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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus (Speaker of the House of Commons): Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to meeting No. 23 of the Board of Internal Economy.

There are currently enough members of the Board of Internal Economy in the room to start the meeting straight away.

[*English*]

Let's first start off with minutes of the previous meeting. I know members have had the opportunity to take a look at the minutes.

I see Mr. Julian has a point to raise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (House Leader of the New Democratic Party): At the last meeting, we discussed renovations taking place on Centre Block. We learned that there are 21 decisions to be made before Christmas, which concerns me a little. I think it concerns everyone.

So I'd like to know if you've already planned when we'll have the chance to discuss and approve these decisions, since time is of the essence.

Hon. Greg Fergus: At our last meeting a few days ago, we agreed that we would revisit this issue at the November 23 meeting. I'd like to point out that we won't be making all 21 decisions in a single meeting. We're going to do it at the next meeting and the meeting after that, which I believe will be on December 9.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

Hon. Greg Fergus: You're welcome.

Would anyone like to move to adopt the minutes of the last meeting?

Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

I see no dissent.

Thank you, Ms. Findlay.

[*English*]

We'll move to item number two, business arising from the minutes. Are there any other issues?

Is there any dissidence to moving to the next issue?

Seeing none, we'll move on to the interpretation report.

[*Translation*]

I would like to invite Mr. Laporte, accompanied by his team, to make his opening remarks.

Mr. Dominic Laporte (Chief Executive Officer, Translation Bureau): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I recognize that we are gathered here today on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

I would like to acknowledge Cécilia, Lylian and Alison, who are interpreting this meeting, and also thank Matthew Ball, vice-president of Services to Parliament and Interpretation, for representing the Translation Bureau with me today.

Mr. Chair, I would begin by congratulating you on being appointed Speaker of the House of Commons. As you know, the Translation Bureau of Public Services and Procurement Canada is a key component of the services provided for parliamentarians. Rest assured, you can count on our support in your new duties.

Today's topic, interpretation services, gives concrete expression to this support. The Translation Bureau has gone above and beyond to meet the House of Commons' interpretation needs, and we thank the Board of Internal Economy's honourable members for giving us this opportunity to provide an update on the situation.

As I have already said in the past, there are two closely linked aspects to the current state of interpretation services: the health and safety of interpreters, and interpretation capacity. In both cases, I am pleased to report that we have made significant progress since June.

• (1110)

[*English*]

Let me first talk about the health and safety of interpreters, our prime concern.

As you may know, Mr. Chair, Employment and Social Development Canada's labour program issued two directions to the translation bureau in February. On August 25, the labour program investigator closed the direction, stating she was satisfied that the bureau complied with the requirements of the Canada Labour Code and the Canada occupational health and safety regulations.

This outcome was made possible thanks to the translation bureau's unflagging efforts, along with the invaluable co-operation of the House administration and a group of sound and hearing experts. Together, the bureau and the House administration put in place a comprehensive series of protocols regarding the microphones used by virtual participants in order to provide a sound environment that would be conducive to interpretation. They also obtained sound analyses from experts at the National Research Council of Canada, Western University and the University of Ottawa.

This positive development does not mean that the health and safety issues are behind us. We must all remain vigilant. Sound incidents, such as the Larsen effect or audio feedback, continue to be reported from time to time at in-person meetings. Simple actions, like keeping earpieces away from the microphone are helpful in avoiding these types of issues.

It is also to be noted that we continue to provide the labour program investigator with monthly progress of updates on the efforts made by the bureau to better protect its interpreters.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, honourable members of the Board of Internal Economy, for your ongoing support. As whips, leaders and influential members of your parties, you help ensure that your colleagues are aware of this issue and, most importantly, that they apply interpreter protection measures and demonstrate understanding and support when interpreters need to interrupt their services to avoid injury.

We have everything to gain by protecting interpreters, first and foremost on a human level but also on an operational level to maintain our interpretation capacity.

[*Translation*]

We recently saw a perfect example of this relationship between improving interpreters' working conditions and interpretation capacity, when a number of freelance interpreters decided to work longer hours instead of limiting themselves to the reduced working hours in effect since the pandemic. A labour-management advisory group is currently looking into that matter for our staff interpreters.

This is one development that may lead to an increase in our capacity. For the time being, our capacity remains stable at pre-pandemic volumes, which in itself is an accomplishment in the current context where we have injured interpreters and a labour shortage. That said, we are making significant progress with our efforts to meet the desire by honourable MPs to prolong meetings and increase their number.

Among other things, we were able to slightly expand our inventory of freelance interpreters this summer thanks to two initiatives: for the first time, we held a second accreditation exam in the same year, and we issued a call for tenders to renew our freelance interpretation contracts. Since freelancers do not work exclusively for us and their availabilities vary, bringing in this new blood has not yet translated into a noticeable increase in our capacity. However, we hope that other steps we take, like the accreditation exam in November—to be held tomorrow, incidentally—will help us achieve our goal.

Of course, we need to keep in mind that the pool of active conference interpreters in Canada is very limited. The handful of new graduates who join the pool each year is not enough to offset those who retire. We are thus unable to achieve a net gain in capacity each time we issue a new call for tenders or hold a new accreditation exam.

[*English*]

In hopes of increasing the number of graduates, we are still in talks with universities to expand the teaching of conference interpretation beyond the two universities that currently offer program in Canada. We have been having promising discussions with two Quebec universities in this regard.

We are also working with the language industry to encourage people of all ages to consider a career in interpretation, and we are dealing with a recruitment firm to find new interpreters.

Lastly, I know that you are very interested in the pilot project intended to enable interpreters located outside the national capital region to interpret for Parliament. Let me assure you that we are continuing to work hard on this with the House administration.

Mr. Chair, honourable members of the Board of Internal Economy, I hope this update shows how the bureau is leaving no stone unturned to maintain and eventually boost its capacity, while protecting its interpreters, in an effort to better meet your needs.

Matthew and I are now at your disposal to take your questions.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

• (1115)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Mr. Laporte.

Before we move on to questions and answers, I'd like to give Mr. McDonald the opportunity to make a few comments.

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

I have two points to raise with the Board of Internal Economy today. First, I'll talk about the latest virtual committees dashboard. Then, I'll give an update on the remote simultaneous interpretation pilot project, which Mr. Laporte just mentioned.

The members of the Board of Internal Economy have been provided with a copy of the latest virtual committee dashboard. Overall, the dashboard shows a stabilization of the key data points we use to review the results of our efforts to keep committee meetings running with as few interruptions as possible. It's true that problems still occur here and there, but our monitoring shows that, when witnesses are properly equipped and coached, and have completed the required tests, there's a good chance that they'll be able to participate in committee meetings without too many interruptions.

[*English*]

As members of the board know, this is the result of considerable investments made by the House in our ongoing partnership with our colleagues at the translation bureau.

We've been reviewing existing procedures and have the teams in place to make sure that we can continuously meet the requirements for supporting meetings with remote participants in a way that meets the requirements of today. For example, considerable efforts continue to be made by the House team to onboard all virtual witnesses by equipping them with approved headsets and scheduling them for pretests to validate their set-up prior to their appearance before our committee. Further resources are on hand during every meeting to coordinate, initiate, operate, monitor and support the video conference portion. These resources help to, among other things, facilitate the technical and audio tests with all virtual participants and the interpreters immediately before each meeting.

Teams that are supporting meetings, including interpreters, also work together to share their observations, collect information on issues and ensure a follow-up when required.

[*Translation*]

The House has engaged in a process of continuous improvement, and we continue to work with the Translation Bureau to identify opportunities for improvement to support the work of committees. Mr. Laporte just mentioned the work that's being done on feedback. A team is working to find solutions that can improve the current situation.

I'll now talk about the remote interpretation pilot project.

At the last meeting of the Board of Internal Economy, we were asked to provide an update on this project. As Mr. Laporte mentioned a few moments ago, the Translation Bureau has been working hard on this file for several months. This pilot project will allow interpreters accredited by the Translation Bureau who live outside the national capital region to offer their services to Parliament. This service was first piloted in April. Additional tests and simulations have been conducted in recent months. The service has now been successfully used 19 times for unpublished and non-parliamentary meetings.

In recent weeks, the teams have also participated in simulations in parallel with real committee meetings to ensure that the service was functioning properly from a technical standpoint and that it met the Translation Bureau's service standards.

Ultimately, the goal is for this service to be as transparent as possible for the participants in the meetings.

[*English*]

In the coming days, the House administration will be reaching out to the party whips to propose an implementation schedule to bring the service online for regular committee meetings. It is proposed that this begin on November 20, which is to say on return from the upcoming constituency week.

Initially, we propose to have one RSI meeting a day between Monday and Thursday, providing support to a regularly scheduled committee from the existing schedule. For the initial rollout, it is

felt that the best option for the whips is to choose specific committees that will regularly use this service. This way, the interpreters will be familiar with the committee and the content, and the members will more quickly become familiar with the service. In the coming weeks, a second RSI meeting will be planned on the same days to maximize the use of these new interpretation resources.

