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• (1110)

[English]

Hon. Anthony Rota (Speaker of the House of Commons): This is the 10th meeting of the Board of Internal Economy in the 44th Parliament.

We're going to start with the minutes of the previous meeting, number one.

[Translation]

Are there any questions about the first item in the minutes of the previous meeting? No? Everything is in place.

[English]

We'll continue with number two.

[Translation]

This is business arising from the previous meeting. Are there any questions or comments on this? No? Good.

Let's move on to the third item: the Special Committee on the Canada-People's Republic of China. The speaker will be Ian McDonald, the clerk assistant.

[English]

Mr. McDonald, I'll let you take it from here.

[Translation]

Mr. Ian McDonald (Clerk Assistant, Committees and Legislative Services Directorate, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You have before you the request for an interim budget for the Special Committee on the Canada-People's Republic of China. This is the normal practice, which is to make a budget request whenever the House decides to create a special committee. The budget is set at \$50,000 only for the start of the committee's work. After that, if the committee wants to travel, conduct other work, or incur more expenses, it must submit another budget request to the Board of Internal Economy.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any other questions?

Mr. Brassard, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. John Brassard (House Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McDonald, the House order allowed for a travel authority for this committee. I just want to make sure that the proper rules will be in place, including having the approval of this body if there is a need for this committee to travel.

Is that still part of your understanding?

Mr. Ian McDonald: Absolutely.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, the \$50,000 is really a start-up budget in case the committee incurs any expenses. If they need more than \$50,000—if they want to travel or if they want to hire professional services—then all of those requests would have to come back to the board.

Mr. John Brassard: That's wonderful.

Thank you, sir.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very good.

Are there any other questions?

Very good, so we're okay with the recommendation of the \$50,000?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very good.

We'll go on to number four, members' advertising and hospitality expenses.

The presenter will be Monsieur St George, chief financial officer, and Monsieur Fernandez.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul St George (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): I am pleased to be here today to seek approval from the Board of Internal Economy to update certain provisions of the advertising and hospitality expense policies.

The first item relates to the current policy, which provides that advertising costs incurred at third-party events cannot exceed \$500 per event. This limit has not been revised since it was established in April 2014. On the other hand, MPs' office budgets are increased annually in line with the consumer price index. Therefore, the administration recommends that the Board of Internal Economy increase the limit for advertising to \$660, in line with increases in members' office budgets since April 1, 2015. In addition, it requests that the Board of Internal Economy authorize that the chief financial officer may review the limit on an annual basis in the future and amend it as necessary. The chief financial officer will then inform the Board of Internal Economy of any changes to the limit.

[English]

The second item relates to tickets for events.

Under the current policy, members may claim the cost of a ticket for a community event, inclusive of a meal. In recent years an increasing number of organizations have started to charge an entry fee for their activities and organized virtual events without meals. The administration recommends that the board approve a policy change to allow the reimbursement of event tickets regardless of a meal.

Also for your information, on April 1, 2022, the maximum rate for tickets increased from \$125 to \$140. The chief financial officer would review this rate, along with the advertising limit, on an annual basis and adjust it accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, this concludes my presentation and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any questions or comments?

• (1115)

Yes, Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Just for clarification's sake on two issues, on the issue of charitable tax donations, if a member is to receive a charitable tax donation, the actual cost of the ticket would not be reimbursed. That remains in effect?

Mr. Paul St George: That is correct.

Mr. John Brassard: Okay.

And political fundraising events are not eligible for these types of expenses?

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Paul St George: That is correct.

Mr. Paul St George: You're welcome.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very good.

Are there other questions or comments?

[Translation]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Whip of the Bloc Québécois): First, I want to thank the House of Commons administration for listening to the requests we made. The reality has changed and we need to adapt our policies accordingly. So I want to thank the members of the administration for their continued rigorous analysis.

I would like to ask a question about advertising costs. These costs were limited to 10% and have temporarily increased to 20%. Since we are going to amend regulations, why did you choose not to increase the percentage permanently, at this point?

To me, it would have been more appropriate to take the opportunity to increase the percentage from 10% to 20% in order to align the regulation with the advertising needs. Can you explain to me the reasons for this decision?

If you do not convince me, I may propose an amendment to your proposal.

Mr. Paul St George: Thank you for your question.

We are looking at this limit at the moment. We propose, perhaps at the next committee meeting, to come back with a report and a recommendation. So that's ongoing.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: All right.

So you are suggesting I be patient. There will be another proposal next week, and I can debate and discuss it.

I find that compelling enough for me to withdraw my amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Thank you.

Are there any other questions or comments?

Are we in agreement on the recommendations?

[English]

Mr. Calkins, I think you have a comment.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Chief Opposition Whip): I would like just a little bit more clarification.

If a ticket shows, or you can decipher, the difference between the cost of attending and the charitable portion of the ticket, would this policy change allow for at least the ability to be reimbursed for the ticket cost, less the charitable donation cost, if that's determinable from whomever you purchased the ticket from?

Mr. Paul St George: The concise answer to that question is "yes".

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very good.

Are there any other questions or comments?

Okay. Now we'll go in camera—

Oh, sorry.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Deputy Government Whip): I'm not sure if I quite understood that exchange. The answer is "yes" to if you can distinguish the charitable portion from...?

Could you repeat that, Mr. Calkins?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: What I'm asking, Ruby, is that, hypothetically, let's say a ticket to go to something is \$150. The catered meal and the cost of going is \$100, and the donation is \$50 as a member. Because I would be there as a member, can I at least get the \$100 back, and the \$50 is just something that's out of my personal pocket, but then I'm eligible to claim it for taxes and so on, and the House is not allowed to reimburse that portion?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: But if you can't distinguish, the whole purpose of this is that if there isn't a meal portion, you can still charge the full amount.

Mr. Paul St George: We look at the claims individually. If we're able to make that distinction, obviously, if it's not reimbursable, we wouldn't. However, it's very difficult; in most cases we can make that determination, based on the backup that's supplied with the invoice, but if we don't, then obviously we'd have a conversation with the individual member to get a better understanding of it.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay.

[*English*]

[*Translation*]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any other questions or comments?

We will have to excuse certain members of the table. I think that's pretty well everyone.

It seems not.

[*English*]

We will now go in camera.

We will call on you as soon as we're finished.

[*Translation*]

We're going to take a two-minute break. I think that should be sufficient.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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