindfulness training, I am sure that your team would be able to develop it and to offer it at no cost. Training like that would clearly come under the central House budget.

I am not opposed to having our constituency budgets increased so that an additional \$10,000 can be allocated to professional development for our staff, and I don't want Mr. Holland to see this as opposition to his suggestion. I feel that the need is justified. However, would it be \$10,000? How would it be managed?

I have a lot of questions. Actually, the range of services and the expertise in your department are so great that I want to ask you instead whether you have courses that our teams could take and that your teams would develop, to meet the needs that Mr. Holland has identified.

I do not want to oppose an increase in the budget for staff training, development or even co-development. I would just like to find out whether your service has the flexibility required to increase the range of your offerings, which could perhaps meet the needs. I will be able to tell you what I decide after I hear your answers.

For the moment, I am still a little undecided about Mr. Holland's request. I still have to be convinced that \$10,000, or \$2,000 per staff member, is a good expense.

However, if your service cannot provide that kind of training, I would be quite inclined to agree to Mr. Holland's request.

• (1245)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Okay.

Ms. Laframboise, do you have any comments?

**Ms. Michelle Laframboise:** Thank you for your comments, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Let me add something. Appendix C has a list of the courses presently available to members and their employees. The training we offer is relatively broad. It covers topics from office management to employee well-being and interpersonal skills. If it became clear that we needed something else, we would be prepared to do the research to find out what could be provided by our employees or by resources that are already available. Otherwise, we could find a way to make it available to you.

[English]

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Now we'll go to Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I have just a couple of questions. I'll start first with the area of mental health and wellness and then I'll move to professional development.

On the mental health and wellness front, maybe it's in the evaluation you've done here and I missed it, but it's a fairly extensive list of mental wellness initiatives that are available to employees and to members.

Have you identified anything, when you compare it to what would typically be available in either the private sector or elsewhere, that you would see as typical mental health resources that members or members' employees wouldn't be eligible for, either by being reimbursed through their MOB or through their employee health plans, etc.? Have you identified anything that are gaps based on comparable options available to the private sector?

**Ms. Michelle Laframboise:** If you look at the employee and family assistance program, for example, it is among the best in its class. I would suggest from my experience, having worked in a variety of organizations inside and outside of the federal family, that the programs that we offer are absolutely the best in class. As well as having the EAP, having in-house services, including nurse counsellors on staff, for example, is definitely a huge part of our wellness piece. We do a lot of training and we do try to stay ahead of the trends so we always know what's coming up. The challenge has been that this last year, these last 14 months, have been exceedingly difficult and have given mental health a whole new world to work in. We're working with not just regular workplace events anymore. There are organizations that can offer more. We have seen organizations that have perhaps bigger wellness staff. I would suggest that the programs we offer and the training currently available meet the majority of our needs.

That being said, for something like mindfulness, we don't currently offer it, but it is something we would be absolutely happy to look at. Mental health and wellness are an ever-changing field. We do try to stay current with the trends to make sure we can offer the services.

While we have some excellent offerings, the challenge remains access. We can tell an employee that they can get reimbursed for certain services, but through the health care plan. Then getting access to your GP to get the prescription and then getting access to a therapist or getting access to other specialized services can be a bit more of a challenge. While we may have certain offerings, access remains a challenge, not only for our employees but also for Canadians in general.

• (1250)

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I was going to ask that question, because I think that's a problem that is not just specific to us. It seems to me I hear that from people, whether they are constituents or other folks I talk to. Getting access to those services seems to be a general problem across this country. That certainly isn't specific to us. I do appreciate that.

With regard to the mindfulness sessions, I don't know about the other caucuses, but obviously Mr. Holland indicated that his caucus has engaged in them. Are those currently something that can be paid for under parliamentary budgets or by the individual MPs or caucuses to have their employees involved through some kind of House officer's budget or otherwise? Is that something that is currently able to be paid for? How are those being conducted?

**Ms. Michelle Laframboise:** We don't offer the mindfulness right now. It's being done separately, but it's something that—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I know you're not the ones offering it, but Mr. Holland has indicated that at least their caucus has in fact conducted these sessions. Have they been able to use parliamentary budgets to pay for those? Is that something that would be eligible under a parliamentary budget currently?