What does this mean in terms of capacity? Ultimately, this will bring two new meeting slots per day from Monday to Thursday, thereby adding eight potential new meeting slots to the committee events schedule.

From now until the winter adjournment, it is recommended that this new capacity be used mostly to bring some needed flexibility to the existing committee schedule; to help reduce cancellations due to meetings that require extra time, occasional extra meetings or late sittings of the House; and, when available, to use the existing in-person teams to support other activities that have less access to interpretation resources at the present time, including regional caucuses, interparliamentary events and other events.

• (1120)

Here is just one example: Currently, when the board meets on Thursday mornings, like it is this morning, a committee in the same meeting block needs to be cancelled. With the new RSI pilot project going forward, it would not be necessary to cancel a committee meeting when the board meets.

[*Translation*]

Ultimately, those decisions will be made by the whips in the days and weeks to come, and House administration will be ready to provide them with the assistance and information they need to make the most effective use of all available resources.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We'll be pleased to answer any questions.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Mr. McDonald and Mr. Laporte.

I've started to draw up a list of people who would like to speak. First up is Mr. Julian, followed by Mr. Gerretsen, then Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

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

Thank you for the status report. I have a couple of questions on that.

It's true that everyone has really made an effort in recent months to reduce the number of injuries among interpreters. It's crucial. As we've said on a number of occasions, we wouldn't have a Parliament in Canada without the interpreters. Their work is essential. I'm pleased to see that progress is being made in this area. The clerks, the chairs of parliamentary committees and all parliamentarians are working together to reduce the number of injuries. Despite everything, as you so aptly put it, workplace accidents are still happening.

What other measures are you considering so that we can have a work environment free of hearing injuries?

Mr. Dominic Laporte: I thank the member for his question.

I would say that an awful lot has been done in the last six months. We're seeing a significant decrease in the number of incidents reported to us.

Of course, every accident or incident is always one too many, and we want to limit the number of them. Are we ever going to operate in a zero-risk environment? I don't think so. Incidents would occur when services were offered on site before the pandemic. So we have to be aware of that.

We work very closely with our partners here, namely, Mr. McDonald and his team. Every time an incident occurs, we try to find the main source of the problem. We've strengthened our protocols in place for wearing the microphone and selecting the right headset for the interpreters. We also work with audiologists. I would say it's a continuous improvement program. We'll continue to work with sound experts to see what can be done in that regard.

That's really the lens through which we're working. There's not necessarily a silver bullet or a step that we haven't taken yet that would allow us to say we can eliminate a lot of the incidents. Awareness is also important. One of the things we mentioned was the work that's being done on feedback. It also allows us to make a lot of progress.

Those are the main areas we're working on.

I can let Mr. Ball provide more context, if he wishes.

Mr. Matthew Ball (Vice-President, Services to Parliament and Interpretation Sector, Translation Bureau): Thank you.

In fact, Mr. Laporte just described all the efforts that the bureau is pursuing. We rely on the opinions of acoustic and audiology experts. Reports are constantly being made.

We're also working closely with the House of Commons administration, which is conducting additional tests on its own initiative to fully understand the audio functioning of its system.

I think we've made a lot of progress so far. As Mr. Laporte just said, there will certainly be risks. There have always been, even before the pandemic. However, we're optimistic. We believe we're on the right track to reduce the number of incidents. We've seen that over the last number of months.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

My second question is about the labour-management advisory group.

Do you have a timeline for the issue currently being discussed by this group? Will it be resolved in the short term, or in the medium term?

• (1125)

Mr. Dominic Laporte: Thank you for the question.

The group began looking at this issue over the summer. So far, we've had six or seven meetings between management and the union, and they've been very productive. Of course, we want to hear the comments of our interpreters to try to find a way to come to an amicable agreement.

We don't have a specific timeline, but discussions are ongoing. Good progress has been made.

Basically, we're trying to look at a range of options. Sometimes, too, it can be on a case-by-case basis. Not all interpreters are in the same situation. Some interpreters have been injured. There isn't necessarily a single easy solution, such as returning to normal working hours.

All in all, I would say that we're having very productive discussions. The process isn't going to take two or three years. I think both sides want to resolve this quickly.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

You talked about an accreditation exam that took place this summer, if I understood correctly. How many candidates took the accreditation exam, and how many were successful?

Similarly, there's another accreditation exam tomorrow. How many candidates will take the exam?

Mr. Dominic Laporte: Thank you for the question. I had a feeling someone would ask it.

Fewer candidates registered for the certification exam that took place in June; there were 38. Four of them were successful. So we had a lower success rate. Perhaps the reason is that a lot of people were taking the exam for a second time. It was also the first time we'd had the exam in June. All in all, we had three new candidates who passed the exam.

We have 57 people registered to take the accreditation exam tomorrow.

Mr. Peter Julian: Did you say 57?

Mr. Dominic Laporte: Yes, there are 57 candidates.

Mr. Peter Julian: I know that the interpreters do a great deal of high-quality work. Given the very high requirements, I understand that the success rate is low.

Tomorrow, 57 candidates will take the exam. Last time, four of the 38 candidates who had taken the exam passed. Were the other candidates close to being successful? Could the success rate be increased if those people were given more training?

What are the criteria that explain why the success rate is so low? In June, just under 90% of candidates failed the exam. Hopefully, the next exam will have a higher success rate.

I'm not saying that the quality should be reduced. The quality must be maintained, but other measures could sometimes enhance the potential of certain candidates.

What solutions could be put in place to solve the current problems and increase the success rate?

Mr. Dominic Laporte: Thank you for the question. I'll answer first, then I'll let Mr. Ball add his comments.

Of course, we're working closely with the candidates who have almost passed the exam. When we see they have the necessary skills to become good interpreters at the Translation Bureau, that they have almost passed the exam and that they may the next time, those people will receive training from us.

We also give a lot of preparatory workshops for our candidates. There was one in October, I believe, and we did the same thing in June. We want to make sure that the candidates are ready. The goal isn't to trick them with an exam. On the contrary, we simply want to make sure that they have the necessary skills to meet the very strict requirements of the House of Commons. We never want to compromise quality. We also have interpreter managers who sit on the committee to ensure that the interpreters meet our criteria.

Mr. Ball, I invite you to add your comments.

Mr. Matthew Ball: Indeed, the number of candidates who pass the exam only paints part of the picture. Before the exams, we give preparatory information sessions for the candidates. It helps them to get the best mark possible and to give their best performance. Assessing the candidates also gives us an opportunity to identify promising candidates with whom we want to continue our efforts. We contact them afterwards. Often, even though these candidates haven't passed the exam, we can hire them as interpreter trainees. It gives us the opportunity to work closely with these candidates who aren't necessarily up to our expectations yet.

Of course, we take into account the real working circumstances of interpreters in the Canadian Parliament. We demand the same quality as you demand in your work.

So, in addition to people who pass the exam, other things are being done behind the scenes to increase the interpretation capacity and ensure the next generation, which contributes to our efforts to support you.

• (1130)

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much. I'm very happy to hear that. We have the best interpreters in the world, and we must maintain this exceptional quality. Training and assistance can also play an important role.

My last question is about the remote interpretation pilot project. I would like to know how many interpreters from outside the national capital region participated and whether technical problems were raised and resolved. Out of personal interest, I'd also like to know if any interpreters from British Columbia participated.

Mr. Dominic Laporte: If I may, Mr. Chair, I'll ask Mr. Ball to answer that question.

Mr. Matthew Ball: I'd be happy to.

We have about a dozen interpreters who provide their services outside the facilities on Parliament Hill. As for the B.C. interpreters, I would have to check that information. I don't want to mislead you.

Yes, this is a pilot project that we're working on with House administration, and it's well under way. We expect there will be little glitches during implementation, but the work we've done has already allowed us to make improvements and resolve small glitches that have arisen along the way.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

Hon. Greg Fergus: You're welcome, Mr. Julian.

I'll now give the floor to Mr. Gerretsen.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Thank you.

I am new to BOIE, so I apologize if this has been covered in the past.

I listened attentively to the comments you made around the earpieces and the feedback they can cause. I know I've been guilty of that in the House, absolutely, but the problem extends beyond just the individual who's speaking. As you would know, when the microphone turns on, it's usually for two desks. If somebody at one of the other desks happens to leave their microphone in that area, the feedback is going to occur. Sometimes it takes a while to figure it out.

My question is more with regard to the technology of it. There must be technology out there, whether through a different style of microphone or something, that would limit that feedback. I think that is a serious hazard to interpretation services. It's something that can seriously affect somebody's hearing if they are subject to that.

Does that technology not exist? Has it ever been explored to utilize it in the House?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Aouididi, the floor is yours to answer that question.

Mr. Yassine Aouididi (Senior Digital Product Manager, House of Commons): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Through you, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the question.

My name is Yassine Aouididi. I'm responsible for the audiovisual technologies here at the House of Commons, including these committee rooms and the chamber.

