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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): I will call the meeting to order today. We are sitting in public and are starting our study of the motion presented to the House on the Board of Internal Economy. We start off with our best witness, Madam O'Brien.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien (Clerk of the House of Commons, House of Commons): I love a fan.

The Chair: We're so happy to have you here today.

Before we start, I want to point out that it's job-shadowing day on the Hill for those of you who don't know. That's why there are some young people in the room.

Dylan, wave.

He is job-shadowing me today. I feel sorry for him, going home tonight after having spent the day with me, but even a bad example is an example.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I was going to have him chair, but after I heard how you acted last week when Kevin chaired, I thought maybe I should take over again.

Madam O'Brien, we'd like you to start with an opening statement, as informative as you can make it, and as I know it will be. Then we'll have a round of questions from our members—and we have some committee business to do at the end of the meeting, if there's some time left.

Madam O'Brien, please introduce the people with you today and tell us what we need to know.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Thank you for that very kind introduction, Mr. Chairman. Good morning to you.

[Translation]

Honourable members, good morning. I would also like to say good morning to the guests of honour who are here shadowing some members today.

[English]

I am joined today by Mark Watters, the chief financial officer of the House of Commons, and by two people who have devoted themselves to the cause of making me look smarter than I am, Suzanne Verville, my chief of staff, and Kori Ghergari, who is with the corporate communications directorate.

This morning I'm delighted to be here to have a chance to discuss with you the role of the Board of Internal Economy. As Clerk of the House, I am Secretary to the Board of Internal Economy. I want to state at the outset that I'm here today as the Clerk and Secretary to the Board, but I don't speak for the current Speaker, Speaker Scheer, or past Speakers, or for the current Board of Internal Economy, or for any board members. I'm basically here in my capacity as somebody who's been Clerk for over eight years. I've been a parliamentary official for over 33 years, so eyes may glaze over and you may think, "She's here to defend the status quo", which is not actually the case, but you'll find out more as we go along.

I paid a great deal of attention to the terms of the order of reference that you have, and was struck by the fact that in the very first phrase you have the term "full transparency" and you mention the concept of accountability. That seemed to be a good place to start discussing things this morning.

I want to look, in the first instance, at the disclosure measures already in place and to the web presence that we—and when I say "we", I'll be referring to the House administration and the Board of Internal Economy—have on the Internet.

I think it's important to realize that in the sometimes quite heated discussions of the past weeks and months, there has been a certain amount of confusion when people are talking about what is disclosed or isn't disclosed. It's been my experience over these 33 years that one has to take everything one hears with a grain salt. I think this morning it'll be useful to see exactly how the board has approached this whole question of disclosure, particularly in the 40th and 41st Parliaments.

What I'd like to start with, then, is the Parliament of Canada website, to show you what's available to the public if one were to google the Board of Internal Economy.

[Translation]

If you search for "Board of Internal Economy"...

[English]

you are brought right away to the main page of the parliamentary website, parl.gc.ca. The board section is also accessible from the main page of the Parliament of Canada website. There's permanent access under the "House of Commons". Under the "What's New?" rubric you'll find such things as the newest information that has been posted—statements, media advisories, and so forth. In the package of information you have been given, you will find copies of what I am presenting, together with copies of certain statements that have been issued by the board. All this is available on the web.

The section “About the Board”, starts with introductory comments on the nature of the board, including its legislative foundation in the Parliament of Canada Act and its membership. It's important to note that the board's membership consists of the Speaker, who acts as its chair; two members of the Privy Council, who are appointed to the board by the government; the leader of the opposition and his or her representative; and additional members appointed in numbers so that the total result is an overall equality of government and opposition representatives. Of course, that's not counting the Speaker.

The current actual membership, in terms of individuals, is made up of the government House leader, Minister Van Loan; the chief government whip, Minister Duncan; the Honourable Rob Merrifield;

[Translation]

...the House Leader of the Official Opposition, Mr. Cullen; the whip of the official opposition, Ms. Turmel; and the whip of the Liberal Party, Ms. Foote.

[English]

At its meeting of June 3, 2013, the Board of Internal Economy decided to post its minutes on parl.gc.ca retroactively to the start of the 41st Parliament. Board minutes continue to be tabled in the chamber, which is a practice that has been in place since the 34th Parliament.

•(1105)

The board meets about every second week when the House is sitting, and, of course, legendarily, it meets in camera. The meetings are in camera, and the board operates largely by consensus, so the board minutes are not *in extenso* in respect of the discussion that has gone on but are simply records of decision. The board frequently considers confidential matters, including legal issues, issues related to labour relations, and issues related to security.

The exact timing for the tabling and posting of board minutes will vary because it depends on the scheduling of the board's meetings. Time was, when you had three board meetings—let's call them A, B, and C—you would have meeting A take place and the minutes from meeting A would be approved in meeting B. Then they would come back to meeting C to be approved for tabling. As of yesterday, the board, I am happy to say, agreed to do away with this belt-and-suspenders approach. So there will be approval of the minutes from meeting A at meeting B, and then they will be ready for posting. They don't have to come back to a third meeting, which might well mean another two-week delay.

Depending upon the matters being discussed, however, some minutes are tabled to coincide with the tabling of other information such as the Public Accounts of Canada—or, one thing that everybody is familiar with, the main estimates. The board considered the main estimates yesterday and made certain decisions. Those minutes, though, will not be available until the President of the Treasury Board tables the main estimates in the House in April.

There are some additional features of the minutes. There is a subject index that's available to facilitate access, and there are hyperlinks in the minutes themselves, which will direct the user to useful information on many subjects that are referred to therein.

I'd like now to turn to the bylaws of the board. As you know, the Board of Internal Economy is enshrined in the Parliament of Canada Act, and it is from this statute that the board derives its authority to establish bylaws.

•(1110)

[Translation]

In general, the by-laws established by the Board of Internal Economy form the basis for all decisions on internal economy and governance in the House of Commons as an institution.

[English]

These bylaws are the foundation of governance. They form the basis of policies and guidelines regarding the resources that members have access to for carrying out their parliamentary functions, and they grant authority to me, as Clerk, reporting through the Speaker to the board, to execute the directives of the board through the administration of the House.

The four bylaws are the “Members By-law”, which, as you can tell by the title, refers to the members and definitions of such things as parliamentary functions, etc.; the “Committees By-law”, which talks about how committees are funded and how they carry on their work; the “Governance and Administration By-law”, which is basically, for me and the administration, the important bylaw that delegates to us certain authority from the board to act on its behalf in executing its directives. Finally, there are the rules of practice and procedure of the board, which are basically the standing orders that the board has set up for itself in terms of how it is going to proceed. These are legally binding on members and they take precedence over any administrative manual or general policy decision.

The bylaws date back to 1993. From 1993 to 2010, they were revised from time to time on a case-by-case basis. But in 2010 the Board of Internal Economy agreed with a recommendation to proceed with a comprehensive review of the bylaws, a project to update and consolidate them. The revised bylaws were approved by the board on November 21 and December 5, 2011, and they came into force on April 1, 2012. The revised bylaws were posted on the Parliament of Canada website on April 2, 2012.

The document that gets, I suppose, the most attention with regard to disclosure and web presence are the Member's Expenditures Reports. But I also want to point out, because this is not necessarily all that well known, that the audited finance statements for the House of Commons and two administrative planning documents are also available online.

The board believes strongly that an annual external audit of the financial statements is a key component of sound management practices. Once again, the audit for 2011-12 of the House of Commons' financial statements has resulted in an unqualified audit opinion. The auditor is of the opinion that financial statements present fairly the financial position and the results of operations of the House. The auditor's work included gathering evidence about the amounts and disclosures made in the financial statement and assessing the risks of error, fraud, or misstatement.

The auditor also evaluated the appropriateness of the accounting policies that have been selected, as well as the estimates made by management. The audited financial statements for fiscal year 2012-13 and the Report to Canadians 2013 will be posted online a little bit later when the board has had a chance to consider it. The board approved the report yesterday at its meeting and we expect that the financial statements audit will be forthcoming.

There is a section

[Translation]

...which consists of a FAQ section, which was given considerable thought. Another section covers the media, allowing the Board of Internal Economy to issue media advisories and statements from time to time, especially on the website.

[English]

So media advisories and statements that are issued by the board are also available online, as well as the FAQs—frequently asked questions—on various subjects.

[Translation]

The Board of Internal Economy designated two spokespersons to interact with the media. These spokespersons work closely with Heather Bradley, the communications director for the president's office. The two spokespersons are the NDP whip, Nycole Turmel, and the Chief Government Whip, the hon. John Duncan.

[English]

Minister Duncan and Madam Turmel are the spokespeople for the board and, again, there you'll see the balance that is kept in terms of the approach of the board in its communications. The board speaks with one voice. These spokespeople respond to questions related to the board—if there are any asked during Question Period, for example—and they also respond to inquiries from the media, working, as I said a little earlier, with the Speaker's director of communications, Heather Bradley.