**Hon. Mark Holland:** That's probably a question directed to me.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I'll let Mr. Holland answer that if...

**Mr. Blake Richards:** If you can answer it, Mark, that's great.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** We have resources that we've decided to deploy to that purpose in support of employees.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** So those are parliamentary resources you're able to access now, or not?

**Hon. Mark Holland:** Yes, that's true.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay. I just wanted to know whether or not that was something that could be done currently.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** It is. My point on that is that we're happy to do it on our side. We've had a really positive response using our House office budgets for that. Individual caucuses could do it as well. It's just a thought that it might be a good thing to offer across the board to all employees. We've had a really positive response on the impact for our employees.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you. I appreciate that, Mark.

On the professional development side, I would assume that other caucuses do this as well, but I know that within our caucus we do provide pretty extensive professional development for our members and employees—different professional development training sessions, briefing sessions, etc. I'm wondering whether in your survey of opportunities currently available to members and their employees some of those robust offerings, of which you have given us some examples here, were taken into account.

**Ms. Michelle Laframboise:** I'm sorry, I'm not sure I understand the question.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Maybe it's unique to our caucus. I don't know. I'd assume and hope it's not. Certainly there are a host of professional development opportunities provided within caucuses themselves. You've laid out some examples of professional development opportunities. I'm just wondering if that's been factored in and taken into consideration in that survey you've done.

**Ms. Michelle Laframboise:** The list that we have here has not taken into consideration what individual caucuses have prepared and delivered themselves.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I think I was hearing from you that you believe there's a pretty extensive list of things that are available. Possibly, it might be a good thing occasionally to come to this board and seek suggestions for things that could be added to your list.

Setting that aside for a second, there seems to be some suggestion that maybe we add a dedicated portion of the MOB for professional development. I'm not clear on whether the issue of getting professional development opportunities to people is in fact a lack of financial resources available to members. I would assume, given there's an extensive list of opportunities that you provide that, from my understanding, can be charged to the MOB.... Is there a financial barrier to MPs to provide these things or is there some other reason they're not being provided to employees?

The question would be how many MPs are spending right to their cap? Maybe that's why they're squeezing these things out. How many MPs are squeezing within \$10,000 of the cap of their MOB? I'm trying to determine if a financial barrier actually exists or not. It may not be a need to provide more dollars to the MOB in order to facilitate these things. There may be another problem.

I understand the problem that we're trying to fix. I certainly support the idea that we would want to try to ensure that professional development opportunities are available to employees and members where needed. I'm trying to determine if we're actually hitting the right problem in the way we're trying to solve it. I don't know if you have that kind of information. If you don't, maybe we can get it.

How many MPs are currently squeezed right up to the cap on their MOB's? How many are within \$10,000?

• (1255)

**Ms. Michelle Laframboise:** I know that we did take a look at that. My understanding is that they don't all use to their cap. Robyn, do you have additional information?

I'm not sure if the CFO is on the line anywhere here. I understand he was looking into—

**Mr. Daniel Paquette (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons):** I can take that question.

Looking at the trends over the last few years—obviously the last fiscal year and the previous one are not necessarily typical years—what we normally see as a trend is that about 25% of the members spend more than 95% of their budget. I don't necessarily have the \$10,000 mark, but if you take 95% of their budget, they're spending less than \$18,000 of the top of their budget. That's about a quarter of the members. The rest would still have some flexibility.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I guess it depends on what part of that range they'd be in, if it's closer to the \$18,000. We're talking about less than 25%, obviously. It could be 10% or 15%. I'm just trying to get a sense of whether that's the barrier here.

I think I'm hearing that it may be a barrier for some members. We all have to make choices about how we use our resources. I guess that's no different than anywhere else. It doesn't sound to me like it's a huge issue when you have less than a quarter who are.... It would be a barrier in those cases. It could be a matter of prioritizing.

That answers my question. Thank you.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** I believe Mr. Holland has a question or a comment.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I hear Blake's point. When we were talking about this point, one of the things I said was that when there are no dedicated resources for something, it doesn't happen.

