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# **Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs**

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**Wednesday, November 20, 2013**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Joe Preston**



## Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Wednesday, November 20, 2013

• (1905)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)):** We'll call our meeting to order.

We are here tonight in our special meeting still looking at the order of reference of Monday, October 21, and the study of the review of the Board of Internal Economy. We have a very special witness for you tonight.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** Speaker Milliken, it's great to see you again. It has always been fun to have you at committee, and this is a whole different circumstance this time.

We are waiting for former Speaker Fraser to join us electronically. There have been some technical difficulties, and when he jumps in, we may give him a few words to start off.

Speaker Milliken, if you have an opening statement, we'd love to hear from you. Then we're going to ask you really hard questions.

**Hon. Peter Milliken (Former Speaker of the House of Commons, As an Individual):** I'd just as soon you go on with the questions, because I don't know what you want to hear from me. It might be better if you ask the questions, to save your time, rather than have me take it up with babbling.

**The Chair:** Wow. We like witnesses who cooperate like you.

Mr. Lukiwski, be gentle.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

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

Speaker Milliken, it really is good to see you again. We miss you. I know—

**The Chair:** I'm telling Speaker Scheer.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** I'm not casting judgment on the efficiencies of either Speaker Milliken or Speaker Scheer, but I know that certainly on behalf of everyone in our caucus, it is very, very good to see you again. You were always, in our opinion, an excellent Speaker.

It is in that capacity, of course, that you're here. We're engaged in a study on whether or not the Board of Internal Economy should be replaced.

I have one specific question. I'd like to hear your observations on that particular question.

To clarify things, for the last couple of meetings, Mr. Julian has been trying to impress upon people that the board either has in the past or is moving towards more of a vote-centric type of decision-making process. We have heard from Clerk O'Brien and also from IPSA in the United Kingdom that they work on a consensus basis.

My understanding is that the Board of Internal Economy for many years now has worked on a consensus basis. I would like to set the record straight so that we don't have the same type of, quite frankly, misinformation coming from Mr. Julian and the NDP.

Beyond the consensus question, I would ask you an open-ended question. Do you think that Parliament would be better served by scrapping the BOIE and going to an independent, arm's-length body similar to what the U.K. has done?

So there are two questions, one on consensus and the second on observations on whether the BOIE should be replaced by some other form or body.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I can't tell you that I know much about the replacement of the British practice there. I've read only minimal amounts about it, and I didn't know that was the thrust of what I was coming to address tonight. So I'm not an expert on that at all and I won't make much more comment.

I have to say that, in my view, the Board of Internal Economy has done a wonderful job as the governing body of the financial side of the House of Commons. I say that having been a member, obviously, since I was Speaker. I don't think I was on the board before—to the best of my recollection, I don't think I was—so I had no familiarity directly with the way it worked. But certainly watching it function, as chair, for the 10 years or so that I was there, I thought it worked really well.

The strengths were that because the meetings were in camera, you had almost no partisan fights, public ones, in the meeting that you would have had if the meetings had been open. Members didn't bother drawing on partisan differences. They said, "We have to fix problems that arise here between parties or with members and the board", in terms of compliance with the rules that the board issued. And the rules were in the manual, very specific bylaws and all that stuff, that the board passed, so members were expected to comply with those—not just expected, it was demanded. The board officials who did the work reviewing members' claims were very thorough, in my view, in examining those claims and making sure there was no issue or problem in terms of compliance with the rules and bylaws of the board set out in the manual.

Then the claims were paid. Members could appeal to the board if they felt they had been unfairly treated, and did, and we would listen to the arguments or review the letter, at least, the member sent, or whatever, and then look at the decision that had been made and see whether we supported it or not. Generally, there was unanimity in most cases, I think. Consensus was standard at all meetings. There were hardly ever votes while I was chair—maybe twice or three times. There were very, very few. It was almost always a consensus deal, and the decision was made on a whole host of issues.

There was lots of criticism from the media that we weren't having our meetings in public. The minutes were always tabled in the House later. They didn't like that because they were too scanty in terms of detail. But the decisions of the board were in the minutes.

Given the nature of the discussion, on mostly financial issues—the big thing the board is dealing with is money—you wouldn't expect that kind of discussion to take place in public, given the claims or sought-after allowances or exceptions to the rules or whatever that were sought by anybody on any issue that had come up. It wouldn't be something that should be advertised, in my view, in public. It wouldn't be in any corporation, that's for sure, so why would it be here?

In the end, I thought the board functioned really well as a board of directors, if I can call it that, or a governing body for the House, in part because of the rules that applied to it in terms of having its meetings in camera, in terms of the appointments to the board, the people who were working there, and the fact that it was charged with responsibility for, in effect, financial oversight of the House. It did its work, in my view, very effectively.

I don't know why there's a sudden press to change it. I'm kind of surprised at this because there hasn't been a scandal involving House expenditures on anything the way there has been in the other place. I don't mean to dump criticism on the other place, but I think our system has worked really well, and I think our rules have been very precise and quite specific. For that reason, I don't think we've had a problem with members misspending or getting away with something very often. It has hardly ever happened.

● (1910)

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Let me ask you something that has come up before, and that is on the composition of the board itself.

Madam O'Brien had mentioned that the composition of the board currently is that there are equal numbers of government members

and opposition members on it, with the Speaker, of course, who's charged with, as you know, representing all members as the chair.

Has that always been the case in your experience?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lukiwski.

Speaker Fraser, I see you're here. I'm wondering if you can hear us yet.

**Hon. John Fraser (Former Speaker of the House of Commons, As an Individual):** I can, and I'm very pleased to be here.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Hon. John Fraser:** I've been driving all over British Columbia trying to find the place.

**The Chair:** It's nice to get a little tourism in, too, I guess.

**Hon. John Fraser:** Well, I guess that's a good way of putting it.

**The Chair:** Speaker, we're studying the Board of Internal Economy, and we have Speaker Milliken with us too.

We've just started our rounds of questioning, and Mr. Lukiwski has already asked his round.

Do you have any opening statement or any comments you would like to make?

**Hon. John Fraser:** It's not very lengthy, but I have some comments when you're ready for them.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Hon. John Fraser:** And then of course I'll take questions.

I'm in your hands.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I'll let you go ahead and give us your comments, and then we'll include you in the next rounds of questions.

**Hon. John Fraser:** All right.

Is that satisfactory to everybody?