Now let's come to the whole question of the members' expenditure report, which has been the subject of a great deal of public discussion and discussion in the House in the past little while. The "Members' By-law" provides that the Speaker of the House of Commons, on behalf of the Board of Internal Economy, ensures the publication of the members' expenditure reports on the Parliament of Canada website. These have been posted online since 2001-02 and you'll see on the slide that you have PDF versions from 2001-02 to 2008-09. I'd like to call up the 2001-02 report and, for those of you who may be frustrated with the degree of disclosure that we now have, you could perhaps console yourselves that we have come a very long way. The 2001 report, which I remember as being the subject of great controversy at the time, is pretty thin gruel when you look at it now. There are a number of headings. There isn't very much explanation. There are two pages of explanation at the beginning of these. None of this, of course, is interactive; you can't select groups of people, or regions, or any of that kind of thing.

Starting in 2009-10, the board agreed to a recommendation for extensive improvements to the reporting format of the individual member's reports, displaying the data in easier to understand columns and rows and providing for a more detailed explanation

of each aspect of the report. Improvements have continuously been made with each tabling of the report.

• (1115)

[Translation]

It wouldn't be a committee meeting if I didn't tell you that, unfortunately, we have a little technical glitch. For reasons I can't figure out, the computer that lets us see the French version can't connect to the Internet. So there may be some inconsistency between what we will see in English and what we will see on the other computer, while we try to access the Internet. I'm sorry. We practised this yesterday, but unfortunately it was in another room. We will do better next time. Here we go.

[English]

I'll tell you some time about my James Thurber parallel to me and technology, so you'll understand that I come from a long way off.

Back to the MERs, the members' expenditure reports, and looking at the summary report of members' expenditure report as well as the reports by individual members, we'll call up 2012-13. You'll see at the beginning of this there's a very extensive discussion of the entitlements—the allowances and services—under different rubrics so that users can understand better what members are entitled to, because, of course, this is a finite set of entitlements. It's not a case of members being able to go back to the board to ask for something more after the fiscal year starts if they find that they have been a grasshopper rather than an ant in terms of managing the resources that are given to them.

You will see a comprehensive introduction on the resources provided to members and you see, of course, the individual reports and the summary of reports. There is a report-generating tool that allows the user to select a single member or a group of members by name, by province or territory, by constituency, or by party and to group them together for presumably comparative purposes. There is also a rollover feature that allows the user to read the description of the category of expenses from the online report.

The board decided in November 2011 to further the detail of disclosure by displaying each type of traveller's expense on a separate line. There are four types of travellers that are permitted to use the resources: the member himself or herself; the designated traveller, the person designated by the member, who is usually a spouse or partner, though sometimes a parent or a sibling; a dependant; and, of course, an employee. Along with displaying each type of traveller's expenses they also display the number of regular, special, and U.S.A. points that are used. One regular point is basically one return journey between Ottawa and the constituency: a half point to go and a half point to come back. There are 25 points out of the total of 64 that are allocated as special. They allow the member to travel from the constituency to any other place in Canada. Four of those can be used for travel to the United States, but only to Washington, D.C., or New York because of the presence of the United Nations.

There's also a further change in the 2012-13 report that presents secondary residence expenses separately from members' accommodation and per diem expenses.

As I mentioned earlier with regard to the format, we started off in 2000 and 2001 with PDFs with a print feature that automatically included the expanded explanation. We now have the expanded explanation for each column and expenditure category, and the XML format we have for the 2012-13 reporting period allows the analysis of report data in spreadsheet software.

On October 23, 2013 the Board of Internal Economy issued a statement on measures it was going to take in order to improve this reporting further. Where you had both contracts for services and full-time employees listed as one total, under the employees' category the enhanced disclosure format will now break that down into contracts and employees' services. There will be employees' salaries and service contracts.

Similarly, members' accommodation expenses will be separate from per diem expenses. Currently members' accommodation expenses and per diems are in the same line.

Similarly, we will subdivide the hospitality category into events. Those are usually the summer barbecues, the winter skating parties—those kinds of things—protocol gifts, and meetings.

The special point disclosure is also going to feature more information because the regular points, as I said earlier, are basically simply travel between the constituency and Ottawa. Special points are different. They are travel to another destination. So, the details of the use of all special travel points will be disclosed. You will have the information about who the traveller is, the destination, the dates of departure and return, the reason for the travel, and the total transportation cost. As I said earlier, there are 25 special points available. A maximum of four are for travel in the United States. The others are for travel within Canada.

• (1120)

I should say in talking about this disclosure that I hope the committee won't mind if I sound a bit of a cautionary note about trying to make too close a parallel between disclosure of members' expenses for travel and disclosure of ministerial expenses for travel. I sometimes worry—in fact, I worry a lot—that such a parallel can lead to false conclusions. A minister's office, naturally enough, looks at travel and logically sees that concept as so many separate trips. You have a separate trip. You're going somewhere with x number of people accompanying the minister. The minister is going for a particular reason: depart and return. There will be accommodation in hotels. There will be transportation. It makes a nice little package.

Here at the House, we don't tend to think of members going on trips; we think of them as travelling, which is basically travelling between the constituency and Ottawa. When they go to the constituency, they're going home, so there's no accommodation there. When they come back here, it's to accommodation they've set up in Ottawa, usually apartments. It's not usually hotels, as they tend to be very expensive over the long run. So that becomes a false kind of parallel.

The other thing is that members who are in Ottawa at the House are given per diems because they're in travel status. So the parallel is not infallible. It is true, though, that members can be accompanied by their designated traveller or dependants or employees. That information is disclosed in the MERs.

The good news today—I don't want to steal the board's thunder, but I checked with them yesterday, and they told me that I can tell you—is that there are two more documents that will be available. They are actually public documents that will be posted in the near future. The *Members' Allowances and Services* manual has been a public document for a long time. It was available, for instance, for the media to consult in the library, and there was the director of communications in the Speaker's office with her long-suffering cut-and-paste of bits of information that she would send in answer to questions. But this will be posted on the web, as will the public registry of designated travellers. That will be available.

I thank you for bearing with me. Many of you may well be attuned to what has been on the web and what's available as disclosure. I thought it would be useful to do that, because I've been troubled by some of the discussion I've seen that seemed to me not particularly well informed in terms of what is already available.

Now I'd like to turn to the question of governance. From my point of view, it is in the governance structure that you see the notion of accountability embedded.

You can see the schematic here that shows the Canadian parliamentary system.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

For our discussion today, we'll talk about the House of Commons as a legislative body, of the 308 members of Parliament and of the House of Commons administration. I'll focus on these three aspects in a minute.

[*English*]

If we define the House as the democratic institution at the heart of the Canadian parliamentary system, then we come up with certain realities. It is independent. Its independence is guaranteed by the law of parliamentary privilege.

It is made up of 308 members, soon to be 338 members. It is the House of Commons as a collectivity that is the institution.

These members are independent of each other and of the House itself. Certainly most of them will belong to a caucus. The caucus will have its own internal ways of operating and supporting its members. But for our purposes in the administration, each member is considered to be an individual who has been elected by Canadians to support, to represent, his or her constituents. Therefore we bring to that member, as an individual, the full support for the work they do in their parliamentary functions.

The House of Commons is independent of government. In order to have that principle mean something, it is, of course, self-regulating. Here again we note that the Government of Canada laws, acts, and policies—for instance, the Financial Administration Act or the guidelines of the Treasury Board—do not apply to the House.

That also is something that, if it is taken out of context, can lead to misunderstandings. This is not to suggest that this is the wild west and that anarchy rules. The point is that it's the Board of Internal Economy, finding its legislative authority in the Parliament of Canada Act, that basically drafts the framework within which the work of the House of Commons is carried out.

We have, for example, the Financial Administration Act. It doesn't apply to us, but we conform to the usual stewardship and, as I mentioned earlier about the accounting or auditing of the financial statements, the appropriate principles for a stewardship of public resources.

Similarly, the House of Commons develops and applies its own policies and procedures to support effective stewardship of public resources. For example, the Canada Labour Code, part III, has not been promulgated to apply to the House of Commons, and yet we have made a point of having our human resources directorate developing, in consultation with the unions, health and safety policies that are as robust, if not more, than the provisions in the code itself.

Ultimately, the House of Commons is accountable to the people of Canada because, of course, the general election that everybody has to submit to now on a fixed calendar is where that accountability... where the chickens come home to roost.

I won't talk very much about the House as a legislative body because that's really not germane to our discussion this morning, except to say, of course, that the governing authority there is the House. The House sets the Standing Orders that define how deliberations will unfold.

The Speaker, elected by secret ballot of all members, is the presiding officer and makes decisions on points of order and questions of privilege, and your own committee of procedure and House affairs has the standing mandate to look at the Standing Orders and, of course, to look at such questions as these which go to the very heart of the administration of the House.

The legal framework for the House as a legislative body encompasses the law and custom of Parliament, of course, including the applicable provisions of the Constitution and the law of parliamentary privilege. And, then, of course, there's the Parliament of Canada Act itself, which is understood to be a constitutional statute, covers the operations of Parliament, the privileges and powers of the House of Commons and the Senate, as well as the Library of Parliament, and the administration of both Houses and of the Library.

It is in dealing with the House as a legislative body that the Speaker and the Clerk bear responsibility for procedural matters. I'll be returning to this briefly later in the presentation.

The governance that interests us this morning, I think, is the governance structure for the 308 members who constitute the House of Commons as a legislative body and a collectivity, and their work, the carrying out of their parliamentary functions in their constituencies and committees or associations, in caucus, and of course in their offices, and the administration of the House, which is basically the bureaucracy that supports members in their parliamentary functions.