Yes, we always explore solutions and try to find solutions with regard to feedback. Feedback occurs naturally when there's an audio source that's exposed to a microphone, such as in this case with this earpiece and this specific microphone. It's not one specific scenario, but multiple scenarios that we're looking at.

Specifically about the earpieces right now, there's already some protection that's integrated into these delegate stations. Effectively, every time we turn this microphone on, the volume goes down on this particular earpiece to minimize the risk of this happening. Accidents sometimes happen when we're using.... Sometimes, we have a Surface here and we plug into the wrong delegate station. Some human error aspects can occur that cause these incidents to happen. That's why the promotion and awareness aspects are very important. That's why we have started working collectively with the translation bureau on ways to promote that and explain more the situations in which this can occur.

Should it happen, there's still integrated protection downstream for the interpreters through the console that prevents a sudden peak. The volume will be stopped to prevent that from causing ear damage. There are multiple layers of this. There's not just one layer.

Also, in the chamber, for example, we replaced the earpieces this summer to make sure that the level of loudness is not as loud so there are fewer chances of peaking. We're trying to tackle it on many fronts.

• (1135)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

Hon. Greg Ferguson: Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, the floor is yours.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Whip of the Bloc Québécois): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have a few questions for the Translation Bureau and the team that runs the committees.

Mr. Laporte, I really enjoyed your opening remarks. It's good to have some positive news in spite of everything, but I'm still concerned. You've been very transparent in saying that, despite your efforts, the interpreters you recruit don't replace all those who retire. So you're never in surplus. You manage to avoid catastrophe and honour the commitment you made to the House administration to interpret 57 events a week. However, despite your best efforts, more people retire than join your team.

In that sense, I know that you will maintain everything you do to recruit interpreters. However, I think it's important to know whether you're going to keep your two annual exams and make them a regular practice. That's what you did this year. However, it only allows you to maintain your commitments, but not to be in surplus. In that context, do you plan to conduct two or three exams during the year to be able to replenish your pool of interpreters a little more quickly?

Mr. Dominic Laporte: Thank you for the question.

With respect to the annual exams, the fact that we added this second exam helped a great deal. There may be some candidates who

didn't pass our exam in June, but who will pass the one in November. So it's a good practice.

The fact remains that the pool of potential candidates is limited. Only two universities have master's programs in conference interpreting. So even if we had more exams, we wouldn't necessarily have more candidates.

We are stepping up our efforts, particularly through the recruitment firm I mentioned, to find people who don't necessarily want to work at the Translation Bureau or who may not have wanted to work there in the past. So every effort is made to find other candidates.

I would say, though, that our capacity isn't diminishing. It's important to remember that our interpretation services are at the same level as before the pandemic. After all, 15,000 hours of interpretation were provided in the House of Commons. It's important to put things in that context. As a result of all the efforts that have been made, whether in terms of health and safety, recruitment or accreditation exams, we've been able to maintain our capacity. We're aware, however, that MPs would like to have more, and we're working on that, of course.

In short, my intention is to maintain two accreditation exams per year. We didn't have a large number of candidates for the exam last summer, because it was the first time, but we may have more candidates next time.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: You're talking about maintaining capacity. However, as you said, since the House of Commons resumed sitting this week, a number of parliamentary activities and committee meetings have been cancelled because of a lack of capacity. I'm talking about interpretation capacity, but it may also be a matter of the availability of rooms. The idea is to increase our capacity.

You're good, you're maintaining your capacity, which means you're not dropping below the threshold you've committed to. However, I think you have to recruit in order to be able to provide what we need to work. We don't have what we need right now. However, I must be assured that you're working on increasing the number of active interpreters to support all our work.

For example, today, because the Board of Internal Economy is sitting, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs isn't sitting. I find that completely unacceptable. It may suit some people, but I find it unacceptable.

I have some expectations about the remote interpretation pilot project. On that point, I'm not sure I fully understand. The Translation Bureau has committed to supporting 57 events. As I understand it, the pilot project will add two more per day, bringing the total number of events to 65. Is my reasoning correct? Is it true that, given the capacity for interpretation, as of November 20, parliamentarians will be able to count on 65 events?

Mr. Dominic Laporte: Thank you for the question.

In terms of the events, I'll let Mr. McDonald provide details. However, I can talk about the number of hours of interpretation we'll be offering. Currently, we offer 160 hours a week. We're going to add 16 hours with remote simultaneous interpretation. So we're going from 160 hours a week to 176 hours a week. It's more than the status quo. That's still a 10% increase in the number of hours of interpretation offered. As Mr. McDonald mentioned, this will be used to stabilize activities and, I hope, to prevent interruptions or cancellations of committee meetings, as in the examples just mentioned.

We're aware of the problems that have arisen. We want to offer our assistance, and we're working closely with the House of Commons administration to carry out this pilot project, which we're still hopeful about, but which is also not a magic bullet. I think this project will allow us to stabilize the number of hours of interpretation that we can offer. It may save us from interruptions, and it may allow us to extend the sittings. However, that service has certain limitations, because the interpreters are outside the national capital region. It doesn't create more interpreters.

• (1140)

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Laporte, I have one last question for you. Then I'll go to Mr. McDonald.

You wrote to the interpreters to tell them that you had honoured your commitment, following the complaint regarding working conditions and health and safety. The National Research Council of Canada participated in a study, together with experts from around the world. After reviewing the sound system used in the House and conducting all the necessary tests, it was concluded that the House administration was meeting quality standards.

I'm very pleased that the House administration achieved such a result. The House administration needed evidence and scientific data to be able to judge what was happening with its equipment.

Now that the matter has been resolved, however, I must admit that one thing remains a concern for me. We know that there have been injuries and accidents at work among the interpreters in the Senate. Personally, I'm very familiar with the measures taken by House administration. I salute the work done by Mr. Aubé and Mr. McDonald to improve the health and safety of our interpreters in the House. However, does the Senate also follow the best practices adopted by House administration? When interpreters work with Senate equipment, do they tend to get injured more often? I'm asking the question because we share the same pool of interpreters, if I'm not mistaken.

Mr. Dominic Laporte: Thank you for the question.

We have the same discipline and rigour in both the House of Commons and the Senate. We have excellent co-operation with the Senate. Interpretation time during virtual sittings in the Senate has greatly decreased. A lot of progress has been made. Sometimes there are small variations in the implementation of protocols, but the same rigour applies to both places.

The director of Parliamentary Affairs and Interpreter Well-Being works with the governance committee that brings together the ad-

ministration of the House of Commons and the Senate. Everything we do to improve things in the House of Commons, we also do for the Senate, and we get excellent co-operation from them.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: I don't know if this question is for you, Mr. Laporte, but is the Senate sound system comparable to ours? Are the two systems of equal quality? Did the tests that were done include the Senate equipment as well?

Hon. Greg Fergus: I'll give Mr. Aouididi the floor to answer that question.

Mr. Yassine Aouididi: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Indeed, the tests that were carried out in the House were also carried out in the Senate. The results apply to both places, since the same systems are used. The House of Commons is a service provider to the Senate, but the Senate is responsible for its own investment plan for modernizing and maintaining its equipment. We provide technical services for committee rooms with the same rigour in the Senate and the House.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: So we can say that the systems of the Senate and the House of Commons are of equal quality, can't we?

Mr. Yassine Aouididi: Yes.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Okay, perfect.

Thank you very much, Mr. Laporte.

Mr. Chair, if I may, I would like to ask Mr. McDonald a couple of questions.

My first question is about the pilot project. How is your team going to manage these two extra events a day? For example, if a committee wants to extend a meeting, how will you determine whether there are sufficient resources? How will you decide?

Mr. Ian McDonald: It's always up to the whips to decide on priorities for the use of resources, including interpretation resources.

What we're proposing is that the interpreters working remotely be assigned to specific committees, at least until the House rises for the Christmas period, and that we start to assess how we can maximize the use of resources after the holidays.

As I mentioned earlier, if interpreters working remotely are always assigned to the same committees, they'll be more comfortable, and the content of the meetings will be more familiar to them. It will also be easier for committee members to get used to this process for the next six weeks and probably for the next four weeks after Parliament resumes. That will help maintain those resources.

If there are requests to add meetings or extend meetings, we'll use the interpreters who are there and who can help with those meetings. It's really for the meetings that are going to—

• (1145)

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Basically, you will have more flexibility and agility. With more resources at your disposal, you will be able to better respond to unforeseen events at Parliament and better manage activities on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. Ian McDonald: The idea is to have a little more flexibility to meet the needs that arise every day, whether it be extending or adding a meeting. We'll see if that's still possible, but we'll do what we can to maximize the use of the available resources.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask one last question.

I looked at the virtual committee dashboard. I know that it requires a lot of work on your part, but it has allowed us to see all the efforts you have made to arrive at the results presented today.

We seem to have hit a ceiling, with about 66% of people testifying in person. I think we can still do more to encourage people to attend committee meetings in person. Few parliamentarians sit in on meetings virtually, which is good news. The whips did their job well. We see the same thing in debates in the House of Commons: very few MPs use the videoconference option to speak, which greatly improves things. I think everyone has done their part. However, there is still work to be done, in my opinion, because 66% is not enough. We want in person attendance to be upwards of 70%.