**Some hon. members:** Yes.

**Hon. John Fraser:** You can hear me all right?

**The Chair:** Yes, we can. It's great.

**Hon. John Fraser:** First of all, thank you very much for asking me to appear in front of this august committee. I hope everybody is aware that it has been some years since I was Speaker of the House of Commons, but I've kept a pretty close interest in what is going on in the House of Commons and I am very much intrigued by the motion that has brought this committee together.

I don't want to go back through all the history of the House of Commons and the history of the Speaker's office; I'm not going to try to do that. I've had the advantage of reading most of what Audrey O'Brien gave in testimony and also her abbreviated notes, and I do have the elements of the motion in front of me, which all of you know and I don't need to repeat.

There are a couple of things I would like to say. First of all, things have probably changed quite significantly in many ways since I had the privilege of serving in the House as Speaker, so I do not speak with any intimate sense of what problems the Board of Internal Economy has had to deal with in recent years. But I am very intrigued that there are some who think that the Board of Internal Economy should either cease to exist or be transformed into a commission of some sort to make it more independent and to satisfy those who feel, understandably so, that there ought to be greater transparency in the activities of the Board of Internal Economy.

I have to say that raises some very interesting questions: exactly what form would this new commission take, and who would be included in it? If it were independent and all the members of it were not related in any way to their duties as members of Parliament, what would that do to the sensitivity of such a commission? Who would appoint the commission? Is it the government? Is it the House of Commons? Who makes that decision, and what are the requirements for those who would serve on such a commission?

Some of you may have answers to those questions, and some who have appeared in front of you may have given those answers, but I haven't heard them, for whatever reason. Those are clearly issues that all of you on the committee will have to deal with.

I want to go back some years, because I did ask Audrey O'Brien, when she had research done into the history of the Speakership, if I can use that worn phrase.... I couldn't remember, in all the years I was there, any major problem we had in the operation of the Board of Internal Economy. For the most part, in fact, I don't ever remember a situation in which we had a serious difference of opinion. We always seemed to work things out among us—again to use an overworked term—on a consensual basis.

One of the most important parts of the Board of Internal Economy was made up of members of Parliament. It was made up of both government and opposition members, and of course the Speaker had the duty to chair it.

• (1915)

As far as my memory goes—and I have not been able to go back through the years and look at any minutes, so I don't have exact details in my mind—we seemed to function pretty well, and we didn't seem to come in for very much criticism.

There's another point that I'd like to at least raise for your consideration, and that is, if we're going to have a commission that does what the Board of Internal Economy did or does, what's the role of the Speaker? Is the Speaker part of the new commission? To what degree are the obligations of the Speaker, which is fundamentally, as I'm sure you're all aware, first of all, of course, the administration.... Well, his first jurisdiction, of course, is the House of Commons, the rules and procedures, and order in the House, etc., but as I'm sure you all know, the Speaker's office and those around the Speaker have an enormous administrative responsibility, and also a responsibility for security, in conjunction, of course, with other people.

Those are major responsibilities. I don't know right now whether the notions behind a commission are going to change dramatically the role of the Speaker, especially the two main roles that the Speaker, up until now, has had. The first, of course, is the House of

Commons, and the second is the administration of everything on the Hill.

The last thing I want to say is this. I pay attention to the media and to public comment about the House of Commons, and of course more recently the Senate, which I don't know very much about anyway, and I am deeply distressed at the degree to which so many Canadians seem to think that anyone who goes into public life is, potentially, at least, unworthy of their votes or unworthy of their support.

Now, as I say, I'm speaking about many years ago, but my experience as Speaker was that for the vast majority of members I knew—and it didn't matter which side of the House they were sitting on—most of them cared a great deal about the country, first of all, and most of them were putting a tremendous amount of effort into trying to do the job they got elected to do: looking after their constituents and their problems, and dealing with the issues of legislation and committees and all that sort of thing.

One of the things that a lot of people don't want to face up to is that there's a great variety of ability among the people we elect to the House of Commons. Some have never had an office in their lives, and some of them have never had a secretary or a staff. Some of them, on the other hand, have had very important administrative, entrepreneurial, and academic positions. So you get a considerable difference in basic ability. Some rise to the occasion. Some do the best they can, but they don't become outstanding.

But all of this is part and parcel of the democratic election system we have, and I think I can say that in my experience, both as a member of Parliament and then later as Speaker of the House of Commons, most members of Parliament were pretty aware that their obligation was to the country, to their constituents, to the House, and to the public interest.

Now, I don't know to what degree an appointed commission is going to be able to be sensitive to these things. I can't tell, because we don't know who would be on it, or how many people.

• (1920)

Again I come back to this: would some of the duties of the Speaker on the administrative side be put off to the commission? Would others remain with the Speaker's office? But those are questions that I'm sure all of you on the committee are acutely aware need attention.

I'm not particularly enthusiastic about an appointed, so-called independent commission, but I suppose I could be persuaded.

The last thing I want to say is this. There's an old saying that before you change something, you'd better be awfully sure that you're going to come up with something better. There's another saying that goes with it that says if you're going to change something, identify what it is that is the cause for needing the change. That has to be more than just somebody writing a letter to the editor or some media person with a deadline to meet, knowing that criticism or something dramatic will get more attention than otherwise. I think this has to be kept in mind.

The last thing I want to say is this. Instead of a Board of Internal Economy that meets on its own in camera, I suppose you could have a commission that meets in camera sometimes when it is appropriate and also sometimes meets in committee in private. But what I haven't seen yet in the discussion is whether we are going to have a situation where we have a commission and the members come, and then it's open to the media and questions from the public. Is it going to be a wide open arrangement? If it is, what happens when the members feel that some matters are delicate enough and appropriate enough to be discussed in camera? Are we going to get the same criticisms that we get against the Board of Internal Economy?

Those are thoughts that I have. I don't want to go on too long, but I'd be very pleased to hear what members have to say and try to respond to any questions you might have.

Again, I want to express my appreciation for being invited to come before you, and I apologize for being a bit late.

• (1925)

**The Chair:** We're happy to have you.

**Hon. John Fraser:** It's a big, wild country out here, and my instructions as to how to find this place were, by either my fault or somebody else's fault, not easy. In any event, Stephanie here finally got me on the phone, she brought me in front of you, so here we are, and I'd like to help in any way I can.