As a case in point, right now, 0.013% of a member's budget is used for professional development, and that includes members themselves. When we talk to our employees, the reason for that is that there's never any discussion of the fact that those dollars would be available. There are some great training modules, but the problem we have is that if a member wants to go deeper in language training, for example, or a member wants to take a course on how to better deal with difficult case work, difficult constituents, conflict management, mental health and resiliency, there really isn't anything to support that culture of professional development for our employees.

Given the fact that we've gone through such a difficult period of time, where employees on the front line have been, over the past 14 or 15 months, subject to so much strain, I think it's a good idea, generally. It's been present in every organization I've worked in, and a wonderful gesture of support for our employees.

What I'm suggesting.... Claude talked about \$2,000 an employee. I'm not against that, but I thought it would be simpler to say \$10,000 per office dedicated exclusively for the purpose of the professional development of employees. The reason being is that there may be somebody who has one course that costs \$3,000, and another person has a course that costs \$1,000.

My suggestion is that we take a year, take a look at what kind of uptake there is, encourage our employees to participate and utilize this, and if at the end of the year we feel that was not a successful endeavour for whatever reason, we can sunset it.

It's something that, at least in our conversations with our employees, would be very meaningful to them. Culturally, it would send a really important message about our believing in their professional development.

• (1300)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Very good.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** I'll move that for consideration, and if there's consensus on that, great.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Richards, do you have another point?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you.

I hear Mark's point that unless there are dedicated resources for something, it doesn't happen. We do have, within our MOBs now, dedicated portions for certain things. We're not talking about an extensive problem of MPs who cannot seem to do anything within their budget. That's not the issue. It's the idea of dedicating funds toward it.

Perhaps \$10,000 is the right dollar amount to start with, or maybe it's \$5,000 or \$2,000 that Claude is suggesting, whatever it might be. Rather than adding to the budget, we would dedicate a portion within the existing budget. That would sort of deal with the issue of making sure that something is dedicated, without adding to the budget. It doesn't sound like there's a need to do that in order to accomplish this. As Mark said, it's a matter of dedicating funds toward it.

Whether it's a percentage of the budget or a dollar figure, however we want to do it, perhaps we can do it that way, where we make the suggestion that it's \$5,000 or 1%. Whatever it is, that amount would be dedicated from the existing budget toward professional development.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Very good.

I'm looking at the time, and we're past our 1 o'clock finish time.

Do we want to extend the session? I know there's a certain interest in this item in particular, but we also have other items as we get closer to QP.

Is there consensus on what we want to do with this session, its being 1 o'clock?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Is that to allow this discussion to finish? Is that what you are saying?

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** To what point: just for this item?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Just for this item, yes.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Okay, just for this item. The others we'll take up when we come back.

Very good.

[Translation]

The floor goes to Mrs. DeBellefeuille. She will be followed by Mr. Holland.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker, I don't want us to leave with Mr. Holland's proposal unresolved. In my view, it is really worthwhile. I am not opposed to additional funds coming from places other than our budgets. I have to tell you sincerely that I do not really agree with the money coming out of our budgets and being set aside for this, as Mr. Richards suggests. This is because our budgeting for the year is already done.

Mr. Holland's proposal is a good compromise. In fact, if we agree and if Mr. Paquette can show us that it's financially possible to add a fund specifically for the professional development of our employees, starting this year, the suggestion could be really helpful. We would need to document the process, showing whether the budget was used, what training was taken, and so forth. We would also need to evaluate it in order to come to a better decision, given how the budgets are to be allocated and used by April 1, 2022.

In that way, we would be looking out for our employees who, as was previously mentioned, are going through really difficult and unprecedented situations. We could set this up this year, the one that started on April 1, and use the amounts set aside for it, as well as our operating budget, to help our employees meet the new professional challenges. We could use it as somewhat of a pilot project, evaluate it at the end of next year, determine whether it met the employees' needs and whether it is a workable solution. We could then decide whether we were going to continue it.

I am quite in favour of that compromise proposal, which meets the needs of our employees. So I am in favour of Mr. Holland's initial proposal.

• (1305)

[English]

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Go ahead, Mr. Holland.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I totally agree with Claude. I think that, if we scale back members' existing budgets, it's going to come as a major shock to members to suddenly find out they have less money.