Do you still have something in your strategic game plan that we could use to increase the percentage of witnesses appearing in person?

Mr. Ian McDonald: Committee clerks forward this information to the chair of the committee to which they are assigned, who then sends it to all committee members. Mr. Lemoine and I have already forwarded this information to committee chairs as well.

If a committee expresses its preference to hear witnesses in person, the clerk can certainly communicate that to the witnesses. At the end of the day, the Standing Orders dictate that witnesses have the choice of appearing in person or virtually. However, if a committee expresses a desire for witnesses to participate in person, the clerk will indicate that to the witnesses, while informing them that they still have the option of participating remotely.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, there is a subject that I do not necessarily want to debate today, since it is not on the agenda, but since Mr. Laporte is with us, I am raising the issue.

At the Bloc Québécois, we have noticed that the quality of certain documents translated from English into French that we receive in committee sometimes leave something to be desired. I don't know whether those documents came from the Translation Bureau or government departments. It might be interesting for us to get a bit of a briefing on the requests for translation of documents and turnaround times. That could be done at another meeting of the Board of Internal Economy. It may not be possible at the next meeting, but it could be at a future meeting, whether it's between now and when we leave for Christmas or when we come back. This presentation would let us know what the process is for translation requests, what the turnaround times are and whether there are any problems.

When we compare translations, we note that there are problems, but we don't know whether it comes from the Translation Bureau or from departments that use Google to translate documents because they lack resources. I don't know whether the Translation Bureau also lacks translation resources.

In short, it might be interesting for us to get an overview of that, if you will allow me to make that request.

Hon. Greg Fergus: That's a great suggestion. We'll come back to that at one of the next meetings of the Board of Internal Economy.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much.

I want to say one last thing. Mr. Gerretsen is new to the Board of Internal Economy, but I have been raising the issue surrounding interpreters, the quality of interpretation and resources for four years because it is important to me. I know that some people around the table were a little tired of hearing me talk about it, but I still want to thank the House administration. As a parliamentarian and a member of the Board of Internal Economy, I felt heard. I think the administration has done a good job and has worked very hard to improve the situation. It's not perfect. There are still improvements to be made and rooms that have problems. However, I know that Mr. McDonald's and Mr. Aubé's teams and the Translation Bureau's team have worked hard to collect data and evaluate and improve their performance. They are striving to do better. It's not easy. So I wanted to take the time to thank all those people who have worked hard, while reminding them that there is still work to be done and that we are counting on them to carry on with their efforts.

• (1150)

Hon. Greg Fergus: On behalf of Mr. Laporte, Mr. McDonald, Mr. Aubé and the entire House administration team, I thank you for your comments, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

The concerns that are raised here around the table are always taken seriously. That is why these people are working very hard to improve the situation, so that all members can carry out their duties as they should.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I see that there is nothing else to mention on this.

I'd like to echo Madame DeBellefeuille's comments and thank the team for coming here and for making this presentation. It was very well received.

Why don't we take a minute to trade places and start up on item number four, on the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians. We have two guests with us—Mr. Léo Duguay and Mr. Matt DeCourcey.

Welcome to the Board of Internal Economy, Mr. Duguay and Mr. DeCourcey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. DeCourcey, you have the floor.

Mr. Matt Decourcey (President, Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Before I begin, I would also like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

It's an honour to be back here with some of my former colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

[*English*]

Thanks for having Léo and me here.

My name is Matt DeCourcey, for those with whom I didn't have the pleasure of serving. I served as the member of Parliament for Fredericton from 2015 to 2019. I joined the board of the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians in early 2021. Just this past June, I assumed the chair of the association.

I'm joined today by my friend and colleague—and our president emeritus—Léo Duguay, a former member of Parliament in the Winnipeg area. He has decades of venerable service to Canadians, which he can speak more about after my opening remarks.

The third member of our team, who intended to be here today, is our immediate past president Ms. Dorothy Dobbie, a former member of Parliament in the Winnipeg area, as well. She is returning from other activities and is unable to be here, but she was certainly fundamental in helping prepare this presentation and in working with the administration of the clerk's office and of the House of Commons to help us prepare for this exchange today.

We don't intend to take too much of your time. We know you're all busy. In many ways, that's the point of why we're here.

As you elected parliamentarians carry on your fundamental duties to help move the country forward, ensure legislation is passed in the House of Commons, serve your constituents and tend to your partisan activities, you have at your disposal a roster of over 1,000 living former parliamentarians from across the partisan spectrum who continue to want to engage and serve Canadians, and who are there to support you in the important endeavour of supporting, promoting and safeguarding the institutions of democracy and Parliament in Canada.

If I might, I think those two institutions can use all the support, promotion and safeguarding they can get in this day and age.

For those who aren't aware, the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians exists because of an act of Parliament passed unanimously by the House of Commons and the Senate in 1996. We exist by statute with a clear mandate to serve the institutions of Parliament and democracy, both in Canada and abroad; to provide non-partisan support to parliamentarians and the government; to foster collegiality among former parliamentarians; and to strengthen and enrich our relationships with senators and members of Parliament. We do that while looking out for the best interests and needs of all former members.

Simply put, to fulfill our mandate, we do what we can. We hold outreach and engagement activities that inform members and former members of what's going on in the lives of their colleagues, and we bring them together from time to time. We do what we can to support the transition out of public office for many members of

Parliament—a time in their lives that can be fraught with emotional, physical and financial stresses. We try to do our best to support them. We hold activities to support democracy and Parliament, primarily in Canada with young Canadians but also around the world with young and burgeoning democracies.

Quite frankly, however, we struggle and fall well short of the value, importance and potential impact we could have to fulfill the statute that asks us to fulfill a certain mandate. We don't have the resources required to properly serve our members and you parliamentarians, so we come to you with a request for a funding increase that we think is reasonable. It has been well thought out and worked on by former members of Parliament from across different party stripes, House administration and members of the clerk's office. There was a lot of thought put into it to identify the best way to meet the shortfall we feel we have and the needs of our members.

We have a request that asks for funding to be phased in over four years. This will allow our association to properly fulfill our legislated mandate; create true organizational capacity to support our members; increase our ability to support incoming and exiting members of Parliament; and, most importantly, help us help you safeguard the institutions of democracy and Parliament in Canada and abroad.

● (1155)

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much again.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Duguay, who will talk a little about our activities and discussions with our counterparts in the United States and Europe.

Mr. Léo Duguay (Past President, Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians): Thank you very much, Mr. DeCourcey.

First of all, thank you very much for inviting us here today.

To begin, I would like to share an anecdote about the life cycle of parliamentarians. When I was an MP, Greg Fergus was a page. So you see the cycle: he went from page to MP, then to Speaker, and one day he will be a former parliamentarian.

As Mr. DeCourcey is fond of saying, I hope that when you become a former parliamentarian, it will be of your own volition. Many MPs become former parliamentarians because the electorate is sometimes cruel.

[*English*]

Earlier on, when this presentation was first made, there was a question about what the former members of the United States and Europe do. I wanted to point that out.

The Americans are fond of saying that they do not receive money from Congress, and, in fact, that is correct—technically. However, the workaround is simple. When the Bundestag's former members or Bundestag's current members meet with members of Congress in Washington, the organization and support of those activities is carried out by the association of former members, a job that, in Canada, is done by some of our colleagues in the bureaucracy.

The other thing that Americans do that we don't do is that Americans have different rules for political contributions, so when the Bundestag meets with members of Congress, corporate entities are invited to attend, and these corporate entities become supporting partners of the association. They pay an annual fee to be supporting members. While it is technically correct that Congress does not give funds directly to the association, they provide considerable sums in an alternative way by hiring the association to perform functions that, in Canada, are bureaucracy functions.

The European former members of Parliament have a different structure. Their support provides to the association an executive director, an assistant deputy minister level staff and two other staff as well as all the support that is required for their association. The former members of the European Parliament also administer the pension plan for former members, and there is a source of revenue that goes to them for doing that job.

All of this is to point out that the request that we've made to you is not out of line with what sister organizations in the world do, and it isn't designed to create weird and wonderful travel activities for our members. It's designed to do a couple of really simple things.

We have members of Parliament who are dis-elected or who retire, and I think the tendency to believe that those who retire have an easy life is not altogether true. We can tell you from years of experience of having picked up our colleagues that the movement from being a high-profile member of Parliament in a public capacity to a person that almost everyone ignores in one day is traumatic for a lot of people. It's not traumatic for everyone, but it's traumatic for a lot of people. That's part one.

The second part of what we do is that many of our former members of Parliament are becoming younger and younger. Remember why all of you entered public life. You entered public life to serve the public. Just because you get defeated or move out as a member of Parliament doesn't mean that you've lost that objective. We all want to serve the public who elected us, and we want to continue to serve. The act that Parliament passed in 1996 was designed to permit our association to do that. However, over a period of time, support for us has dwindled—never mind meeting the standards that we've put forth.