**The Chair:** Let's hope that's exactly what you can do.

We're in the middle of our first round of questioning, and we're going to go to Mr. Julian for seven minutes.

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

Thank you very much, Speaker Fraser and Speaker Milliken, for being here today.

I just found out, Speaker Fraser, that you're in Squamish. I'm glad you were able to find the studio, but I'm not sure why you were sent there. It's good to have you both here with us, and thank you very much for your contribution to Parliament and to our country. You have many years of service.

I'm going to go first to questions to Speaker Milliken, and then I'll come back to you, Speaker Fraser.

Speaker Milliken, you spoke of your past history with the BOIE. I'd like you to just tell us the parliament where you had the maximum number of parties around the table, because I think you were Speaker in a period when there was what some people called the pizza Parliament, when there were four or five parties. What was the maximum number of parties you had around the table?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I think it was four.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Four.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Yes, the Bloc, the NDP, the Liberals, and the Conservatives.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Okay.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I think that was the maximum.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** You referenced two or three votes that were held during the period that you were on the BOIE as Speaker.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** You mean in the BOIE?

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Yes.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Did I? Okay.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** That's the note I took. Perhaps I misunderstood.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** It might have been. I can't remember, but there were some, yes.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Do you recall any vote where it was the government members on one side and the opposition members on the other?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** There might have been one.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** There might have been one where the government—

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Where it was an even split like that, yes, there might have been one. I can't remember for sure.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Okay.

Now, as Speaker, you did reference looking for consensus and unanimity. In that kind of situation, even when there are four parties around the table, would you be looking to have some consensus across the aisle, where the government and the opposition, or at least one or two of the opposition parties, are in agreement?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Yes.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Okay.

That comes to the issue of majority vote. I know the government members are a bit defensive on this, but we did learn from Madam O'Brien that there had been a recent move to the government basically having a majority vote around the BOIE.

I'm wondering, with that kind of situation, would you feel—

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** A point of order.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lukiwski, on a point of order.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** That was never said.

I know Peter is trying to defend a position he has, but Madam O'Brien never said there was a move towards majority votes.

Let's keep it clear on the record.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

**An hon. member:** It's not a point of order.

**The Chair:** It isn't, so we'll carry on.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** It's on the record now.

**The Chair:** Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Madam O'Brien said there was a recent vote; it was a majority vote. It is true that I used the word "move".

But my point is, and I'll come back to you, Speaker Milliken, if we have a vote where a majority that is just on the government side establishes policy or a decision, do you see that as a precedent that makes it more difficult to establish consensus later on?

Where you have a situation where a majority imposes or decides, then implicitly there is the fact that it could be used in the future. Would you see that as a negative precedent, or an unfortunate precedent?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** No. Something like that can happen, but there's not a majority on the board. The Speaker is the chair, so there's only a possible equal vote among the parties.

The Speaker may have to cast a deciding vote and decide one way or the other, but I don't remember being put in that position. I may have once, but that's the most I could say about it. As I said, I don't remember for sure.

It was very rare—very, very rare.

• (1930)

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Yes. But as you said earlier, your job as Speaker is to establish a consensus and to try to have that bridging between the majority—

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Try, yes. Sure.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** —and the opposition.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** But normally there wasn't an issue like that with the board. It was almost always agreed one way or the other.

If it happened, it was only once in 10 years. It was just exceedingly rare. It was almost always a consensus or a majority, one way or the other.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Speaker Fraser, I'd like to ask the same question to you.

Can you recall a situation? You, as well, were in a number of different situations as Speaker where there was a vote where the government was on one side and the opposition on the other. That was as opposed to, as you mentioned in your testimony, looking for a consensus and having sensitivity for the opposition and the opposition point of view.

**Hon. John Fraser:** Mr. Julian, unless I were able to go back over all of the minutes over a number of years.... I might find a situation like that, but if there had been situations like that, I think I would have a pretty good memory of it. I can't recall any situation in which the discussion at the Board of Internal Economy became so two-sided, if I can put it that way, that there was need for anything except to try to find a way through it.

I'll say this. There were times, of course, when members on both sides, both the opposition and the government side, might start off a discussion in which they seemed to have one position, and that position would be modified as they heard from each other. Of course, it is also the Speaker's task to try to make that happen, but it also happened, at least in my experience, because members around the table, while they might be able to have quite severe differences of opinion on the floor of the House, seemed to find ways to work things out. That doesn't mean they always started off a discussion in complete agreement, because I think that's asking for too much. But they were all there to do the job that had to be done, and as long as the decision didn't so upset one or two people, no matter what side of the House they were on, they would usually concede, "All right, we can live with this."

There is another problem with this, which I didn't get into in my earlier comments, and that is what do they do when members come along and ask "Well, what exactly did you say in these debates?" The members will later see the minutes or something and see the result of the deliberations. I don't have any particular answer to that.

But it seems to me that people, being normal...there was probably some discussion by members of the Board of Internal Economy with some of their own caucus before they came to meetings, and there may have been some discussion afterwards.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Lamoureux for seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Thank you, Speaker Milliken and Speaker Fraser. It's great to see the two of you here.

I have some experience from the Manitoba perspective. I sat on the Legislative Assembly Management Commission, which operates in a similar fashion to the internal board here in Ottawa. When I reflect and I try to understand why it was that we moved in a certain direction in the Province of Manitoba, I can't help but apply some of that here in Ottawa. For example, Canadians as a whole want to see more transparency. They want to see more accountability. The issue of proactive disclosure seems to be talked about a great deal. When you look at the things the Board of Internal Economy does, are there things we can take out of the Board of Internal Economy that might appease the need to be more transparent and accountable?

I'll give you a specific example. We have a commissioner in the Province of Manitoba. It's the commissioner who sets the pay and the pensions for MLAs. The Canadian public, as a whole, don't believe politicians should set their own pay or determine their pensions. Having that independent commission proves to be of value.

The idea of movement toward more public meetings and not to have in camera meetings, may be an issue. Can we set up a subcommittee that deals with highly personal, in camera type topics that do come up but ultimately have to go back to the full committee in order to ultimately be approved?

Can I get each of your thoughts with regard to answering those types of need? Are there some things that we can kind of hybrid away from the Board of Internal Economy, thereby giving more attention to those critical issues?

Speaker Milliken, do you want to start off?