As I mentioned earlier, the Parliament of Canada Act is the statute from which emanates the board's authority for this governance. It establishes bylaws, and the bylaws regulate the use of parliamentary resources that are made available to members.

The decisions of the Board of Internal Economy are final, and the *Members' Allowances and Services* manual is where those policies are gathered together, that is, the policies approved by the board to be executed by me as the head of the administration and the people I work with.

In your information package we have included an overview of the history of the board.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

The board's research section prepared this overview for us. I'll spare you the summary of the entire history, but I would like to mention a few dates and point out that the concept of internal economy goes back to 1868.

[*English*]

There, in 1868, there was An Act respecting the internal economy of the House of Commons. The internal economy was put in the hands of the Speaker and four commissioners, all of whom were privy councillors who were members of the House.

In 1886 that act was integrated into a new act, which was called an Act Respecting the House of Commons, and it had a section on internal economy. Basically, that remained unchanged for 86 years.

In the 1960s and 1970s there were various studies of the organization of the House of Commons. In 1964-65 there was a Special Committee on Procedure and Organization. In the 1970s there was a lot of concern and debate about this whole idea that the membership of the board was limited to ministers and that the members had no say. In 1974 the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections also did a study relating to that.

In 1979, in November, the Report of the Auditor General, which had been undertaken at the request of the then Speaker, revealed that there were significant vulnerabilities, and not to say significant "vacancies", shall we say, in the whole administrative structure of the House and in the way the stewardship of public resources was being handled.

That led to a flurry of changes, which brought in a bureaucracy that was similar to and based largely on how the public service was organized at the time. There was, for a brief time, someone called an "administrator", who was ostensibly in charge of the administration of the House. That led to the confusion, you can imagine, in which there was a Clerk and an administrator and a Sergeant-at-Arms, who were like co-deputy ministers. They did not get along nearly as well as the Trinity. I can tell you that from being the actual chief of staff to the Clerk at the time.

In 1984, the Special Committee on Reform of the House of Commons was created. That was chaired by the veteran MP James McGrath, and it became known as the McGrath committee. Really, it undertook an ambitious series of studies of both procedural principles governing the House and of the principles underpinning the management of the House and its committees. It tabled three reports, all of which elicited government responses but none of which was adopted.

At the same time, I think it's important to note that the McGrath committee was really the intellectual cornerstone for the development of the House into the institution that we know today. For instance, it's there that you will find the roots of the way in which the Speaker is now elected by secret ballot without domination by the parties and so forth, the notion of private members' business—all kinds of ideas. It was a tremendously creative exercise, and it really can be regarded as the touchstone for where we find ourselves today.

In 1985, Parliament adopted the Parliament of Canada Act, which consolidated three acts: the House of Commons Act, the Senate Act, and the Library of Parliament Act. It replaced commissioners by a Board of Internal Economy chaired by the Speaker with, as members, the Deputy Speaker; two privy councillors; the leader of the opposition or his or her nominee; and two members of the opposition, at least one of whom comes from the official opposition. That change was made specifically to give a voice to all members and to give an equality of voices in the representation to the government and the opposition.

In 1986, Parliament passed the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, whereby it created the Board of Internal Economy as the employer of record for some...well, now we're about 1,800, if we count part-time staff. The board is the employer of record for those staff people in the House of Commons who report through the services to me. It sets the terms and conditions for the unrepresented employees as well as the negotiating mandate that we take to collective bargaining with the unions.

In 1989, another special committee was created, this time chaired by Deputy Speaker Marcel Danis.

• (1135)

[Translation]

This committee also looked into how the Board of Internal Economy was set up.

In 1991, Bill C-79, Parliament of Canada Act amendments gave the Board of Internal Economy the authority to control how MPs spend their budgets and use parliamentary resources.

[English]

It's important to realize that it was the 1991 amendments to the Parliament of Canada Act that gave to the Board of Internal Economy the authority to establish bylaws that would govern the spending of MPs' budgets by MPs and their use of parliamentary resources. For instance, in the case of travel, the money comes from a central fund of the House of Commons.

It was also that bill that provided that the Clerk of the House of Commons become the secretary to the Board of Internal Economy.

It was then that the bylaws of the board were drafted. These were approved at the end of March 1993 and were tabled in the House for the first time on April 19, 1993.

In 1997, you may remember, there was a proliferation of opposition parties in the House, and in order to deal with the composition of the board—to accommodate this larger number of opposition parties—Bill C-79, An Act to Amend the Parliament of Canada Act, addressed that composition, adopting a formula that would allow for the future configuration of parties but maintain the very important principle of the equality of government and opposition representation.

If you're especially interested in the history of the board, there is that brief history prepared by the Table Research Branch in your briefing material. There's also a very useful article that I found, which was written by two of the Library of Parliament analysts who have extensive experience in the House. I believe James Robertson was once the analyst for this committee, and James Robertson and Margaret Young contributed this article to the *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, the winter issue, in 1991-92. I think it provides a helpful explanation of the circumstances surrounding the board's creation.

I realize this kind of history may seem tedious, but we get to the place where we are because of certain circumstances and because of certain influences, and it's important, I think, to realize that there's been a tremendous amount of thought that went into the creation of the board and the ameliorations that we've seen over time.

It's the board—and it's been discussed in this respect in the newspapers and in the media—that provides members and House officers with their entitlements, allowances, and services to support their parliamentary functions. This is all detailed in the *Members' Allowances and Services* manual.

The basic principle that underlies the approach of the administration and informs my work as Clerk of the House is that each individual MP is directly accountable for the use of parliamentary resources that support the work in their offices as they carry out the parliamentary functions entrusted to them on their election. From that individual accountability of each MP flow the independence and the flexibility enjoyed by each MP to manage the budget allowances and services provided to the MP in those functions.

Thus, you will see that the “Members By-law”, as the name suggests, lists and goes through extensive definitions and establishes the framework within which members are to operate. It gives an enormous amount of independence to individual members, because the fundamental principle here is that it's up to the member to judge how he or she will represent his or her constituency. That freedom is required so that the members can set their priorities and decide what assistance they will require to achieve them.

As I said earlier, each political party determines how it will support its caucus members, but from our point of view, we look at each individual MP as an independent entity.

Each MP is the employer of record for each person hired on staff or on contract, because it's the individual MP who sets the terms and conditions of employment for staff and then decides on deliverables and the value of the contract that they may sign. It's the individual MP who decides where the staff will work, whether in the constituency or on the Hill, and what their responsibilities will be. The individual MP decides how many constituency offices he or she will need to lease, where the offices will be located, and how they'll be staffed. And it's the individual MP who decides how to shape the relationship with the constituency and how he or she will communicate with citizens.

Generally speaking, these fundamental decisions determine how the MP will decide to allocate his budget. Once staff has been hired and office space has been leased, a significant portion of the member's office budget, the famous MOB, has already been committed. The MOB is allocated to each member each fiscal year, and the member is personally liable for any and all expenses incurred above those allocations.

The expenditures are processed by Finance Services—and Mark will be telling you a bit more about that in a little while—and are captured in the member's expenditure report, so that every dollar that is spent within members' budgets is reported on. These expenditures are then further captured in the Public Accounts of Canada.

But along with this central role of being responsible for the resources that are given to members, the board has a wider role. It examines and approves the annual estimates of the House, that is to say, the main estimates and the supplementary estimates. It approves and controls the budget expenditures of committees of the House and of International and Interparliamentary Affairs. The committee envelope is given to the Liaison Committee, which then distributes it as requests come to it from the standing and standing joint committees.

Similarly, the Joint Interparliamentary Council, which is chaired by the chair of the Senate internal economy committee and the Deputy Speaker of the House, is the council that is set up to deal with the envelope of money that is given to interparliamentary associations.

• (1140)

As I said earlier, the board is the employer of record of the staff of the House of Commons, and in being that employer of record, it conforms with the terms of the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act. It approves salary scales for non-unionized employees. It authorizes us to negotiate the renewal of collective agreements with unionized employees, and it ratifies those agreements after those negotiations are done.

We currently have about 1,800 employees, including those who are not represented, and the unions. There are seven bargaining units of which four have bargaining agents.

The board also, of course, governs the security of the House of Commons precinct. In security and other matters, for example, the long-term vision and plan for the renovation of the parliamentary precinct, the board partners with its counterpart in the Senate for the management and security of the precinct.

I have been talking about the framework for the 308 members. I'll just say a few words about the framework for the administration. You've noted the "Members' By-law", which governs the allowances and services available to each member. The "Governance and Administration By-law" delegates to the Speaker and the Clerk the authority to oversee the administration, and it in turn is responsible for executing the directives of the board on various issues.

In the governance structure in the organigram that you see before you, the Board of Internal Economy is at the very top in deciding on budget and policy. Those policies are then left to the Speaker who operates something like a minister in a government department, and I operate as the equivalent of his deputy minister in the House of Commons. Two people in my office report directly to me. One is the director of internal audit, and the other is Suzanne Verville, who is my chief of staff and the director of corporate communications.