We're not asking for a free handout. We would simply ask that you endorse the proposal in principle and let us work with the administration to try to figure out how we could best accomplish those things the act requires us to do.

● (1200)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Mr. Duguay and Mr. DeCoursey.

Are there any questions or comments?

Ms. Findlay, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (Chief Opposition Whip): Thank you.

Thank you for being here today.

This is a tough time for a lot of Canadians, and I understand the call to service, having won elections and lost elections, and that it is the will of the public at the time.

I do understand your comments about wanting to continue to serve. The questions are, at what level, doing what things and how much of that should be supported by public funds? I do note that a year ago, the association was requesting basically double the funding that you are requesting now, but it's still a sevenfold increase in the value of support.

I do have questions, because I'm not persuaded that this is the best use of funds.

One thing I was wondering about was how the size of the association's membership has changed over the years. Has there been any significant growth over the past decade, for instance? Can you advise me on that?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: For the benefit of everybody in this room, Mr. Chair and committee members, I think we realize and are fully aware of the challenges that this institution has to deal with on a daily basis, keeping in mind the challenges that ordinary Canadians face in their daily lives.

I think one of the benefits that our association and a potential membership of a thousand living former members offer is a dedicated desire to continue to ensure that this institution, Parliament and the system of government that it sits beneath—democracy—is upheld and that its values are able to be imparted amongst folks in their daily lives.

I know that our membership has gone through ebbs and flows. Certainly, during COVID, it was more and more challenging to reach out and ensure the enrolment and retention of members in the association. I think we sit at just shy of 300 members currently as part of the association. Léo can speak to the historical trajectory of what that has looked like over time, but the fact is that we don't have the capacity to sustain our outreach and our ability to go and seek out potential members, engage them in activities and organize enough meaningful activities for them to feel as though there is import in what we do. We have a board that is committed to ensuring that we increase those opportunities for those 1,000 potential members out there.

Léo...?

● (1205)

Mr. Léo Duguay: The membership has ranged as high as 425 in some years. That's what it was before the pandemic. Every time that our membership ebbs and flows, we have organized a volunteer telephone campaign to try to get people to join the membership.

I would point out that one of the significant issues is that of the former members of Parliament—and don't hold me to the number—the last number I had was something in the order of 40% of people who serve in Parliament never qualify for a pension. That's a significant number, so the idea that members of Parliament retire from here and live the life of Riley is not really quite true. Many of them have difficulty in reintegrating.

I'd just hasten to add one point. I've had the opportunity of meeting with my colleagues in the U.S., former members of Congress, and the European members, and one of the things they have had that we have not had is incredible support from current members. We've had difficulty in getting you to help us out, and it isn't just about the money. It's about you coming to our events to help us out and to help the work that we do. Former Speaker Scheer, of all the people in this room, has the most experience of anyone I can see. He and I attended probably 40 events together over the five years that I was president of the association. If you ask, why five years? There isn't exactly a competition for these jobs. Most members are happy to let somebody else do it, as I think, frankly, speaking to you, you are also happy to let somebody else do it.

I hasten to add that our bureaucracy does incredibly good work for members of Parliament. The line, though, gets stopped when we say that your work and their work is about members of Parliament—not former members of Parliament, which is what we do.

There is an incredible job in reintegrating. I can tell you there are at least 15 or 20 former members whom we have picked up off the ground. Some of you here will know that Mark Holland, I think, made an example some time ago. We have cases of attempted suicide. We have cases of depression. The system that you have in place right now for members of Parliament stops pretty well after you become an ex-member.

I just want to remind you that this is not a demand of give us the money and we will go away. What we're saying here is that these are the things that we think we can do. We think they're worthwhile doing, and our request to you is to let us work with the department and come up with a refined plan. When we submitted this to you a year ago, it was just a draft. My impression was that we would work with your staff, that you would say for us go work with the staff and refine it. We've worked with staff now and have refined it, and it needs some more refining.

This is not a request of give us the money and we'll go away. It's saying, here are things we want to do and here are things we can do. Help us do those things, and we'll work with your staff and come back with a fixed, hard-line budget, which this is not.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Thank you for that answer.

I certainly understand some of the problems of reintegration, to use your word, when parliamentarians find themselves out of office. I understand the idea of collegiality among former parliamentarians, but it's a lot of money that's being asked for.

Do you have the intention to revive your fundraising efforts, which I believe the pandemic put on hold? How much were you able to raise annually prior to the pandemic? Do you have any plans in that regard?

• (1210)

Mr. Léo Duguay: For a period of about 10 years, I was responsible for almost all of the fundraising efforts. We were able to raise over a 10-year period something of the order of \$1.5 million gross. We used that money to fund our association as best we could. The pandemic brought this to an absolute halt, and a number of other things have conspired to make all fundraising on a volunteer basis difficult.

We had a process whereby we held an annual dinner here in Ottawa. Some of you actually have attended that. It's becoming harder and harder to have corporations grant you money for purposes that they're not sure about.

We're quite prepared to do that. As a matter of fact, I'd make you an offer: If you will match this dollar for dollar, we'll go right back to the fundraising.

I'm telling you that raising money—I've done it—is very hard work. It's hard to get an association of volunteers together to go beg corporations to contribute money for the objectives we have here. I remind you that these objectives were not our objectives. They were set out in an act of Parliament.

Yes, we're prepared to do our part in fundraising, but this would be basic funding from which we could do the rest.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: If I might, Ms. Findlay, just to finish off and help respond to that question, I think our association is more than open to partnerships with a range of different civic-minded groups. I know that this board has had other organizations that come to them seeking funding. We'd be more than happy to partner with them. That would be point one.

Point two on that same train of thought is that we have a legislated mandate. We exist by an act of Parliament, which I think differentiates us from some of those other organizations to come. If we had the funding, we would be more than willing to work with civic literacy organizations, parliamentary interns, teachers associations. That's at the core of our mandate, and that's work we want to do more of.

Right now, we struggle because we don't have the organizational infrastructure in place to properly run a Parliament-to-campus program. It's gone in fits and starts. We don't have the proper infrastructure in place to help support the fundraising, which brings me to my third point.

Some of us are younger parliamentarians who need to go out and work full time in the world and raise families. We can't undertake that sort of fundraising activity, certainly not without the support of a fully functioning office to help backstop us.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: I have just two more.

One of the objectives you have laid out here, which I think is a good one, is helping with election monitoring work. It's my understanding that you did, at least at one time, have international development grants to help in that work. I'm just wondering if those grants have been cut off, or if they are ongoing.

Mr. Léo Duguay: About 10 or 12 years ago, and don't hold me to the date, CIDA granted us \$500,000 for the development of election monitoring internationally through an institute that has now morphed into the Global Democracy Initiative, which I currently chair but it has been dead for about five years. Canada provided all the money. The Europeans provided zero, and the Americans provided zero.

The field of election monitoring internationally is very crowded. In Canada, we have a group, which you fund. The name is CANA-DEM, which the Government of Canada funds. This is the organization Parliament has designated to run election monitoring.

We were trying to do some international stuff with our colleagues abroad. It was a wonderful initiative, but it died for lack of funding. It died because we tried to raise money internationally, but the Americans and the Europeans were not very co-operative. The only reason it existed was that the government had granted \$500,000 from CIDA.

Hon. Greg Ferguson: Ms. Findlay, you have a last question.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: My last question is on the promotion of democracy. The promotion of parliamentarism is certainly a parliamentary function. We do that as part of our mandate. I'm just trying to understand and struggling a bit with how former parliamentarians would add value with respect to those broad ambitions more than parliamentarians who are doing that on a regular basis.

• (1215)

Mr. Léo Duguay: I'll just add that you don't have time to do the job. You have a full-time job doing a whole bunch of other things. I've lived your life. I didn't have any time left after I did my House of Commons committee work, constituency work, public events. I had very little time to go and do that.

We have the time. We have the energy. We have the background, and I would add one other dimension. When you're a sitting member of Parliament, of necessity you have to have a partisan edge. Those of us who are former members are still partisan, but the edge is off. I've done lots of events across Canada, most of them, by the way, at my own expense, with colleagues from other political parties. We're able to bring a view that says, here's why democracy is important and why Parliament is important. It's not important because we opposed you to get elected. That's a piece we don't have anymore that can bring something pretty substantial.

My last point is that you do the job, but you don't have time to do that. You still have to get elected. I have the time, and I don't have to get elected—thank God.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Maybe the final thing I'll add there, Mr. Chair, is that in 1996 Parliament unanimously saw fit to provide former parliamentarians with a statutory mandate to go out and enrich the promotion in the support and safeguarding of democracy. I would think that Parliaments ever since, certainly in this day and

age, would see the benefit in having folks without that partisan edge, who aren't out seeking to be re-elected, help educate, primarily, young Canadians but also all Canadians and our partners abroad about the importance and benefit of our functioning style of government.

Again, I come back to the fact that we have a legislated mandate to do this, and we don't have the funds to fulfill that mandate that exists in statute.