• (1935)

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** First of all, the rationale for the board meeting in camera is a very sensible one, in that they're dealing with mostly what I would call personal issues of claims for payment or whatever—that's a big thing for the board to deal with—and then policies for dealing with those things as well, because they do the bylaws and regulations that govern the way members submit claims and how they're processed and all that sort of stuff.

That part isn't secret. The bylaws are all made public. They're all there for people to read, if they want to, and to see what rules govern members and the way they can make claims and how they're to be processed—all that sort of stuff. So I don't see that as a big issue. I know the media try to make it such, but it isn't. It has worked, and we've had very few problems with it over the years I've served in Parliament. To my mind, it's worked remarkably well. I'm not counting the Senate; I'm talking about the House, and that part has worked really well. I think it's because the rules are public. Yes, they're passed in private at meetings, but then they're made public, and so are the minutes of the meetings. So that stuff is not secret in that sense. The record of what has gone on is there.

Now, sure, it's not a detailed record of who said what, but it does have the decisions the board made that are made public. And I think that's important. I'm not disagreeing with that aspect of the way the body functions, but I also think that in making decisions and reviewing complaints or reviewing cases that members have asked to be raised because they feel they were unfairly treated...it's reasonable for that part to be done in secret, behind closed doors. Why should the member make public the fact that he's unhappy with a decision that was made in respect of a claim the member advanced? I don't see why that's an issue. The question is whether the claim was correct or not, and the board will make its decision. Those decisions have been, in my view, well made over the years that I was there. I never heard complaints in the time before I was on the board, as chair, from any of the previous ones either. It was something that just didn't happen.

I feel our system works very well, and I think it's important to bear that in mind. If we had people making false claims or there were a lot of claims that were not well regulated because our regulations were weak or not properly enforced, yes, but that hasn't been an issue, and it isn't an issue, in my view, with the House of Commons. That's why I'm a strong defender of the way our current system works and the way it has functioned. I think it's good, and I think it's served the House very well, it has served the members very well, and it has served the public of Canada very well.

Salaries of members are not an issue the board decides; it's a government issue. The budgets are what set these things, and they are introduced by the Minister of Finance. The recent restrictions on budget increases for members for their salaries were done in the budget, as I understand it. That's my recollection. I don't think the board ever made a decision in respect of MPs' pay. They may have affected their budgets. If the Department of Finance, in its budget that the minister gives in the House, cuts the Board of Internal Economy's budget, you can only imagine where the cuts are going to fall. MPs' salaries are dealt with by the Minister of Finance in the budget, not by the Board of Internal Economy.

The board isn't there just to look after members. It's there to look after the interests of the House of Commons. In my view, it's done a remarkably good job of it. And I'm not saying that because I was the chair; I'm just saying the way it worked, the way the members worked around the table, to me was extremely good.

It was quite non-partisan. One party would say, "Our member is asking for additional payment for this or for that, but we don't support it", and the others say, "We don't support it either", and that

was the end of it. That's the way the board works, in my view. It's mostly consensus, and it was very effective for that reason.

● (1940)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker Fraser, I'll give you a chance for a short answer on that. Mr. Lamoureux is just about out of time.

**Hon. John Fraser:** I'll be very short.

Speaker Milliken, I think, got to the nub of the thing. Salaries and benefits are determined by the government in the budget, not by the Board of Internal Economy. That, however, may not transfer over to the question of expenditures on any particular trip or activity the member might be in. That could lead to discussion.

I agree with Speaker Milliken when he says there are some things that are sensitive enough that, in fairness to a member of Parliament, they should not be dealt with in the public domain.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

We'll move on to Mr. MacKenzie for four minutes, please.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Speaker Milliken, whom I know best in this whole thing, it seems to me, having sat here through this, that we have people who have a solution for no problem.

When I heard the IPSA people talk about the issues they had that brought forward the IPSA program—which seems to me to fit very closely with the BOIE, other than that IPSA is an independent body—they were all the same things: they hold their meetings in camera, they have their minutes, and so on. But what we found out is that prior to their making those changes, they had a system whereby any expense claim of under £250, or about \$400, could be made and was automatically paid without any type of receipt.

Would you agree that such a system does not exist here and that our receipts are scrutinized in a manner that is much more comprehensive than that?

I think that explains why they are where they are, and it probably explains the difference in the two systems.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I'm sorry, I don't have enough of the details to answer that question. I don't know whether we demanded receipts or not. I suspect so, but I just don't remember. You'd file a claim, and I don't know what was attached to it; my staff did all that. But I assume they attached receipts or that there was some evidence—a boarding pass or whatever it was. I don't know; I guess they attached that stuff. I'm sorry.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** That's fair enough. But if in fact those receipts are submitted—

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Yes.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** —and if the claims were then somehow made public, does that fit the transparency model that you would expect?



**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Yes, because the amount that members paid out for travel and all of that stuff was made public.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** Yes.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** It still is, as I understand it. There's no question about that.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** My other question would be, when you headed up the BOIE, did you find that MPs were less partisan during in camera meetings than they are in televised meetings like today's?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Absolutely. That's why I think it's important to keep that work in camera; otherwise we'd have very partisan divisions in the board that would be seriously counterproductive.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** Thank you.

Do I have any more time?

**The Chair:** You have about a minute and a half.

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** Speaker Fraser, I wonder if you would answer the same question.

**Hon. John Fraser:** You started off, and I was very taken with this, saying that maybe the proposed solution isn't there because there isn't really a problem. Again, I haven't been around there recently; Speaker Milliken has, and we have a new Speaker as well. But I come back to what I said a few minutes ago, and that is that if you're going to change things, you had better know what the problem is that you're going to change.

You also asked whether members were less partisan in private meetings of the Board of Internal Economy. I can't refer to specific meetings, but over a number of years I am convinced that most of the members, most of the time, when they knew they were not in the public eye, treated each other in a courteous and often helpful way. I certainly do not remember any narrow partisan exchanges in all the years I was there. I think I would have, because as Speaker you're sitting in the middle of it.

What would happen if, for instance, tomorrow the media came in to all of the Board of Internal Economy meetings? I think it's inevitable that somebody, sooner or later, would choose to take the opportunity to make some points, and somebody else would take them on, and you'd have a partisan dispute going on. I think that is much less likely in a closed meeting.

• (1945)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

We'll move to Mr. Christopherson for four minutes.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Speakers, for your attendance today. This is all very helpful.