On the last line there, there are the six senior officials who are the heads of services. They report to me on their different responsibilities and we sit together as the Clerk's Management Group. I preside over meetings of those six people. You have the Deputy Clerk, who is in charge of procedural activities. The Sergeant-at-Arms is in charge of security and the physical plant of the building, and in so being he's obviously working with Public Works and Government Services on the renovations. There is the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, who provides advice on legal issues as well as running the legislative services that draft private members bills and amendments to government bills. Then you have the three senior people who one would find in any organization: the chief information officer, who is responsible for the network of the campus and for all of our technology; the chief financial officer, Mark Watters, who is with me today; and the chief human resources officer, Pierre Parent, who is the person in charge of staffing and all of the related human resources policies.

I said earlier that the Speaker and I have two distinct areas of responsibility. There is the parliamentary role and function, which is basically the part of the job that comes with a uniform, so I'm wearing it today because we'll be in the House this afternoon for question period. Then there is the administration role and function that we play, and that's, of course, of more interest to you here this morning. The Speaker is the chair of the Board of Internal Economy and I am its secretary. He oversees the administration, which I am directing, and he appears before this committee to defend the estimates. You have from time to time gotten into discussions with him on the study of main estimates and supplementary estimates.

So it's the same thing, the same division of labour for me. Time was when the Clerk of the House really spent much more time on procedural matters, but really most of my time now—I'd say 85%—is on administrative matters. I am very well supported by the six heads of service who are the experts in those various fields, but I do think it's particularly useful to have the Clerk as the secretary to the board and as the person responsible for administration overall, because I think the needs of a legislative assembly are different from the needs you might find in another public sector formation—an agency, a crown corporation, or a department—and certainly vastly different from the needs you would find in a corporate situation.

•(1145)

So as part of the Clerk's Management Group, I report directly to the Speaker and have regular meetings with him on various issues. The group, that is to say, the meeting of the six people, the heads of service on that bottom line of the organigram, is chaired by me. The chief of staff, Suzanne Verville, and the director of audit, Jennifer Wall, attend those meetings as observers. We make recommendations to the Speaker and the board regarding the administration of the House.

It's the CMG, Clerk's Management Group, that is responsible for setting strategic directions, priorities, and expected results for the House of Commons administration, for ensuring that we have the financial, material, and human resources necessary to carry out our mandate, which is to support members in their parliamentary functions, as well as to support the legislative body that is the House. It sets the direction for the development of policies for our own internal regulation. Of course, we ensure appropriate monitoring so that there is compliance with the approved policies and directives.

I should say, for example, that the performance audit of the Auditor General, which was done some two years ago—it took so long I sometimes forget, taking two years to do instead of one—looked at the structures and the systems that we had in place for ensuring compliance with the directives of the Board of Internal Economy. They were content with what they saw. They did make a few recommendations, which we have happily taken on board and acted upon. Basically, for us, it was a very helpful exercise.

When I mentioned earlier that the CMG, Clerk's Management Group, sets the administration's strategic objectives, maybe it's useful to just mention to you the following. Because members are elected in general elections on a regular basis—and in the Commonwealth, for instance, Canada has one of the higher turnovers of members in each election—it's inevitable that the job, the responsibility for carrying the institutional memory, rests more with the administration than it would in other circumstances. I know it is common for people to have a very long career at the House—not just to spend a certain amount of time at the House. So I feel, as the Clerk, and I know my predecessors felt the same, that we have a culture that has a very special responsibility for safeguarding the institution, the independence of the institution, and for ensuring that we are not only applying the highest standards of public sector governance, as we say in that fourth objective, in this parliamentary context, but that we're ready to respond to changing needs, because each Parliament is different.

The composition of this parliament, for example, which is more diverse and far younger than most of the previous parliaments, means we have to be ready to deal with the various challenges that come up there. We like to pride ourselves on the fact that we do that. We are very flexible and prepared to change, as I say, to respond to needs.

We also feel responsible for enhancing ongoing services, for instance, communication with citizens, communications with constituents. Now that people are using websites and other kinds of approaches, we are always looking very carefully at what tools we make available to members.

Finally, we want to promote greater understanding and support for the advancement of legislative institutions. In that respect, we are often asked by other jurisdictions to come to visit on studies. The U. K. people have come to look at how we are set up. We have a lot of visitors from the Commonwealth, and right now there's a study program that's in train for senior parliamentary officials

•(1150)

[*Translation*]

...from French-speaking countries who are there not only to share their experiences of governance in their legislative institutions, but also to learn how we meet the challenges. One of the most impressive things that emerged from these exchanges and studies is how similar the challenges an administration faces are, be it the Walloon parliament of Belgium, in Kenya, Senegal, Nunavut, British Columbia, Quebec or here, at the federal level in Canada. The context is particular because of the geography and culture, but the challenges are essentially the same. We're fascinated by that.

That is how I see the role of the Board of Internal Economy.

I'll turn things over to my colleague and friend, Mark G. Watters...

[*English*]

who is the chief financial officer. Then I'll come back for one final kick at the can and we'll be happy to take questions.

I should say that Mark is a career public servant, and I think of him as “my” but it really is “our” renaissance finance guy. He has extensive experience and came to us

[*Translation*]

...from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration two years ago.

[*English*]

He previously worked with a government agency, the Canada Council, and with

[*Translation*]

...the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

[*English*]

As well, he worked with the Office of the Auditor General. He really has a phenomenal breadth of experience. He's going to be addressing other aspects of your study.

The Chair: Mr. Watters.

Mr. Mark G. Watters (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I do have a statement that I will go through. We have copies that are available both in French and in English for members of the committee to consume, either during or afterwards.

Thank you very much for allowing me this opportunity today. I would like to share with the committee the results of our work in examining the governance structures of other jurisdictions and, in the first instance, our findings in provinces and territories in Canada.

I'd like to highlight three provinces where the regimes either are the most different or are thought to be the most different, starting with the Province of Manitoba.

In Manitoba, there are 57 members in the provincial legislature. In this area, a commissioner is appointed within six months following a general election. The mandate of the commissioner is to decide on the appropriate salaries, allowances, and retirement benefits for members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba and to make regulations for implementation and decide on the disclosure regime.

The Speaker is responsible for approving member expense claims and does so through the staff of what is called the Members' Allowances Office, the staff function, the MAO. Members may appeal any decision made by the MAO directly to the commissioner, whose decision is final.

Again within six months following an election, the director of the MAO prepares a compliance report, which describes any administrative or interpretative issues that have arisen in the administration of allowances and also verifies whether the amounts paid were in compliance with the Legislative Assembly Act and regulations. The report is then audited by the provincial Auditor General, who expresses an opinion, and both the report and the opinion are tabled by the Speaker in the Assembly and posted on the Web.

Moving to Nova Scotia, where 51 members make up the assembly, a body that is also called a commission has replaced the legislature's Internal Economy Board. The commission, however, is no more independent than the current governance of the House of Commons. Membership in the commission is similar to that of the Board of Internal Economy of the House.

Under this regime, the clerk administers members' expenses and members appeal decisions to the commission—essentially to the board. All members' expenses are disclosed. Twice yearly, individual member expense statements are publicly disclosed. On a monthly basis, data regarding member purchases is extracted from the financial system and posted on the legislature's website. It's really a dump from the financial system that's simply put on the website, so it's fairly difficult to comprehend.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, with 48 members part of that legislature, the governance body is also called a commission, the House of Assembly Management Commission. This commission is chaired by the Speaker, and the clerk is responsible for member expense administration.

The makeup of the commission is similar to that of the Board of Internal Economy, with representation from elected parties. Once every general assembly, an independent committee is established to inquire and report on salaries, allowances, severance payments, and pensions paid to members. All member expenses are disclosed. Again, similar to Nova Scotia, twice yearly an individual member expense statement is prepared, which summarizes expenses by category.

Mr. Chair, it's important to also appreciate the environment in which these three legislatures operate. The average number of sitting days for these is 63, 54, and 47 respectively. The House of Commons sits for 27 weeks, or 135 days, making the difference I believe significant. In addition, in terms of travel, our parliamentar-

ians' travel is quite extensive and on the national scene. In 2012-13, members collectively used almost 12,300 points. This represents 12,300 round trips and the expense claims that go with those trips. The volume that the House of Commons deals with is impressive.

In terms of other provincial and territorial jurisdictions, all other jurisdictions have the equivalent of the House of Commons Board of Internal Economy. Most jurisdictions have some form of public reporting, and the frequency of reporting varies.

I wanted to highlight those three that were the most different or thought to be the most different.

In terms of other Westminster-style parliaments, the Clerk and I travelled to London to review the model adopted by the U.K. As members may be aware, the model in the U.K. is quite different and boasts an independent arm's-length agency for members' expenses. The reforms were adopted following the leak of an unredacted copy of an expense report for all parliamentarians. Journalists had begun to point out a large number of alleged abuses of allowances and expenses. There was, as you can imagine, significant political fallout, and the reforms were adopted. I'd like to summarize those for you this morning.

• (1155)

In the U.K., the model that's been adopted is that an independent body has been created to oversee and regulate members' expenses. The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, IPSA, as it's called, was created in 2009. The agency was created to address the member expense scandal. At the time, the House of Commons did not have a very rigorous finance function, and existing rules were not being enforced. There were internal proposals to increase transparency and compliance, but these could not be put in place in time once the political storm had been unleashed.