Hon. Greg Ferguson: Thank you, Mr. DeCoursey.

We have three other interventions so far on the list. I have Ms. Gould, Mr. Julian and Madame DeBellefeuille.

Go ahead, Ms. Gould.

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, for that.

Thanks to our guests for being here and for all the work that they do on behalf of former parliamentarians. I think what I find particularly compelling about what you were saying is the need to support the transition from being a parliamentarian to a former parliamentarian, and certainly the challenges that that come with.

I have a couple of questions. In the interest of time I'll try to group them together and maybe come back afterwards.

The part of your proposal that I find very interesting is the mentorship program. I'm wondering if you could spend a little bit of time talking about that and why that's important. We do a lot of work to onboard parliamentarians. I fortunately have not yet been in the position of deciding not to...or of not having been re-elected yet. I know that day will come at some point. I understand from former colleagues how big a shift that is. You go from having the resources and the support of the House of Commons to effectively being on your own.

I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about what you envision in terms of supporting former parliamentarians in that way with the transition back to civilian life, if you will.

Then my other question was just with regard to the staff support. Let's say, for example, you were provided, by the House administrator, with staff support and perhaps the mentorship program coordinator. Would that provide you enough support to be able to fundraise for the other very laudable objectives that you have?

Is there a world in which that is something that would provide that stability for the association and the numerous members you have in order to pursue some of those other objectives?

• (1220)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you for grouping those questions together. Hopefully we can have some brief responses.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thanks very much, Ms. Gould and Mr. Chair.

As someone who has gone through the transition out of public office fairly recently, I can attest to the fact that the supports offered by the administration of the House of Commons and of Parliament are first class. We would be advocates of always beefing up those supports that the administrative team offers.

What is lacking, and why I feel so fortunate to have been given the call by Léo's colleagues at the time at the Association of Former Parliamentarians, is.... That gave me a place to feel as though I could continue to provide service to Canadians and continue to contribute and, quite frankly, find my way back to collegial engagement like this with you folks.

Léo has been part, in the past, of attempts to pair former members who have spent some time out of office with immediately leaving members to help provide them with some guidance, whether it be professional or personal, such as helping them with mental health supports, which would be something that I would see reason to further engage with this committee about—the mental health supports offered to leaving parliamentarians.

The second part of your question, Ms. Gould, was about the staff complements and, perhaps, the mentorship as a good start for this organization.

Hon. Karina Gould: Yes

You were talking about the difficulty and the challenge around fundraising without having that staff support. I recognize and thank you, Mr. Duguay, for sharing the pretty incredible fundraising efforts that you were able to do before the pandemic. If that is a source of stability, almost, to enable some of the fundraising for the other activities that you might want to fund....

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Yes. If we had some full-time leadership in our own office, we would be able to take on a whole range of different partnership opportunities, whether they be seeking financial support or engaging in other democracy-building activities with a range of organizations out there.

Léo, maybe you could speak a little bit more about how it has worked in the past.

Mr. Léo Duguay: Fifteen years ago, I undertook running some fundraising dinners. We raised enough money, on an annual basis, to hire an executive director, and the executive director was able to help us with the fundraising. Someone needs to be there in the office to handle all of the administrative things that are involved with booking a hall, arranging speakers and transportation, and all of those kinds of things. It's a little bit like a pyramid. If you give us some support, we can help ourselves.

With regard to Ms. Findlay's point that she made a while ago about the sevenfold increase, if you gave us half of that, we would multiply that tenfold. If you give us the support that we are asking for in some form, we could our job a lot better, but without your support, we're stuck in a quandary.

It's not everybody who has fundraising experience. I'm getting to the point where I've done a lot of it, and today I'm not as anxious to do all of that work as I was 15 years ago. It's very hard to find people who know that background. I'm willing to train others and help them, but it's just not there.

As for the last point on mentorship, we've spent a lot of time trying to talk with people and call them and ask them. Believe it or not, the day they leave office, they are not ready to look for support. You will see this one day. You will be in shock. I'm telling you that you will be in shock until you recover. Then you can go ask for help. However, the early period....

What we tried to do was to call those people and say, "Hey, I'm one of your former colleagues. I'm here. If you need anything, call me back." In the course of the years, when people call back, the engagement starts. We're able to help, but we don't really have the support to do things like the mental health component that Matt was talking about.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: If we had the infrastructure and the office to keep track of how former members are doing six, 12 or 18 months out, then I think we would see a much greater engagement in the association and much more potential to build our fundraising coffers and to do more work in partnership with other organizations across the country.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much for your presentation.

I found a number of your comments very compelling, particularly with regard to former members. I think Mark Holland going public with what he experienced as an ex-member of Parliament showed tremendous courage, but I also think it exposed what we know privately to be a reality for so many ex-members of Parliament. The very abrupt transition from elected life to being defeated is very hard on anyone. We've all seen and we've all lived through that experience with our colleagues who have been defeated. I find compelling the argument about providing supports in a more structured way for former members of Parliament.

I also find compelling your argument about democracy. Our democracy is under threat. We have just gone through a process of putting in place a public inquiry to combat Russian and Chinese foreign interference. There is widespread disinformation. There is spreading hate. These are all very strong warning signs that we can't take our democracy for granted. We saw with our American cousins how close they came to a violent *coup d'état*. It is not something that we should take lightly at all.

I note the figures you have here, and you mentioned, Mr. Duguay, that you are also looking for an agreement in principle around the budget figures. I agree that this is a significant expansion, so that's one thing that makes me hesitate a bit.

When you talk about an endorsement "in principle", is that because you think some of the elements within this proposal would actually be considered as in-kind contributions? You currently receive in-kind contributions of office space and other supports. Is it your intention to not so much meet some of the draft components of this budget as it is to look to the House administration and other sources, so that the financial outlay would actually be much less than some of the figures given here?

• (1225)

Mr. Léo Duguay: When we first drafted this two years ago, it was drafted by volunteers—volunteers without the expertise to lay out some of this. For this iteration, we worked with your staff. Jeremy and his group and Eric and his group were helpful in trying to refine these numbers.

I think what we're saying is that these numbers are not precise enough to ask you to give us this budget as it is. What we're saying is this: If you agree that these are the kinds of things we can do, then let's go the next step, work to refine them specifically and come back with a finite, exact budget. I think this one is not exact.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: If you look at the budget page, Mr. Julian, there's a note in there somewhere explaining that the first two years have been rather fine-pointed with the support of the clerk's office. The next two years are a bit more notional. We would seek your guidance and your support to perhaps lay out a more precise plan as we move forward, understanding that the first thing we need is a fully functioning office that can help us undertake these activities, and, as we've discussed with other colleagues on the panel here, perhaps look for some partnership opportunities that could seek funding elsewhere.

Mr. Peter Julian: Today what you're looking for from us, from the Board of Internal Economy, is a green light to look further at ways in which the association could be supported in its push to support former members and to educate and provide more outreach around protecting and enhancing our democracy and other democracy-building components. We wouldn't be approving any budget today. We would just be giving a green light for further discussions that would ultimately come back to this board.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I think that's a reasonable approach. What we brought you today was after months and months of work amongst our board and with the support of the office here, so we think it's reasonable, but we're also reasonable enough to know that you have other checks and balances that you need to consider.

If there was a nod of support in principle that you were interested in supporting our organization further, we'd be more than happy to continue this conversation.

• (1230)

Mr. Léo Duguay: If you were to give us the staff support we need, I think we could go from there.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm sorry. What does that mean? I want to be clear on what we are being asked to do, or asked to look at today.

Mr. Léo Duguay: I'm not sure. Matt may be more on top of this. If we were dead sure of the preciseness of these numbers, we'd be saying please approve them. For instance, in year one of building organizational capacity, staff support of \$337,000 is a relatively good number. If you were to start with that, let us build the budget over a protracted period.

The problem we have all the time is trying to run this budget structure with a bunch of volunteers. This time, we're much better than we were a year ago, because your staff has helped us out.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Ms. Gould.

Hon. Karina Gould: On that last comment, my understanding was that the numbers in year one and two for each bucket are over a couple of years. That's not for one year—is that correct?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: The year one numbers would be the ask in the first year. The year two numbers would be in addition to the year one numbers coming on board in year two. If the initial year one allotment was agreed to in principle, even if there were further discussions that needed to be had about the exact dollar allocation, we would be very much in favour of having those conversations. The year two request for the mentorship program support has also been fine-pointed with members of the administration.

Years three and four are more notional. We think they're the types of activities our association should be engaging in, but we understand that, first, we need to have the organizational capacity of staff to help us undertake those initiatives.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mrs. DeBellefeuille, over to you.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Duguay and Mr. DeCoursey, I sincerely salute your courage in coming to testify before the committee today. Your tenacity shows that you are convinced of the merits of the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians. You came here to meet with us today even though you know that at the last meeting of the Board of Internal Economy, we refused to increase the budget of parliamentary associations by more than \$400,000 so that sitting parliamentarians could do their work abroad. The current situation is not easy in terms of the economy and setting priorities.