Let me say, just by way of a little assistance, that IPSA, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, the British system that has been set up—this is from our library analyst—in a nutshell has three main roles:

...it regulates the system of costs and expenses, sets MPs' pay and pensions, and administers and pays MPs' salaries, business costs, staff salaries and expenses. IPSA is fully independent from Parliament but does respond to written questions from MPs, and publishes all Freedom of Information requests.

As some of us would see it, that's the ideal, the gold standard, and the question is whether we feel we're going to go there or not.

I might just also say that, like some others here, I have sat on a Board of Internal Economy—at Queen's Park, but as you know, the rules there are very consistent with ours and it is similar in the way it functions—so I am very familiar with not only what goes on outside but what happens inside BOIE.

Speaker Milliken, I jotted down that you said the BOIE for the most part did a wonderful job, that it functioned really well, that there were no partisan fights, and that it worked very effectively—things such as that. I certainly wouldn't disagree; I think it has served us well.

But that's the whole point: one of the Speaker's most important roles is to protect the rights of members of Parliament. This is about the issues of the rights of the public, and I would contend that we don't have to prove that the BOIE is broken to justify going to a better system.

Yesterday, the Auditor General told us:

In my opinion, governance can be strengthened by having an independent body that would either advise the Board of Internal Economy or be given the responsibility for all matters related to Members' expenses and entitlements. Regardless of the role of such a body, it is important that Canadians are confident that its membership is independent and that the members have been chosen in a non-partisan manner.

And of course our guests from Britain advised us as to the system they had set up and how it works.

Here is my issue. Every party talks about transparency and accountability, but you can't just talk the talk; you have to walk the walk. That's the difficulty with staying where we are right now. The public views this, and rightly so, as part of—to use an expression—"the old boy network", and you can't blame them for feeling that, when it is us deciding on things about us and for us.

That doesn't necessarily mean that there has been anything wrong. For a long time, the notion was that we'd just have a few good chaps go in and do a good, competent job. Well, good chaps sometimes turn out to be not so good, and competency often is not so competent. Yet there is no accountability, because it's all us; it's all in-house.

The issue I would put to Speaker Milliken, because I quoted you, but certainly to Speaker Fraser, if you wish to comment, is...

And Speaker Fraser, you said that you could be convinced. I would put the question to you: do you really think we need to prove that the BOIE is not working and not functioning and is effectively a failed body, in order to justify going to a better system? If we can show that there's a better system that meets the public needs, and we have something to draw from—a standard, which is Britain's, in the Westminster mother ship.... They went through horrible scandals and came up with this model. We're in the process of changing everything, and we have a motion on the floor that says we should look at that model. I'm just asking, do we really have to prove that BOIE is broken before we can justify going to something that meets the current, modern era and public needs of accountability and transparency?

•(1950)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Christopherson. Your time has now expired.

Mr. Richards, you have four minutes.

**Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I sympathize, because that happened to me the other day, so I know how it feels. But unfortunately, it's my opportunity now, and I appreciate that.

I want to go back to Speaker Milliken and some of the comments you were making earlier. You were talking about there having been a number of cases—and I can't remember the number you said, but it wasn't a large number—in which you had to look at a member's expense claim when they were questioning the decision that had been made about their expenses.

How often did that occur? Would it be something that—

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I couldn't tell you. I don't remember. It happened from time to time—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Yes, but—

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** —but how often, I couldn't—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** A few times a year or—

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Yes, a couple of times a year.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Something in that neighbourhood? Maybe a few times a year.

Maybe I'll ask Mr. Fraser if he recalls during his time as well. Can you give us some examples, obviously without giving personal information or people's names, of what type of thing that would have been? Would it generally have been something where they just weren't able to provide documentation, or was it something where there was a rule that was in place and maybe in an instance where the rule itself just didn't make common sense in the situation?

I know I can think of one, and I don't think it went to the Board of Internal Economy for me, where there was a snowstorm. I think it's 100 kilometres to be able to claim a hotel room in your riding and I was 88 kilometres from home and in a terrible snowstorm. I would have been leaving there at 10 p.m. and having to be back there at 7 a.m. the next day in the same community, so I was able to have an exception made. It was actually a cheaper thing to do, the hotel room, than the mileage anyway.

Was it more something like that, where common sense kind of dictated that the rule needed to be bent in that case, or was it lack of documentation? What would it have been?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I suspect it was things like that. I'm sorry, I just don't remember. It was usually something where there was some excessive expenditure or something had been incurred that wasn't allowed under the existing rules and they had been disallowed and they appealed.

Usually we backed the decision that was made by the employee of the board who had reviewed the thing for the reasons that were given in that, but occasionally there might have been an exception. I'm sorry, I just don't remember the cases.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Sure.

Speaker Fraser, basically the same two questions: how often did you see those kinds of things come forward, and can you give us any examples, or maybe just even a broad generalization of what types of things they may have been that would have come before you in terms of members looking at their expenses and questioning the decision that was made by the staff of the board?

**Hon. John Fraser:** It's getting to be a long time ago, but I don't remember that being a big issue at all.

I just wanted to say something to Mr. Christopherson. When I said that there's an old saying that you don't look for a new solution unless you've seen the problem, I don't want him or any of you to think that I don't think there's any room for improvement. I think there could be.

What I've raised is how are you going to do it, and to what degree are you going to change the responsibility of the Speaker and of those members who would have been on the Board of Internal Economy? For instance, if you had an independent committee to check all expenditures of members of Parliament, and that is what they did and nothing else, that might work. But when you get into the whole question of whether or not you think the Board of Internal Economy ought to support the plans of the public service department in its renditions of new buildings or in accommodation adjustment and that sort of thing, you don't need an independent committee to do that.

So there may be some things that an independent commission could do that would meet the very things that Mr. Christopherson was talking about, and that is that the public gets more upset about the misuse of public money than about many other things. If that would solve it, then perhaps the committee on which you're all working could come up with a solution.

My point is that you don't start coming up with a whole new commission to take over everything that has already been done unless you can point at the problem. In fairness to Mr. Christopherson, he did point out a specific problem. I think that might be something that could be done.

•(1955)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you very much, Speaker Fraser.

I have two more people, at least; I'd like to get three. That would finish a round, but let's do it as quickly as we can.