IPSA's main role is to regulate the expense system, which it does by determining the rules governing members' expenses, and to administer and pay members' expenses and their salaries. IPSA is governed by a board of five, one of whom is the chair. The appointments are ratified by the House of Commons. Candidates are selected for recommendation based on the principles of merit and fair and open competition. They are appointed for specific terms. Three of the four members must meet specific eligibility conditions. The agency has a chief executive officer and a professional staff.

Within the agency there is also a compliance officer role. In the original legislation it was defined as the commissioner for parliamentary investigations, but was subsequently amended to compliance officer. The compliance officer is appointed in a manner similar to the board of IPSA, and IPSA must provide resources to the compliance officer for the carrying out of the mandate.

The role of the compliance officer is to conduct investigations if the officer has reason to believe that a member may have been paid an amount that should not have been allowed under the allowance scheme. There are strict processes to follow regarding how investigations are conducted, as well as limitations on how investigations are launched.

The Speaker of the House has a committee for IPSA. The members of this committee are the Speaker; the leader of the House; the chair of the standards and privilege committee; five members who are not ministers, all appointed by the House; and three laypersons who are appointed by resolution of the House. The laypersons must also meet strict conditions prior to being appointed.

The role of the Speaker's committee for IPSA is twofold. It considers IPSA's appropriation and agrees on the Speaker's recommendation to the House for the appointment of the IPSA chair and board members. The Speaker still maintains other committees for the functioning of the administration of the House.

Implementing this model was quite difficult. It was done in great haste due to the environment. Members were generally dissatisfied with the new agency, saying that the service was poor and they were not better served. In fact, at the time of the election in 2010, members were out of pocket for a significant period of time as IPSA struggled to get off the ground.

IPSA had a significant credibility issue to overcome due to its poor response to members in a post-election period. The election unfortunately happened to be timed at the same time as the coming into force of the legislation and the creation of the agency. The compliance function is now, some three years later, just getting off the ground, post-enactment of the legislation.

It's clear that with the creation of this new agency the pendulum had swung to an extreme position. Some three years later, the middle ground is being found. A rigorous arm's-length relationship was forced with a strict independence mentality, which no doubt caused relationship issues to arise.

Today we note the existence of an informal liaison group between the House and IPSA that meets on a regular basis, is jointly chaired, and whose objective is to discuss and consult on potential changes to the allowance scheme, which is under the exclusive jurisdiction of IPSA, and to improve relations with members.

This is a large group, and from the House perspective it is quite diverse and representative of members according to geography, gender, age, family status, and other criteria.

• (1200)

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, I'll now address the issue of independence, transparency and accountability.

First, I would like to say that independence doesn't necessarily lead to transparency and accountability. It only leads to independence.

The House has made significant advances on transparency and accountability with respect to spending.

As the clerk mentioned earlier, I would like to remind the committee of the following initiatives: public disclosure of minutes of the Board of Internal Economy meetings, an annual audit of our financial statements, posting our financial results in the Public Accounts of Canada, posting the administrative by-laws of the House on the website, posting the Report to Canadians on the website, posting the Strategic Objectives on the website, annual

publication of the members' expenditures reports with increased disclosure in recent years, a transition toward enhanced quarterly reporting on members' expenditures in the coming fiscal years, beginning April 1, 2014, the planned posting of the *Members' Allowances and Services Manual* on the website and the planned posting of the Public Registry of Designated Travellers on the website.

We could adopt the following measures to continue improving transparency and accountability through increased disclosure.

First, we could prepare and publish a quarterly financial report, possibly using the same format as the Public Accounts of Canada. The report would present credits for each program activity and line of income, like we do when the Main Estimates and Supplementary Estimates are presented here in committee.

Then, we have the modification of our program activity architecture in order to establish an improved report at a much more detailed activity level. Our activities are currently summarized in two categories: House of Commons members and officers, and House administration.

We could also look into a more detailed presentation of activities. We could even examine the members' annual expenditures reports before they are posted on the website.

• (1205)

[English]

Mr. Chair, the House has a robust finance function in place, says the CFO of the organization—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mark G. Watters: —you would hope.

Finance Services provides policy advice to the board, makes payments of members' claims after verifying compliance with policy and regulation, provides support and advice to members through training and communication initiatives directed towards members and their employees, provides access to financial tools, tracks all member expenses of public funds, and regularly discloses these according to the format that's approved by the board.

We have put in place a rigorous pre and post-payment verification process. The U.K. through IPSA is only now attempting to put in place such a regime.

If we review the following measures of performance indicators for the House finance function, we can appreciate the conditions under which this model is applied at the House: over 70,000 member payments on average in the fiscal year; 20,000 calls and e-mails received by Finance Services in a year; and 4,365 regret letters sent to members advising them of a modification to an amount claimed—some of you will be familiar with those letters and you probably typically don't like to receive them. But this is where we've made an adjustment to claims, and we advise you. We conveniently call them “regret letters”, rather than something else.

Only seven requests for exemption were made to the board in the fiscal year, and there were 11 situations raised with the Speaker that were dealt with directly without having to involve the Board of Internal Economy. Finally, 21 staff members were involved in the adjudication of member expense claims.

Despite complaints made by members of the requirements or services provided by Finance Services, members are generally supportive of the regime currently in place at the House. There have been numerous public comments made by members about the robustness of Finance Services at the House. In the most recent Office of the Auditor General report on the audit of the House administration, the AG indicated that the administration had in place appropriate policies and control systems to govern the proper expenditure of funds in accordance with the bylaws, policies, and directives of the board. The AG found no instances of significant non-compliance.

Our external auditors, KPMG, once again have issued a clean opinion on the financial statements prepared by the House administration. Further, they did not find any areas that needed to be addressed through a management letter as a result of their audit. That's probably as good as it gets in terms of audit-speak. In our view, the House can claim that it is transparent and accountable for the resources that are expended.

Mr. Chair, now turning to the independence issue, while the board is not an arm's-length agency, we have made significant inroads on the independence front as an institution. In terms of human resources, the finance function that is contained within the administration of the House is functioning well and is supported in its role by the Board of Internal Economy.

A high number of staff have professional designations and adhere to strong codes of ethics as a result of their memberships in these professional bodies.

Salaries for members are determined independently; they are not decided upon by the Board of Internal Economy. A formula contained in the Parliament of Canada Act, which ties increases to those achieved through collective bargaining in the private sector, assures this. Pension entitlements for members are debated in the House and administered by the Treasury Board with the assistance of the Chief Actuary of Canada.

If there were a desire to add an additional layer of independence in decision-making, external expertise could be added to the existing structure, as is often the case on corporate boards and audit committees. External advisers or independent directors supplement the existing structures to provide additional perspective on issues. The committee may wish to explore these models, which, in our view, could achieve the objective of independence while continuing to leverage the investments that have been made in the existing regime, which in our view is robust and sufficient.

Of course, such a model would avoid the duplication of committees that we find in the U.K.—you'll recall the Speaker's committee on IPSA, the Speaker's administration committees, and the informal House-IPSA liaison committee—and could be pursued without incurring significant additional cost and delays.

Mr. Chair, thank you for your patience. I would now like to return the podium to the Clerk for final comments.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I join Mark in thanking you for being so very patient this morning. Naturally, in preparing for today's appearance, Mark and I discussed extensively on how to proceed. Your order of reference is very clear.

[*English*]

Your order of reference asks you to conduct hearings with a view to replacing the board with an independent oversight body, and we wondered whether we should, actually, conclude with any kind of recommendation. I think it would be disingenuous if we didn't conclude with a recommendation. Basically, we are both of the opinion that the Board of Internal Economy is a viable governing authority for the House of Commons. I hope we have been able to explain how and why we believe it is responsive to changing needs. It has demonstrated, through its steady improvement on the transparency and disclosure regime, an ability to respond to changing needs with the flexibility inherent to being able to do that.

We hope, as well, to have demonstrated that the role of the board extends beyond merely the question of allowances and services for members. In our view, the board is transparent and accountable. We're not suggesting, by any stretch of the imagination, that it is perfect. There are clearly areas where changes may well be recommended, and we would certainly be open to those, but basically we think the board has evolved with and responded to these changing requirements and that we have, as I say, a regime that is ever more transparent and is certainly accountable.

We'd be happy to answer any questions.

[*Translation*]

Once again, thank you for your tremendous patience.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam O'Brien and Mr. Watters.

You've been so detailed today that I'm sure the members have no questions for you.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: That's always a good outcome.

The Chair: It's a good start, but we'll try.

Members, we have some committee business we'd like to do at the end of the committee, so we will need you to be short and succinct with your questions if at all possible. I know the members of Parliament would love to fill all the time allotted to them but I'll ask them not to do so.

Mr. Lukiwski, we'll start with you today for seven minutes.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Madam O'Brien and Mr. Watters, for your very thorough presentation.

I have a lot of questions. However, I think the one we really have to deal with is contained in the order of reference that was adopted. It was originally a motion presented by the NDP, supported unanimously in the House last June, and it states, unequivocally, that the view of this study would be to replace the Board of Internal Economy. I thank you for your recommendation that the board need not be replaced; perhaps it could be improved.