I do understand your arguments. I was a former parliamentarian myself. I lost two elections before I was re-elected and returned to parliamentary life. I understand what you have been saying. At the same time, I feel that your mandate is broad and that you are giving yourselves a lot of responsibilities, and that's what I'm questioning. The House administration has completely revamped its approach since 2017. They've hired a lot of human resources staff to support us when we are in office, and also when we leave. When I lost in my riding in 2011, I was able to see a counsellor. The House administration was very helpful. It helped me get through my electoral defeat, something that is never easy for anyone.

I am convinced of the importance of the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians. Do I believe that the expansion of its mandate is relevant? Personally, when I lost, I sought solace from my former colleagues. I did not call on the association. I think that the camaraderie and friendships that develop in the parliamentary world bring comfort after a defeat and the transition period that follows.

However, I agree with you that, thanks to their life experience on the Hill, former parliamentarians can provide assistance when it comes to supervising elections abroad or representing Canada, to bodies such as the Council of Europe. In my opinion, the association is perhaps more of a social club for former parliamentarians.

I agree that the association must exist and must have what it takes to do the bare minimum. However, I am not convinced that its mandate should be expanded and that the budget you are asking for is indicated. I think, based on what has been said, you can see where we're going with this. If you came back to ask us for a more realistic budget for a slightly reduced mandate, your chances of getting it might be better. At this point, I'm not convinced.

I am being frank here: as a parliamentarian, I don't beat around the bush. I know this is not an easy time for you, when you feel we aren't showing much enthusiasm for your proposal. However, I want you to know that I think the association does play an important role. I just think your mandate needs to be tightened up a little bit and maybe looked at in a different way that would cost less. For example, you could include fundraising activities, as was suggested to you. I don't know how we can help you more. As Mr. Julian was saying, you would have to come back with a tighter proposal. That way, you might have a better chance of getting the Board of Internal Economy's approval.

• (1235)

Mr. Matt Decourcey: Thank you very much, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

I think it's important to emphasize that we're not asking for an expansion of our mandate. Our mandate already exists and is enshrined in the legislation that was passed unanimously by Parliament in 1996. What we are asking for is additional resources so that we can fulfill our mandate as set out in this act.

I think Mr. Duguay would like to add some comments.

Mr. Léo Duguay: Yes, thank you.

Your choice of words is very interesting, Mrs. DeBellefeuille. In Quebec, the provincial association of former parliamentarians calls

itself an *amicale*, a club. Its role is more social than ours. For our part, we are more of an association that provides services.

I am aware that many members' experience will be similar to yours. Many MPs who lose an election are supported by their families and their colleagues, enjoy the high-quality service provided by the House of Commons, and everything works out fine. However, that has not been the case for a number of other former MPs. Everything may have gone well for you, but that is not the case for everyone.

As Mr. DeCourcey said, we are not looking to expand our mandate. I mentioned the mandate of the associations in the United States and Europe to illustrate what they were doing. For our part, our association is looking at Canada, especially young Canadians. As was mentioned in a question asked by Ms. Findlay, our overseas activities have been greatly curtailed because of a lack of resources.

So the mandate has not been broadened. We're just asking for money to better carry out the few things we do have in our mandate.

Hon. Greg Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Mr. MacKinnon would like to make a quick comment.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Chief Parliamentary Whip): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief.

The whips of three political parties sit on the Board of Internal Economy. I think they know that the literature and research conducted with parliamentarians and former parliamentarians show that adjusting to a more private life following a political career dedicated to public service does indeed entail mental health challenges. We have to deal with it, whether through your association or someone else. If we believe that democracy is worth it, it is in our interest to prioritize such activities. It has become clear that this is an essential function.

The research also shows the importance of having a mentorship program so that elected officials know what to expect in their new role. For example, it is important to explain to them how Parliament or a constituency office works or to give them an overview of a typical day in the life of a parliamentarian. In that context, I think that everyone would benefit from the wise counsel of people who have already had this experience.

It seems to me that supporting parliamentarians, both when they take office and when they leave Parliament, is part of the basic duties of an association of former parliamentarians. It is also a way for its members to continue to provide a public service. It seems to me that those functions must be supported by some kind of permanent staff.

I don't want to comment on the numbers or all of the proposals, but if my colleagues are in agreement, I would ask you to come back to us with a budget that would specifically focus on those two functions. You could also show us that it is possible to raise funds for certain other worthwhile activities that are in your proposal, activities that for the time being, should perhaps not be publicly funded. You should focus on the activities of the association and the creation of a program to support parliamentarians when they take office and when they leave Parliament. I see a certain logic and elegance in that. We would then be grateful to your association for improving those two aspects of public life.

That is the proposal I wanted to make, Mr. Chair.

● (1240)

Mr. Léo Duguay: I'll make just one comment, very quickly.

When elected officials take office and receive assistance from public servants, those public servants are not allowed to talk about the political aspect of the job. One thing that is missing when parliamentarians take office is the opportunity to work with other MPs who could explain to them the political ins and outs of the caucuses and Parliament. The same is true when they leave office: public servants are there to explain how the process works in practical terms, but they do not address the psychological aspect. That is what is missing when parliamentarians arrive and leave. It would be beneficial to provide that support.

As we said, there is no shortage of volunteers. They volunteer their time. Where there is a gap is on the organizational side, which is lacking at the moment. If we had those two things, mentorship and organization, we would be okay.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Mr. Duguay.

[English]

Mr. Scheer, it's over to you.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (House Leader of the Official Opposition): Very briefly, I think you'll probably find a lot of agreement on the aims and the goals. If we were in an environment where there wasn't the economic reality that Canadians are going through.... There are a lot of "nice to haves" in your proposal.

You mentioned that the election monitoring space is crowded. When I hear that, my first thought is, "Does it need another player or does it need another entity in that?" To my colleague Mr. MacKinnon's point, is that something we can reshift the focus away from, if it's already well served by other NGOs or other government-supported entities that go and do that around the world, and keep the focus more on some of the other topics that you've mentioned?

Mr. Léo Duguay: The international field is very crowded. I don't think there's a role for us there.

On the Canadian field, there is sometimes a role for having more ex-parliamentarians serve in the election monitoring because, as I've often said in a kind of fun way, I've seen just about every shenanigan that anyone can apply in an election over my career. We're more able to spot shenanigans than the average university professor. It's crowded, and we're not looking for an extra role, but in the case of CANADEM, we might be able to play a better more

efficient role. If you were to mandate us to do that, you wouldn't be adding funds, you'd be redirecting funds.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Mr. Scheer, thanks very much for the comment. If I sense you're trying to position yourself with the comments of Mr. MacKinnon, I would be in favour of our focusing on those key priorities for our association. I know there are a lot of "nice to haves" in the world, but two things that I think are not "nice to haves" are democracy and mental health. I think our organization can play a key role in ensuring that the mental health of exiting parliamentarians is first and foremost in the minds of their colleagues on the outside. I think with the organizational capacity in our office, we could do a darn good job supporting the important work that you do in democracy building both at home and abroad.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Colleagues, is there an appetite for what Mr. MacKinnon put on the floor, which is to invite them to refine their proposal on a more focused mandate?

I see some heads nodding around the table. Very good. So be it.

Mr. Duguay, Mr. DeCoursey, thank you very much for coming. I'll leave you with this. My former boss, who was defeated in an election, told me that he retired for health reasons: His constituents got sick and tired of him.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Greg Fergus: Colleagues, we have a little bit of time left for two important items on our agenda, one in public and the other in camera.

In public, it's item five. I'm going to turn the mike over to our interim clerk, Mr. Janse.

● (1245)

Mr. Eric Janse (Acting Clerk of the House of Commons, House of Commons): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As my colleague set out, maybe I'll just say the following in terms of an introduction to this item. As members know, the board is, of course, the point of intersection between members of Parliament, their parties, and of course the House of Commons administration.

For this next submission it's being brought forward by the administration, but it is in response to demands placed upon us by the parties. We fully recognize that it is a substantive business case, but it reflects the substantive change to the manner by which Parliament now operates.

[Translation]

I will now turn the floor over to my colleagues, who will present our submission. We will then be pleased to answer your questions.

[English]

Mr. Jeffrey LeBlanc (Acting Deputy Clerk, Procedure, House of Commons): Thank you very much.

Stéphan and Paul and I are here this morning to present a business case regarding sustaining the transformation of parliamentary proceedings. As you know, over the past few years, at the request of members, the House administration has transformed its technology and its operations model to expand the ways in which members and Canadians can follow and participate in parliamentary proceedings.

Though it was not the only factor, the pandemic was certainly a catalyst for many of those changes. The House had to put in place very quickly a model that would allow us to continue sitting and voting by using technology. A lot of these changes have now become a regular part of working, not just for our proceedings but for all sorts of different kinds of events, which are now conducted with some form at least of video conferencing.

The changes are, of course, most pronounced in committees where now the vast majority of our meetings are webcast, which was not always the case, and contain at least some remote participation.