Mr. Bellavance, four minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Fraser, I would like to remind you of your last years as chair of the Board of Internal Economy, from 1993 to 1994. At that time, the Conservative Party and the NDP were not yet recognized. They had two and nine MPs, respectively. They certainly were not on the BOIE. Do you remember the two parties complaining about not being on the BOIE and not being sufficiently informed about what was being discussed there?

I'm going to relate a short anecdote about what we experienced on our side. I had no problems in the first seven years I was an MP because our party was represented on the Board of Internal Economy. But in 2011, when the board looked into a matter involving the Bloc Québécois, I asked to attend the meetings as an observer, but my request was denied.

For the sake of greater representation of all members of the House, when it comes to their own political party or, at the very least, when some files affect them, meaning almost all of them, should space not be made for MPs who are members of a party that is not recognized or who sit as independents?

[English]

**Hon. John Fraser:** First of all, I don't remember the circumstances to which you refer. That doesn't mean they didn't happen.

Your specific question has to do with what happens to those members of a party who don't meet one of the rules in the House of Commons on how many people have to be there before they are recognized as a party. For instance, Elizabeth May is all by herself. That's just an example.

I don't in principle have any particular objection to finding some way to accommodate that situation, but I'm not going to try to give you, this afternoon, the exact way of doing it.

I was very conscious, as Speaker, of the Bloc especially, because there was a good number of you, as you will remember. I know that one of the things that concerned me at the time was that we had to make sure that members of the Bloc got an appropriate amount of time to ask questions and to take part in the discussions in the House.

In principle, that could probably be carried over to the Board of Internal Economy as well.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** When Ms. O'Brien was here, she said that the board was able to adapt to changing needs. Do you remember the main changes that took place in the 10 years you were chair of the Board of Internal Economy, particularly with respect to transparency? What changed the most from your first to your last year as chair of the board?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I don't know that there were many changes. Perhaps more regulations were made public, but I think it was already that way when I started my mandate as Speaker of the House. Perhaps more documents were published, but I don't know if that's true, I don't know the details.

Meeting-related documents were published after the meetings were held. It was the same when Mr. Fraser was chair of the BOIE.

I think that's all. I don't think there were many procedural changes or changes in Board of Internal Economy publications during my term.

• (2000)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Speaker Milliken.

Madame Turmel, four minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask you the same question as my colleague, I'd like to make a comment first.

You spoke at length about minutes, which were public. In your opinion, BOIE minutes are no different than the minutes of most companies, insofar as they do not say much. With regard to transparency, independence and the impression of the public and of journalists, that adds to the current mistrust.

The Auditor General said in his presentation that he was very much in favour of creating an independent body. He felt that such a body would help show that there is some openness and help dispel this mistrust or this impression that as MPs, we are both judge and jury. I would like your opinion on that.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I think it's unbelievable that he suggested something like that. According to his report on our figures and other things like that, everything is completely in order. He doesn't think our activities pose a problem.

Another Auditor General looked into the accounts of the Board of Internal Economy over a number of years. The Auditor General does this review every 10 years or something like that. I don't know all the details. The figures did not pose any problems. They were organized and presented well.

The public does not have a problem with what the House is doing. The press might have raised this issue because it thought that if there were problems elsewhere, there might also be problems in the House of Commons. But there are not, and the Auditor General proved it.

In my opinion, I don't think decisions on the issues reviewed by the Board of Internal Economy need to be made differently. The board has done its job very well, and its decisions are fair and comply with the legislation and its own regulations. MPs do not submit many unacceptable claims, according to the board-adopted regulations. There are currently no complaints about these regulations.

**Ms. Nycole Turmel:** Mr. Milliken, we sort of had the impression that the Auditor General saw his capacity to investigate and conduct audits as fairly limited. Since he is the one saying that, it carries a little more weight than what journalists say.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Yes, but the auditor asked to do audits more than once every few years. There is another auditor who does audits every year, and his decisions are acceptable, too. There was no indication of any problems. So, what is the problem here?

**Ms. Nycole Turmel:** I'm finished.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you. We are finished with that round, and I think we'll stop right there so we can change out.

Speaker Milliken, Speaker Fraser, thank you so much for your help today. I could go on for another hour with the two of you, but we have another witness who needs to come in.

Speaker Fraser, thank you for joining us today on teleconference, and Speaker Milliken, thank you for coming and joining us. It's always great when you come and join us.

We'll suspend for one minute while we change witnesses.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_
- 
- (2005)

**The Chair:** We'll start back up.

Mr. Taylor-Vaisey, thank you for joining us today. Do you have some opening comments? Tell us about your role, and then we'll ask you a bunch of hard questions.

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey (Vice-President, Canadian Association of Journalists):** Thanks. I'm not a former Speaker of the House, and you get me for a whole hour.

**The Chair:** Not everybody can be.

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Nevertheless, thanks to the committee members for inviting the CAJ to express our views.

Briefly, as some background on our organization, we are Canada's largest national professional organization for journalists from all media, representing approximately 600 members across the country. We have two primary roles, one to provide high-quality professional development to our members and the second is public interest advocacy, which I guess is why we are here today.

As you know, we are here to provide our organization's perspective and a working journalist's perspective—I am a working journalist; I work for *Maclean's*—on your study of the Board of Internal Economy.

In my remarks today I really have two themes. The first is parliamentarians' responsibility to be transparent and the second is journalists' responsibility to report in the public interest.

Today I won't provide you with specific recommendations related to the particular composition of any re-imagined Board of Internal Economy. That's not my expertise. But I will emphasize the value of a more transparent board to the public—of course, the public being the citizens who ultimately hold politicians to account.

There are two caveats to my remarks today. The first is that we ought to recognize the steps the board has taken over the years to enhance transparency and improve it. When the Clerk of the House, Audrey O'Brien, testified at this committee earlier this month, she outlined the many steps the board has taken in a good direction: the board's website is more robust than ever; meeting minutes are posted online, and I believe more quickly than they had been before; and members' expenditure reports that are online do outline in some detail how parliamentarians spend their budgets.

The second caveat is that we are sensitive to concerns that matters normally reserved for in camera debate ought to stay behind closed doors. Of course, there are legitimate reasons for in camera sessions, as members of this standing committee or any standing committee know and are well aware of. Neither of those caveats, however, suggest that the board cannot and should not be more open, in our view. We think openness should be the rule, not the exception.