I want to drill down a little bit on that. I think, certainly, one of the arguments we've heard from members of the opposition with respect to the board is the fact that all of its meetings are in camera. They claim the secrecy aspect is problematic, at least to them. I hope I'm not mischaracterizing where the NDP is coming from, but at least that's certainly what I've heard them state.

If the board remained in its current state but perhaps were open to some suggested changes, what would your thoughts be on the board meeting in public, as a general principle, and then going in camera when needed? For example, if they were dealing with issues of a personal nature, of a legal nature, of a labour relations nature, would that, in your view, be appropriate?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Mr. Chairman, through you, I was afraid that this would be a question, because I fear that I have what is, I suppose, easily characterized as a Luddite approach to this.

I'm going to be very candid with you, at the risk of going beyond my remit as the Clerk. I don't think, if the meetings of the board were to be held in public, this would improve the situation. It might improve the perception of the board. It is invariably characterized as very secretive, highly secretive, which seems to suggest that fascinating secrets are being dealt with there, when in fact the work there—I see Mr. Preston smiling seraphically—is of such mind-numbing ordinariness that I think people would be quite surprised. I mean, we're not dealing with issues of national security.

Again, I'm going to be foolhardy and go out on a limb here—and hand you a saw—and say that I think, just as an observer of the situation, that the current climate that exists in political debate is so ferocious that it seems to force people into rigid partisan positions that are really not helpful when you're trying to come to a consensus over a particular issue.

I have found with the board a willingness for members, because of the fact that they're private meetings.... I don't consider them secret, because the minutes are published, the decisions are published and people find out what those decisions are, and in talking to their representatives on the board, the representatives can explain why they're going along with the strategic review, what they're contributing to this environment, and so on and so forth.

I think if the meetings were public, to tell you the God's honest truth, what worries me that it would drive the actual discussion underground. It means that the real bargaining goes on in corridor discussions, in private meetings that are not in any way minuted, where there's no presence of a secretary. I worry that this would lead to perhaps a situation where decisions are not perhaps as sound as the decisions that I think the board has been taking over these many years.

I understand the wish of the public to see the board work, to see how decisions are made and that kind of thing. It is certainly the

case, perhaps, that what seemed to be a veil of secrecy in which the whole operation was cloaked initially has kind of stayed with it well beyond any kind of useful life. But I do think that the private discussions are useful.

Now, how do you regain credibility if credibility is not there and trust is not there? I think perhaps there are other ways. For instance, the board might be able to meet—this is just totally, absolutely off the top of my head—and field questions as to why certain things are done in a particular way, and this kind of thing.

I'm taking up way too much time, so I'll leave it there. I would prefer to see the meetings kept private. We could look at putting minutes that are less terse, shall we say; they're virtually haiku at the moment. We could conceivably have a bit more information in the minutes.

•(1215)

The Chair: You have one minute left, Mr. Lukiwski, if you have another question.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I think there wouldn't be time for a detailed answer.

I thank you again for your candour on why the meetings are typically held in camera. I think there are a couple more reasons. Correct me if I'm wrong, but to my knowledge the Board of Internal Economy is not covered by privilege.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: It is not an actual committee of the House, and in that sense there is some debate about whether privilege is covered.

There are all kinds of ancillary issues there that make it really difficult.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: This is my last comment, since we have a serious lack of time here. My observation, after what I've heard today, is that even if we went to a new system of an independent oversight body as suggested in the order of reference, that body, however it would be structured, would still have to be supported by the administration of the House in a similar fashion to the Board of Internal Economy being supported today.

So in terms of the old saying "If it ain't broke, don't fix it", I'm not sure if the board needs to replace, but I'm sure there will be questions that will determine that outcome.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Julian for seven minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I hope we will have an opportunity to have Ms. O'Brien and Mr. Watters back for another meeting. In fact, I think we still have a lot of questions to ask.

•(1220)

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: We don't want to infringe on your work, but we are willing to come back.

Mr. Peter Julian: You are very kind. Your presentation was very detailed and very useful. However, it raises all kinds of questions, for me and my colleagues, and it would be important for us to address these matters.

We are studying the NDP motion that was passed unanimously in the House of Commons. The most important question I want to ask you has to do with the Board of Internal Economy's decisions. Are they made on the basis of the majority or is a consensus reached among the board's members?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Mr. Chair, it really is a consensus process. A discussion takes place. Certainly, in some cases, people don't always take the same position but, over the course of the discussion, we come to a compromise that everyone finds acceptable. At least, that is what I've seen in my 30 years here, although I haven't always worked directly with the Board of Internal Economy.

But I must say that we recently needed to go to a vote because we couldn't reach a consensus. However, that situation is very rare. It was almost unprecedented. Sometimes we put off decisions so we have the chance to develop them.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much.
[English]

So what you're seeing with the Board of Internal Economy now is that there are certain decisions that are subject to a vote, where the majority then makes that decision. Is that a fair characterization?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Not quite. There has been at least one instance where that has happened. That has happened in this Parliament, but it's not common with this board either. It's still a rarity, quite a rarity.

Mr. Peter Julian: But it does represent a shift. You understand what I'm saying. If what we have is a situation where a majority makes the decision, we're not talking about an impartial group that makes the decision by consensus.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Well, I think—

Mr. Peter Julian: If ultimately it can be subject to a vote, then what that means is that it's really subject to a majority control, which I don't think would enhance the reputation of the Board of Internal Economy in the eyes of the public.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Well, I think it's important to remember that there is no majority. The majority doesn't belong to the government or the opposition; there is an equal number of voices, and the Speaker, if there's an equal number of voices, is left with the unhappy role of weighing in.

Speakers and chairs of the Board of Internal Economy with whom I've worked have been very deft at avoiding that kind of situation. As I say, I think this has happened only once in my time as secretary to the board, so I wouldn't call it a shift.

I understand what you're saying, though, about credibility and about the idea that you might fear that the Speaker—impartial though the Speaker is, having been elected and so forth, and impartial in presiding over deliberations—might be inclined, by virtue basically of the ideology he represents in being a government member, to side with the government, say, and therefore create a majority there. But I don't think that would be a fair characterization

of the way that Speakers—and this Speaker as well—handle the role of chair of the board.

Mr. Peter Julian: You can understand that it would be a concern to the public, right, when we're talking about public perception? This is why this order of reference was made by the House of Commons. There needs to be in the public eye, I think, a sense that when we're talking about MPs' expenses, when we're talking about taxpayers' money—

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Yes.

● (1225)

Mr. Peter Julian: Because these are taxpayers across the country, in my riding and everywhere else, who are paying our salaries and paying those expenses, and they want to make sure that it's subject to a neutral, non-partisan, independent body that is making those decisions based on facts, rather than on having a debate and ultimately some votes taking place, which is exactly the opposite of what I think the public wants.

Can I ask you, because you have a long history and experience, if you have seen that happen in the past. Or in the past has there been a real attempt by Speakers to say, “We're not going to make a decision until all parties agree”?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I think you're quite correct in saying that part.... When I talked about Speakers being very deft at handling their role as chairs, it is the case that the Speaker will say: “Well, you know, we obviously have some way to go, and people have to think about this. They have to talk about this with each other and whatnot, so we'll put this off to another time.” So you have that chance for cooler heads to prevail, for a consensus to emerge.

I guess that what worries me when you say a process lacks credibility and the public expects that these steps be taken to make it independent, to have an independent body, and I guess what troubles me about that is.... And I understand exactly what you're saying, and I agree with you that it's a public perception that's out there that we have to fight, but I think the terribly upsetting premise that that seems to be resting on is that anyone who is associated with politics or who knows something about politics is, by that very association, untrustworthy.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're at the seven-minute mark for Mr. Julian.

Mr. Lamoureux, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do want to address the issue of what I believe is the public perception, which is something that we all have a responsibility to deal with.

To use an example, we and the leader of our party have been talking a great deal about proactive disclosure, making reference to ministers and how they would proactively declare the actual costs of making that flight in terms of where it is they're flying to, and the costs of meals in terms of where they're having those meals, and so forth. Here is an expectation that we're hearing from Canadians as a whole: they want to see more proactive disclosure.

I can appreciate that there might be additional costs for that, but we're in a democracy. We have to meet those costs in order to provide what it is that Canadians ultimately would like to see.

The question—and it might be best for Mr. Watters—is in regard to what steps we could be taking to make proactive disclosure to the same degree to which ministers have proactive disclosure on their trips. Is that something that's doable within your administration?

Mr. Mark G. Watters: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The answer to that question is yes, that anything is absolutely doable. There would be no trouble in doing that. The board has been reluctant in going in that direction, and we have been reluctant in recommending that. Personally, I feel that if we were to adopt that type of disclosure, it would be a regression from where we are today.

As you've seen earlier today, the members' expenditure reports are far more detailed than what proactive disclosure would be at the level of a minister in a department. You have in that disclosure essentially disclosure that is around a trip.

We disclose far more than that. We disclose all the expenditures of a member with respect to all the funds that are entrusted to that member, or that are spent from central funds from the administration on the account of that member. We go far beyond that level of disclosure.

I personally believe it would be a step back if we did that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Yes, but that would be on the assumption that the proactive disclosure we're talking about is just limited to that in the future. If we look at it as a starting point.... I'm very much wanting to provide and deliver what Canadians are asking for. We had the opportunity, for example, to use this as a starting point back in June. We came very, very close to actually having it pass in the House. If it weren't for the New Democrats, in fact, we would have had the support to see it actually pass, and it could have been in place today. That is indeed a starting point.