The second point is that, for a lot of members who go up to that 95% mark, they do so because they're in ridings where constituency offices are much more expensive or staff are much more expensive. People in certain metropolitan areas have a much bigger strain. While we have some provision for that, we don't really have a lot to compensate for the fact that if you're in downtown Toronto, downtown Vancouver, or other environments, there are a lot of extra costs. What we would be doing in effect is saying that professional development would only be available for some offices.

I like the idea of doing it, as Claude has suggested, on a temporary basis. We can do it for this fiscal year, review it next year, and see what the uptake is. Yes, I would support what Claude just said.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thanks.

I'm not opposed to the idea here, as I think I've indicated already. It's something that I know I certainly do within my office, and I think it's a great thing for others to do. I'm also aware that, as employers, we make our own decisions. I sort of hate the idea that we start to get prescriptive about how people spend their office budgets. I like the idea of enabling this. I don't even mind the idea of dedicating funds, but I think that if we start to say, "Okay, we're going to add this much to your budget for this", then what comes next, right? It gets to the point where we're starting to be very prescriptive about how people spend.

All MPs make decisions accordingly. For example, we have a dedicated portion of our budget for advertising now. I choose not to advertise; I don't spend that money. I believe there are better ways to utilize my MOB. Others make different decisions, and that's fine. I just don't like the idea of our starting to get into dedicating a bunch of things to....

I like the idea of professional development. I don't mind the idea of considering setting it aside, because I agree that sometimes if it's not set aside, it doesn't get used for something, but I don't like sort of, "Here's a pool for this, and here's a pool for that".

My thinking is that I maybe just don't have quite enough information at this point. I understand where Mark's coming from with people in areas where constituency lease costs are high in large ridings where they have to have more than one office and things like that. Often, then, people are spending to the cap. That is why they're doing it. If that's the problem, perhaps we need to look at that and whether those supplements for some of those areas are done appropriately or in the right way.

I would just like to get a bit more information before I make a decision on this. For the 25% that are more than 95%, can we break that down a little better? How many are within \$5,000 of their cap? How many are within \$10,000 of their cap? Then we'd have some sense of what we're talking about there. I'm not suggesting that I'm opposed to this. I just don't think I have quite enough information to make a decision that I would want to add to MPs' budgets at this point.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Mr. Holland.

**Hon. Mark Holland:** My apologies, Mr. Chair. I thought when we spoke as whips.... I misunderstood. I thought we were closer to consent than we were.

What I'll do then is to withdraw the item. We'll go back and have a conversation as whips to try to answer Blake's questions, and we'll return with this item once we have a consensus.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** That's good.

If there are no more comments on that.... That was part of my understanding of the consensus. We're basically instructing HR to explore offering additional health and wellness resources to members and to employees of the House and administration. We're also directing them to explore changes to existing professional development regimes. I will add as well that they consult with whips to see what they're looking for so that we can have options when we return to make a decision.

Do we have consensus on that? Does that make sense?

Mr. Richards, do you have a comment?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Yes, I just have one quick comment, Mr. Speaker.

I had a very brief conversation with Mark about this, and certainly, as I indicated at this meeting, I think it's a good discussion to have. I'm supportive of the idea of making sure that professional development is provided, but we never did get into any detail.

I'm happy to do that, but I'll still ask for the the information I've just asked for. It would be helpful to me in knowing the appropriate way to approach this. If we could still ask the administration to provide the information about how many MPs are spending right to the cap, how many are within \$5,000 of the cap and how many are within \$10,000, that would be very helpful to me.

• (1310)

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** We have that request on the record, and it will be brought to the board.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, do you have a question or comment?

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** I would like to make one final comment on this, Mr. Speaker.

If you are letting the human resources people do the analysis that Mr. Richards is asking for, I believe that last year must not be used as a reference, because it's not representative. Because of the pandemic, we spent less in certain areas, so we have to use a wider reference than just last year. In that way, I feel that the analysis would be more accurate.

**Hon. Anthony Rota:** Thank you very much. That is a good point.

With the direction given, if there are no further questions, we will adjourn today's meeting and continue the agenda at the next meeting.

[*English*]

I declare this meeting adjourned.









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