In her testimony, Ms. O'Brien suggested that the benefits of public meetings would be mostly illusory. She said, "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." And she added that meetings conducted with open doors would "drive the actual discussion underground" because parliamentarians would be loath to discuss matters candidly and with less overt partisanship.

We are absolutely understanding of those concerns, but, frankly, we don't think that is sufficient reason to close the doors on the board's meetings. If the tenor of debate around the table changes for the worse and is taken safely underground, as she put it, in our opinion that's a failing of MPs that they need to address among themselves. The public shouldn't be barred from meetings because parliamentarians need closed doors to get things done and to get along.

Ms. O'Brien also said that the committee's deliberations are "of mind-numbing ordinariness", and former law clerk Rob Walsh, testifying at the committee on November 7, said the meetings are "boring as hell". Interesting as that may be as a comment, the entertainment value of board meetings is really of no importance to journalists, nor the broader public. I have no reason to question Ms. O'Brien's or Mr. Walsh's words, but our job is to witness events and speak truth to power, not to take people of influence at their word and eventually read fairly sparse meeting minutes whenever they are posted online.

The public knows precious little of what happens at board meetings. They know nothing at all about when or where the board will meet. They only know that meetings occur "approximately every second week when the House is sitting". Approximation is not precision, which I think the public should expect.

Mr. Walsh made several recommendations to this committee. He suggested that board meetings "be held in public with its agendas made public the day before, subject to the usual limitations for privacy", and further he mused that the board could establish subcommittees that would meet privately and present reports publicly at public meetings. That sounds to us like a step in the right direction.

The committee has asked previous witnesses about the board's treatment of proactive disclosure, namely, whether or not there is enough public disclosure of MP spending. I don't have time during this statement to address that point fully, but I will say that greater and more specific disclosure would help journalists better understand how public money is spent. Not every expensed item, of course, is a matter of public concern, but we'd like the public to make that decision on their own.

In closing, we understand how far the board has come, but anything short of open meetings means the public is effectively cut out of a forum that administers over \$400 million of public money each year, and we support open doors to allow us to scrutinize that administration.

• (2010)

Thank you again for inviting me.

I'm happy to take any questions you have, which as you can probably understand is kind of a bizarre thing for a journalist to say to a room full of politicians.

**The Chair:** And here we turn the tables.

Mr. Lukiwski.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Taylor-Vaisey, for being here.

I'm assuming the reason you're requesting more transparency is because we're talking about taxpayer dollars. You wouldn't be asking for the same level of transparency, say, for a private sector company.

Am I correct in saying that?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Absolutely. Sure.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Okay. I have a couple of questions along that line.

Number one, I will refer to some of Mr. Christopherson's comments when the Speakers were both here. He pointed to IPSA—and I hope I'm not mischaracterizing David's comments—as perhaps a better system. He stated that the public really shouldn't accept, or doesn't accept, MPs governing themselves and setting their own rules when it comes to pay and benefits.

From a transparency standpoint, which is your main concern, IPSA told us that they started having their meetings in public but then quickly went to in camera. That's how they do all their meetings now, and they listed several good reasons for that.

Madam O'Brien and both Speakers Milliken and Fraser said that in camera would be better as well, because there's a more frank, open, and frankly more productive discussion. Your point was that they can still do that in public because if partisanship came into the situation it would be the fault of the MPs.

I think what we're trying to do here is to make sure that taxpayers' dollars are treated respectfully and properly. I'm not sure, given the fact that all decisions are made public, that the rules and bylaws concerning spending of MPs are public, and that all of the decisions, as I said before, are made public, how having meetings made public would enhance the benefit to the public. Given the fact that there could be problems about partisanship, because that's just the environment we're in—shame on us perhaps, but that's the environment we live in—I don't see how transparency and the benefit to the public would be enhanced.

I'd like a comment on that.

Secondly, and on a separate issue, if it's the fact that you're more concerned about transparency because of taxpayers' dollars, would you be advocating for all crown corporations to have all of their meetings in public as well? We're still talking about taxpayers' dollars there.

• (2015)

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Sure.

On the first question, I would return to the notion that openness should be the rule, not the exception. If a meeting quickly goes in camera for legitimate reasons, then a meeting goes in camera for legitimate reasons. If it doesn't come out of the in camera session until the committee decides to adjourn the meeting, then so be it. But I think it should be coming at it from the standard that everyone is allowed in until there's a legitimate reason to remove people who shouldn't be in the room.

On the second question, I'm not sure I have an answer that would give much respect to the question. Off the top of my head I'd be guessing, so I don't know if I can address the crown corporation question.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Again, I go back to how the public's interest would be better served by having meetings in public. As both Speakers stated, as did Madam O'Brien, all of the rules and bylaws governing spending of parliamentarians are already public. The board has to adhere to those rules and bylaws. The decisions made by the board, which govern any requests or claims or any financial information, are published.

Are you suggesting that somehow the public would be better served if the meetings were made public and journalists and others could observe if the results were the same as they would be at an in camera meeting? You were saying that gives them more confidence that everything is on the up and up.

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I think confidence is an issue for sure.

You took the words out of my mouth in your last sentence.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** But here's where I have a problem. When I say “problem”, I don't think there's a problem now with how the BOIE has been operating. It's certainly moving to greater transparency, and I think that's a good thing. I really do.

Madam O'Brien outlined many of the steps they're doing. In other words, rather than lumping a number of categories together and getting a final total, they're breaking it down individually. At least two of the three parties have gone to voluntary disclosure of their MP expenses as well. Third, as you've heard, the BOIE doesn't set salaries or pensions. That's set arbitrarily. They're basically talking about the financial administration of the House—which, as Audrey O'Brien said, can get pretty boring—and MP expenses.

Would your main concern be on getting more transparency in terms of the expenses to members of Parliament, the elected officials, or do you think the public is truly concerned about all of what I would perhaps incorrectly call the minutiae of the financial administration of the House?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I think the answer is both. Whether or not it's the minutiae of the House or whether or not it would be boring as hell, or whether or not it would be mind-numbing, I just think the notion is that the public should, as its starting point, be able to listen to those things or hear those things.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** So you think it's important that the public knows how they got to the decision rather than just the decision, even if all rules and bylaws were....