You made reference to the fact that you went to other provinces. I was intrigued by Manitoba. I served in the Manitoba legislature for 20 years. I was a part of the process that brought us the commissioner. I can tell you that when we talked about bringing in the commissioner—I was part of those discussions and representing the Liberal Party at that time—we needed to make a clear statement that politicians should not be setting politicians' salaries—

• (1230)

Mr. Mark G. Watters: Right.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: —nor should we be determining what our pensions are.

There was also a feeling that there needs to be an appeal mechanism that is not the Board of Internal Economy—we knew it as the Legislative Assembly Management Commission in the Province of Manitoba—so that if in fact a member has an issue, they could go to someone, and that was determined with the commissioner.

Here's the question I have for you. Do you believe that the potential role a commissioner could play here on the national scene

could be of benefit to Canadians as a possible add-on? You talked about how we have the established Board of Internal Economy. Do you see the potential role that a commissioner could play in dealing with what Manitobans thought was important, but applying that nationally?

Mr. Mark G. Watters: The position we have advanced today is really one in which we would perhaps supplement the Board of Internal Economy with some external advisers. I think doing so would in fact address a number of issues.

Mr. Lamoureux, if you look at the number of exceptions that are requested of the board in a particular year, there are on average only seven. To put in place such an infrastructure for that many who decide to appeal to the board, when in fact, as I advised you, we alter almost 4,400 claims when they are presented for payment.... I think the current regime is working.

The question is whether we want to add the element of independence. The fundamental argument the Clerk and I have put forward today is that the board does lots of things. It does more than just members' administration of expenses. That is a very important part, but only a part of what the board does. If there's a desire to bring independence to that, then do that by bringing in external advisers or maybe creating some type of another small working group within the board to do that, but continue to lever off the infrastructure that is already in place, which is, as we hope we have demonstrated today, working properly.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I have one last question for you, Ms. O'Brien. I appreciated your comments about the importance of being in camera and how, if you remove the in camera aspect, decisions might ultimately end up being made in hallways as opposed to through a more formal process. I can appreciate that.

Something I have advocated for years is to allow for the assumption that meetings are in fact public, and if it is deemed necessary that a meeting go in camera, that it be done through unanimous consent of all the members of the Board of Internal Economy.

Do you feel that would be a problem? I'm familiar with the give and take and the nature of the discussions of a group such as the Board of Internal Economy. I wouldn't think it would be a problem, because, generally speaking, people from all political parties are sensitive about having to go in camera.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lamoureux. You have used up your time including our witness's time to answer.

We'll go to Mr. Richards's time and hope that the Clerk will get a chance to answer that question within it.

You have four minutes.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Thank you.

I have a few questions for both Ms. O'Brien and Mr. Watters. I'm sure we won't get to them all, but we'll get to as many as we can.

I do certainly think when we're looking at changing something or replacing something as this motion contemplates, it's always best to start from the point of view of looking at what is being done currently, and how or if it's working or not working, and certainly having the two of you here is very helpful to us as a starting point in that. That's very much appreciated.

With that in mind, I think I'll first pick up on the line of questioning that Mr. Julian was undertaking in his initial part of his time, in relation to the consensus on the board.

Ms. O'Brien, you indicated that you could recall at least one occasion when that wasn't able to be arrived at so a vote had to be taken. I cannot imagine, but I would like to ask if you could imagine any other way, if consensus could not be reached, that a decision could be made. In that instance is there any mechanism through which to make a decision other than a vote?

• (1235)

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Through you, Mr. Chairman, I can't think of one. I have to say in fairness and to appreciate how seriously the members of the board take their responsibilities, they were very loath to get to that point. It was something that divided them, and there was no option.

Mr. Blake Richards: It is quite uncommon as you said.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: It's absolutely uncommon, and in a sense it's a sad event, because it says we can't get to a middle place.

Mr. Blake Richards: I know you also indicated in your presentation some of the recent changes that have taken place in the way the board operates. One of them was the posting of the minutes.

I'm wondering if you have kept any stats on how many people are clicking on that page to see those minutes, and if they were unique hits or whether we're seeing.... Obviously you can imagine that within the Parliamentary Press Gallery or the research staff we have here on the Hill, inside the bubble, people would probably be clicking on it quite frequently.

Are there any stats that have been taken on this to help us understand...?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Yes, indeed, Mr. Richards. We've been anxious as well to see how that was received. I'm afraid I don't have that information with me, but I can certainly provide it to the clerk for the committee's use.

Mr. Blake Richards: The next question is if the board were to be replaced by some kind of an arm's-length organization, do you have any idea how something like that might look or function? Also, if you've done any of that kind of work or research, has the House of Commons done any estimates on what it might cost to replace the Board of Internal Economy with an outside body?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I confess we have not costed that out, because it would depend on the composition, the structure, and so on.

It was only in rereading the order of reference today that I saw that it's with a view to substituting for the Board of Internal Economy an independent agency. All I could think of was that God always answers prayers and sometimes the answer is no. I thought to myself,

I was going with a no. I don't have a very elaborate alternative, because I didn't think it would fly. I genuinely don't think it's a good idea.

Mr. Blake Richards: That's appreciated.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: The U.K. model offers some use.

Again, in the case of the U.K., it was act in haste and repent at leisure. The scandal broke just before the election and they were desperate to do something. We've learned a lot from them, but that model does work, ultimately.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards.

I'm sorry to stop you there.

Madam Groguhé.

The Chair: Thank you.

You have four minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to our witnesses. I have learned a great deal from their information and explanations.

My first question has to do with the powers that the Board of Internal Economy possesses. Do you believe that some of those powers could be taken over by an independent agency, and if so, which powers would they be?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: You want to know whether I believe...

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: In terms of the technical and administrative work that the Board of Internal Economy does, do you believe that some of its powers could be taken over by an independent agency? If so, which powers would they be?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: An independent agency along the lines of the independent agency in the United Kingdom could certainly be established. We could learn from their mistakes and organize ourselves in that way.

I feel that we still need an authority in charge here, in the House, for the administration and for the parliamentary precinct. I think that is a matter of credibility and of meeting the public's expectations.

But the problem, as I see it, is that we are not doing enough to communicate to the public so that the public understands the way in which decisions are made. The public draws parallels that are not particularly useful. They even have it in their minds that there is not enough control, not enough regulations or standards, but that is not the case at all.

When we met with the people from IPSA, the independent agency in London, I was very happy to learn that the systems for verifying expenses that we have in place here in the House, were every bit as robust as theirs.

• (1240)

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Board of Internal Economy deliberations most often achieve consensus. But sometimes, they have had to hold a vote. You also mentioned the ability to put off a decision until later, giving time to consider a matter in much more depth.

Has the Board of Internal Economy ever had to turn to expertise from outside, for example, before coming to a consensus or taking a vote? Has that ever happened?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No. Given the clearly unique environment in which we work, the problems that arise are ideological or political. Some people want to see a certain approach and others do not share that point of view. The debate is not about the facts, but rather about the approach. That is what happened in the only case that I can recall where a vote was needed.

Mrs. Sadia Grogue: Okay.

In terms of—

My time is up already, Mr. Chair? That was too quick.

[*English*]

The Chair: There are about two seconds left, so I don't think we're going to get that question in.

Next is Mr. Opitz, please, for four minutes.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, all, for being here today. It's been an incredible presentation, incredibly detailed.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: You're very kind.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Madam Clerk, you mentioned the rules, standards, and lessons learned from the U.K. model, which itself leads to a communications plan. You're speaking language that I understand from a previous life.

In reference to our board, you referred to communicating with the Canadian public so that they understand fully what the board does. What would your recommendation be for a communications plan to the general public?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I think the board has actually taken measures to address this vulnerability. The problem is that if there are scandals, or if there are problems that make headlines, then there's a contagion there. It spreads like wildfire. The impression of difficulty spreads like wildfire, and that's very bad for the institutions generally speaking.

I think the direction that the board is taking now, putting more and more information on the web in a timely fashion, ready to answer quite specific and substantive questions from the media and from Canadians, is definitely a step in the right direction for communications.

I belaboured the point about what is available on the web because I don't think that's well understood. I think it's the case that people just don't get that.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Certainly that would take some reinforcement.

To go back to something that Mr. Lukiwski asked earlier, as the board of economy is not really a House of Commons committee, would its proceedings be subject to parliamentary privilege if it were public?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No. In the first instance, it's not a standing committee, so it's not obvious that privilege would attach to that. Then you get into the experts discussing parliamentary privilege and

the fact that it would attach to it only if it were linked to deliberations of the House.

So certain decisions probably wouldn't be covered by privilege, where others would be. I think this is why, for instance, in the statute, the Parliament of Canada Act, it specifically says that the board is the sole authority.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Right. But anybody appearing in front of it then would be subject to some sort of risk, potentially, from lawsuits or...

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I think potentially, yes.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Okay.

In terms of going in camera, without mentioning specific cases, are there any examples of what the board has considered, and that you could talk about, that couldn't be dealt with in a public forum?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: The board has had very detailed explanations of, for instance, certain security instances, of certain security challenges that were met. Other examples would be labour relations cases and the negotiations mandate for collective bargaining. I think those are good examples.