As we heard a little earlier in this meeting, increased remote participation has also had an impact on our interpreters, and the House has had to develop new tools and new processes to ensure their health and safety and ensure that all can participate in the language of their choice. To support these new requirements, the House has had to make investments in staffing and technology. These are staff to offer ongoing support and monitoring to ensure cybersecurity, to onboard and test witnesses, and to manage a whole series of new processes.

There are also capital costs relating to equipment and licensing. These are additional obligations that did not exist only a few years ago.

[Translation]

The House of Commons Administration did not request additional funds from the Board of Internal Economy for these activities. During the pandemic, reduced activities caused surpluses. It was also possible to reallocate staff from other projects, which became less and less possible when normal activities resumed.

Today's submission does not aim to hire new staff, but rather to maintain the teams we have built up over the past few years and to provide these new services. Procedural Services and Digital Services are currently running a deficit because of the high number of additional employees we have had to hire to support these activities. While the House of Commons Administration tries to be fiscally prudent by reallocating staff and funds where possible, there is nevertheless certainly a risk if we have to continue to rely on surpluses and carryforward funds to pay for activities that have become permanent.

[English]

I will very quickly deal with the different areas in which all of those changes have been made.

[Translation]

The four main fields are the House, the voting application, committees and, finally, interpreter health and safety.

In the House, of course, the first step to enable MPs to participate remotely was to invest in equipment. We also created support teams to monitor and resolve MPs' technical problems throughout the sitting. Staff also have additional tasks such as coordinating communications for sittings and for votes, responding to MPs' queries and liaising with the technical team. I would also like to point out that we've seen an increase in both average sitting hours and the frequency of late sittings. The ramifications of those increases are multiplied given that more staff is needed to support a session.

Regarding electronic voting, we have set up an application that enables MPs to vote from anywhere in Canada. This considerably increased the number of MPs taking part in each vote. In turn, support for the application is necessary, including dedicated cybersecurity resources to ensure the system's integrity, real-time troubleshooting and ongoing, regular maintenance. This also means additional tasks for procedural staff such as preparing and managing information in the application.

• (1250)

[English]

The additional expectations are probably most pronounced in committees where, once upon a time, most committee meetings were audio only with a limited number of meetings being televised, mostly in person. If anyone participated by video conference, they had to travel to a studio that was operated by a third party. Today, the reality is that most public meetings are either webcast or broadcast. Almost all meetings have at least some participants participating by video conference, or at least we have to prepare for a circumstance where anybody could participate by video conference and they could do so from just about any location.

Even if one were to do away with the hybrid aspects for members of Parliament, it would probably not be feasible to go back to the old model for witnesses. The expectation now for witnesses is that they are able to appear using familiar video conferencing software from their homes or their offices.

To ensure adequate sound quality for interpretation, there was a series of extra supports that had to be put in place. The support requirements for witnesses have increased dramatically, including the shipping of headsets, a series of pretests and the ongoing monitoring. There are also challenges in managing the capacity for meetings, which has resulted in longer blocks of committee meetings over the day. That creates additional resource pressures.

The costs for video conferencing in committee were, once upon a time, charged to each committee's budget, back when we were using a third party, and that was paid out of the Liaison Committee envelope. That is no longer the case, and those have been absorbed by the House administration.

I'll let Stéphan, very briefly, also touch on what we've done in terms of supporting the interpreters.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé (Acting Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons): Thank you, Jeffrey.

Mr. Chair, I'd just like to expand on two specific drivers for the submission that had a major impact on the administration's financial resources, our human resources, our technologies and our processes.

The first driver we've been talking about is the change to how we have members and witnesses participate in the parliamentary proceedings. As Jeffrey mentioned, if you recall, prepandemic, witnesses had to drive to specific locations, to specific facilities that we had in Canada, and through the interconnectivity of those facilities and the parliamentary infrastructure, people were able to participate in the meetings.

As part of the pandemic, that was impossible. We had to change the complete model as to how we could have members and witnesses participate as part of the proceedings, and that had a major impact on how we had to support the participants. We had to introduce, as Jeffrey talked about, new processes and pre-meetings. We now need to have people pretest to ensure that people have standardized equipment before they participate in our meetings. We also have to ship equipment so that they have standardized equipment. We had to introduce quality assurance programs during meetings. We now have dedicated people, who are requested to be here, to ensure that the audio quality is met and that we meet the ISO standards. We also introduced concepts, as we talked about earlier, for post-meetings so that we can provide dashboards on incidents and continuously improve our environment.

Talking about resources and the impact that change had on the administration, it used to cost the House administration half a resource to set up a normal meeting prepandemic, as most of the meetings were in audio only. Now, we require three people, from a technical perspective, just to do the pretest and the online quality. You can imagine, based on the number of meetings, the impact it had, from both financial and resource perspectives, on the institution.

[*Translation*]

The second major change since the pandemic and the introduction of these new technologies has been the instructions we received under the Canada Labour Code and the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The Translation Bureau received specific instructions to protect the health and safety of all participants at our events. These changes had a direct impact on the number of resources we needed for meetings.

We now have to carry out random tests throughout the year to ensure that our equipment complies with ISO standards. We must carry out these tests whenever we make changes to our infrastructure, to ensure we provide a high quality audio signal that won't ad-

versely affect the working environment of MPs and other participants. We now need to establish relationships with audiology centres so they can assess the quality of the audio signal through subjective testing. We have had to put numerous initiatives of this kind in place. We had no choice. We had to be agile to implement them and to keep Parliament running smoothly. All of this has had an impact on our financial resources, our human resources and our processes.

I'll now hand over to Mr. St George. He will be able to give you a clearer idea of what this means in financial terms.

● (1255)

Mr. Paul St George (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Aubé.

[*English*]

I'm going to cover four points very quickly. These are financing, forecasting, inflation and carryforward.

[*Translation*]

In terms of funding for the activities under this proposal, as Mr. LeBlanc mentioned, they were funded internally and using carryforward funds. Budgetary capacity during this period was attributable to lower operating costs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the administration's historical surpluses gradually declined from \$12.1 million in 2020–21 to \$6.9 million in 2022–23.

[*English*]

From a forecast perspective, this year, administration alone is forecasting a \$610,000 deficit. For this year, we're not seeking additional or supplementary funds for this funding case. We predict that costs will continue to escalate in the future and that administration will find itself in a greater deficit.

From an inflation perspective, administration bears about \$1 million, which we absorb in terms of non-salary cost inflation annually, and we've been doing so over the last several years. This has been managed through continuous improvement initiatives at the service level.

From a carryforward perspective—some will refer to it as the reserve—the purpose of that reserve is essentially to finance projects that will support and enhance member services. One of the strategies of the submission is to protect these funds and seek funding through the mains.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude the presentation on behalf of my colleagues and me. We welcome any questions.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Ferguson: Ms. Gould, you are first on the list of those wishing to speak. You have the floor.

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Before I go to this item, I'm conscious of the time, and I'm worried that we won't make it to the final item, which I think is really important.

I'm putting it to you, for future meeting management, that maybe we could have time limits on some of the items so we can get to the whole agenda. However, I leave that with you.

[Translation]

First, I would like to thank you very much for all of the incredible efforts the House administration has made, particularly during the pandemic. You have completely transformed the way we work. This has been an excellent thing for democracy, because it has enabled all members to continue to participate in the work of the House.

I also agree with what Mr. Aubé said regarding witnesses. Not only was it beneficial during the pandemic, but from then on, we saw a huge increase in the participation of witnesses at committee meetings. Many more people are able to participate now who would not necessarily have been able to before.

Therefore, I take my hat off to you and I thank you for all of this work.

[English]

My question is really about what Mr. St George was saying, because in terms of the carryforward, we completely support the request for these funds, but would like to see that absorbed by the carryforward given the current context.

It would seem to me, based on your comments, that this is actually what the carryforward would be intended for. It's for these unforeseen circumstances that support the work of members. This is exactly the kind of work that would do that. From our perspective, our position would be to say yes, absolutely, you can spend this money. It's important. It's imperative. I don't think there's a desire to go backwards in terms of allowing members to participate virtually.

We saw in the first few weeks of the House how COVID spread through Parliament quite rapidly. There were many people who got

sick but who were still able to participate virtually in the proceedings. There are a number of other reasons why we want to enable members to continue to participate virtually, but also for witnesses to be able to engage in that process.

My proposal would be that we accept this increase in funds and grant that to you, but that it be taken from the carryforward unless there is a time when that cannot be absorbed through the carryforward. We would then invite you to come back, so that we could provide funds in extenuating circumstances. That would be the proposal that I would put on the table.

Thank you.

• (1300)

Hon. Greg Fergus: I see no other interventions.

Is there a general consensus on that perspective proposed by Ms. Gould?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we are up against a time limit, but we do have one more issue, which is important.

Do we have time to take a couple of minutes for that, or do you have previous engagements?

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, if it's a very important issue, I don't know if we can do it justice.

Could it be the first item at the next meeting?

Hon. Greg Fergus: We'll do this item first at the next in camera meeting, if there's a general agreement.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: I agree with that.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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