• (1245)

Mr. Ted Opitz: Okay.

To Mr. Watters, have outside auditors ever been brought in to look at either House of Commons spending or spending by the House of Commons administration?

Mr. Mark G. Watters: Yes, every year since 2004-05, I think, the financial statements of the House have been audited.

We have an external auditor, KPMG. The financial statements, which include all of the activities of the House, are consolidated, and KPMG expresses an opinion on those financial statements annually.

This year, as I said in my statement, no management letter was issued, which means there was no area for improvement. As I said, it's as good as it gets in terms of audit-speak. If there's one thing we can be happy about in finance, it's that—when we get that kind of report from the auditor.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Bellavance, something new today: for four minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I plan to show you that I have not lost my touch, at least I hope I haven't.

Thank you for your testimony. I have two matters to bring up and not a lot of time to do it.

Times have changed in terms of transparency, and that is a good thing. You gave us a great example of that earlier on.

For the Bloc Québécois, it is quite normal for the public, and, by extension, the media, to be able to have access to our expenses, given that people have questions about them. It is their money, after all. We feel that this is a very important question.

With expenses posted, we might look forward to the time when even more details may be available on the Internet. Ms. May, for example, pointed out the costs of air travel. We do not know whether a member flew economy or business class, nor how many times he or she did so. But we know that business class is much more expensive. This possibility would answer the public's question about that.

My first question is for you, Ms. O'Brien, or for the person with you. It is about the importance of protecting privacy. We have a law about that. People might want to know whom we are meeting with, and why.

Also, there are all those cases of whistleblowing, including the one at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, where the person was fired because of the revelations she made.

Someone meeting with an opposition member of Parliament could be targeted by the government. It would not matter who, because in the list of expenses, you could see that they went to a restaurant, for example. I am sure that you will tell me that people will be more careful in cases like that. But it is a problem that we should think about.

Everyone feels that their consciences are clear by saying that they want more transparency. But it not the same for everyone at the moment. And it has to be. We cannot ask each member of Parliament to reveal more and more all the time, as if this was the dance of the seven veils.

The other part of my question deals with independence. Mr. Watters, you made me sit up and take notice when you said we have to be careful. Yes, but sometimes there is nothing better than a real example for showing the importance of independence.

With the exception of the Liberals, every party has been non-recognized at some stage, when they had fewer than 12 members. A non-recognized party can be subject to the scrutiny of the Board of Internal Economy. I will not remind you of the case, but it has happened to us, as you know full well. But despite our requests to the Board of Internal Economy and to the other parties, everyone washed their hands of the matter and it was decided that the discussions would be held without the party there. It took several meetings and, because it all went on behind closed doors, we knew nothing about it. This ties in with what my colleagues said earlier.

We suffered the consequences after the fact. In my opinion, the Board lacked all credibility and legitimacy in that study, given that the people affected were not able to be there.

So, in terms of independence, I also feel that there is certainly some room for improvement.

Could you comment on the two points I have raised?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: It is true that times have changed, Mr. Chair.

Like Ms. May, you talked about points, and about business class and economy class. But people need to know that we run ourselves ragged so that members of Parliament, who are travelling all the time, can normally do so, not as cheaply as possible, but with passes, for example. These are like coupons; we buy them and they let

people travel business class generally much more cheaply than if we bought business-class tickets separately.

Anyway, according to Board of Internal Economy rules, members of Parliament can only travel business class in certain cases. There are rules for all of that. I feel that this may be a lack of communication rather than a problem of disclosure.

You also mentioned independence—

• (1250)

[English]

The Chair: Be very quick, Madam O'Brien.

[Translation]

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: In terms of non-recognized parties, I have to tell you—and I am really going out on a limb here—that the whole issue is not necessarily a problem with the Board of Internal Economy, but rather because the rules changed at some stage. I think that the NDP was the non-recognized party at that time. The rules were changed to introduce the new phrase “party not recognized in the House of Commons”. That got across the idea that the parties were not recognized in the House, though they may well be recognized elsewhere.

I could respectfully suggest that this committee might wish to change that approach.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. This committee needs more work.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I know. Sorry, sorry, sorry: I rabbit on.

The Chair: Madam O'Brien, thank you for coming today. We do need to do some committee business, so if it sounds like you're getting the rush, you are.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I'd bring my sleeping bag.

The Chair: Hopefully you would make yourself available, as we may not have got enough rounds of questioning in today.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Sure.

The Chair: If you could make yourself available at a later meeting on this—

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Yes, absolutely.

The Chair: This study must finish by a set date, so if we ask you back, it would be in the next little while. That would be great.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I'd be happy to come back.

The Chair: That's great. I know that your presentation was long today, but it was important for us to hear exactly all of that.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Maybe—again, not to sort of plan on cooked answers, but to deal with the fact that I rabbit on—if members had specific questions they wanted to submit in advance, that might help in keeping things more succinct, or in keeping me more succinct, not them.

The Chair: That would help. They always seem to fill their time if we give it.

It's important.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We need to move into committee business, Madam Turmel.

We do have a session in camera on committee business too, so please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also have a young student with me; his name is Camil. I hope that he appreciated this morning's presentation and that it was of some help to him.

I would like to follow-up from the previous meeting, where we discussed at length the matter of meeting in camera. We decided that it was up to Conservative members to make a motion to form a sub-committee, or a working committee, to determine the requirements for meeting in camera.

I have a motion; there are copies here. It is similar to the last one, except that the first paragraph is different. I will read it to you.

That the Committee include in their review of the Standing Orders a full study on when a committee may conduct their business in camera and use the following guidelines:

I will not list them here, but they are the same as the ones I listed before.

The last paragraph reads as follows:

That all votes taken in camera be recorded in the Minutes of Proceedings, including how each member voted when recorded votes are requested.

That would give the working committee some direction and would allow us to determine the needs for in camera work.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I was not at the last meeting, so I'll turn it over to the chair of that.... No, I'm just kidding.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I was not here, so I don't know where we stand on this motion.

We have a motion on the floor, but we also have committee business we must deal with.

I leave it to the committee as to where we're going here, folks.

Mr. Julian, very quickly, because we're all going to run out of time at one o'clock.

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

I think this is a motion that goes in the exact sense the Conservatives mentioned when Madam Turmel presented her original motion, so I think we just need a sign from the Conservatives that they're going to vote for this, and we'll be

governed subsequently. It certainly responds to what Conservatives mentioned, so I think Madam Turmel has done wonderful work.

• (1255)

The Chair: I have Mr. Lukiwski on this, and then I'd like to bring it to a conclusion.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Very briefly, Mr. Chair, the position of the government has not changed. I stated at the last meeting that I believe committees have to have the ability to go in camera when they wish not be constricted by the finite terms as presented by the NDP.

The Chair: Mr. Julian on that.

Mr. Peter Julian: There's no contradiction here, Mr. Chair. I believe Mr. Lukiwski now has a copy of the motion that was revised following the comments from the Conservatives. This isn't an issue that's divisive. This is an issue on which everybody around the table should be in agreement.

There's a whole range of areas where we could go in camera, including on any issue at all where the committee has full agreement, so there's no problem. It's not rocket science. It responds to the Conservatives' concerns that were expressed publicly, and it certainly I think responds to the concerns that Madam O'Brien and Mr. Watters raised about public disclosure as well. This gives the Conservatives exactly what they wanted, exactly what they asked for. I would assume this would mean that the Conservatives would say yes to this.

The Chair: Seeing nobody else on my speakers list, I'll call for a vote on it, then.

Mr. Scott, you're in favour?

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): No. My hand was sort of up and you didn't see me.

The Chair: Okay.

Let's get on the list quickly if we're going to talk about it. We have only a couple of minutes left.

Mr. Craig Scott: I'll be very quick.

I just wanted to follow up on what Mr. Julian was saying and make sure that my colleagues across the way understand that the motion is for a full study on this. It is not the same motion you saw the last time.

The Chair: This committee will at some point study the Standing Orders.

Does anybody else want to speak to this motion?

Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I have just a bit of concern now, after what Mr. Scott has raised. Can I get a copy of exactly what it is we're voting on?

The Chair: Sure. I thought it was distributed.

I'm very sorry, Mr. Lamoureux. I thought you had it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: No—but I do now.

The Chair: Your speed-reading is coming into play at this moment.

Seeing no one else on my speaking list, Mr. Lamoureux, do you have further thoughts?

I know you're getting there. I saw your lips were still moving—no offence.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: No, I'm fine, Mr. Chair, if you want to call the question.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, I'd like to request a recorded public vote on this.

The Chair: Certainly.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: That has failed, so we'll move on to committee business very quickly.

Your steering committee met yesterday. We are working on planning the rest of the study on the Board of Internal Economy. It's

been left with your clerk and your chair to put together the rest of the schedule.

We have the requests from all members on what witnesses would be there. Some have already been asked. Some have not. Some have already moved their time around. So you'll have to bear with us; we will give you full committees of...

I need to know from you all....

Yes, Mr. MacKenzie?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Should we not be in camera for this committee report?

The Chair: That's likely right. It is a committee report, so I suppose we should pause for 30 seconds to go in camera.

I forgot that. Thank you. Your chair apologizes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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