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Absolutely. As it stands, the public can read the minutes, as sparse as they may be, and see those decisions. You'd think it would be useful if they could hear the deliberations.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Would it be helpful if more detailed...I wouldn't say transcripts of all discussions, but if more detailed minutes were provided? For example, you know as well as I do that you only have so many column inches, and I would find it very difficult to believe that even if the meetings were made public there would be almost a verbatim transcript of all of the discussions that went on. There would be some editorializing, I'm sure. There would be some compactness of reporting. So I'm really not sure we would get to the point where the public would be better informed just by hearing how individuals perhaps got to a consensus, and then the decision, than they are better served now by just seeing what the decision is.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

We'll all have to get better informed during the next round of questioning by Mr. Julian.

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

Thank you, Mr. Taylor-Vaisey, for being here today.

I just wanted to mention the good work of the Canadian Association of Journalists. Recently the Canadian Association of Journalists granted the Code of Silence Award to the Conservative government, and I want to quote association president Hugo Rodrigues, who said that the Harper government was the overwhelming choice of the CAJ's 600 members across the country. He said, "The death grip on information has long frustrated journalists in this country, but it may now be reaching a point where the public at large is not only empathetic, but shares it."

I'm going to ask a series of questions. The first is, do you feel that the public has a greater and greater concern about the secrecy of the current government and, by extension, of course, the secrecy around the Board of Internal Economy decisions?

Secondly, we now have on the other side, on the side of good, the Auditor General, who this week said very clearly that his preference was that there be an independent body "given the responsibility for all matters related to members' expenses and entitlements". He said, "...it is important that Canadians are confident that its membership is independent and that the members have been chosen in a non-partisan manner."

You have two examples, of course. The Code of Silence Award is on one side. On the other side, you have the Auditor General very clearly expressing his preference for an independent body.

Very specifically, then, do you think the public shares that increasing concern around secrecy, whether it's the general government direction or MPs' expenses? And do you not feel it would be important to have independent oversight, like the Auditor General has so clearly stated as his preference?

● (2020)

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I'm not sure I can say something like the public is more concerned now than ever about transparency. I think the public has always been concerned about transparency. There are issues with every government. Right now there are issues this current government is facing that people like me are reporting.

So there's a sense, because people have generally short memories...no offence to human beings, but we sort of do. Right

now the Harper government, in some people's eyes, is an object of concern, and is the worst ever, or something, but I wouldn't feel comfortable confirming that myself.

I think independent oversight is never a bad thing.

Perhaps you could repeat that question.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** The Auditor General said it's important that Canadians are confident that the membership of the oversight body be independent and the members are chosen in a non-partisan manner. He gave two options, but we questioned him, and he said his preference was to have independent oversight. This is a body given responsibility for all matters related to members' expenses and entitlement—so no more self-policing. What would be established is an independent body, the Auditor General having enormous credibility with the public in this regard. I think that's something this committee obviously will have to follow very strictly.

Do you not feel that is the type of approach that needs to be taken for credibility?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I'd rather not comment on whether or not an independent body or independent oversight is more or less appropriate. That's not really my expertise either.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Okay.

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I'm a journalist who doesn't like to take opinions, I guess, but I would say if there is a forum or an approach to that forum that allows for comfortable non-partisanship, if we can call it that, where people are comfortable not being partisan, then that's the kind of thing a journalist would love to see, because it would mean if it leads to an open meeting, we could attend that meeting.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Absolutely.

Can you spell out to us what measures you feel would enhance accessibility to MPs' expenses, so we're establishing that public trust and confidence the Auditor General has very clearly stated needs to happen?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Measures that would make sense to....

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Measures that enhance accessibility to MPs' expenses. We talked about independent oversight, of course, but what about other measures that you think would enhance that accessibility to MPs' expenses?

I'll give you an example. Every one of our members of the NDP caucus has a direct link from our website that people access locally, because that's the website they get in their materials, their community bulletins, ten percenters, neighbourhood bulletins, so they can go on to directly access MPs' expenses. We've been pushing, of course, at a variety of levels to enhance the transparency and accessibility of expenses.

Are there other measures that you think need to be taken?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** The members' expenditure reports currently online I think are useful. Obviously, there is a certain level of detail there that either me writing a story or my neighbour who is curious about their MP can access. I think the more detailed it is, the better.

There's some criticism or concern about disclosing too much—for example, disclosing a pack of gum that's been expensed. That can lead to embarrassing stories that are characterized as “gotcha” journalism. To be fair, I think there are unfair stories that can be written about things that are expensed.

Again, I would repeat my original statement that I think the public is the judge of how much disclosure is too much.

I think the answer to your question is that in an online form, as much disclosure as possible of MPs' expenses is ideal.

• (2025)

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** When we talk about accessibility, so that the public can actually access it... I've been posting my expenses for seven years. Constituents in Burnaby—New Westminster, as in all the 100-odd ridings of the NDP, can go directly on their MP's website and access the expenses. We've been pushing for more transparency, and doing it in a way that we're not comparing apples to oranges or having selective partial disclosure, but having expenses that everyone can access and that people can compare.

From a constituent standpoint, I know that every year as expenses come out, my constituents ask me questions. We're pushing now for quarterly reports, and that's going to start happening early in the new year, which is good. Those are all issues around accessibility that are important.

My question then is, that type of accessibility, going beyond journalists, actually allowing constituents to access those expenses, is fundamentally important, is it not?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Sure it is. Absolutely. Something being easily—

**The Chair:** What's fundamentally important is that we're going to Mr. Lamoureux.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I find it very interesting, the NDP pushing for more transparency and accountability. I hadn't witnessed that first-hand when we asked for the New Democrats to participate in proactive disclosure. I'll continue to hold my breath. Maybe that might be one of the first things on the agenda, whatever that new body might be, because of the hesitation and reluctance of the NDP to get involved in more proactive disclosure.

I do have a few specific questions I would like to ask.

Do you think it would be in the public's best interest if we actually had performance audits conducted on a regular basis? By regular, I mean every three years we would actually have performance audits conducted on MPs and how they're spending the money, done by the Auditor General.

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** What about the idea that we look at the Auditor General looking at ways in which they can provide more detailed audits on how those tax dollars are being spent? Is that something else you would support?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Yes.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** I understand you make reference to the rule versus the exception. There is this other independent body, IPSA, on the other side of the ocean. In your opinion, is there a difference if it's IPSA in camera versus the current system in camera?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I'm not overly familiar with the IPSA system.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** But in principle, if we change the system so that it's not a group of individuals on the Hill going in camera, it's some other group that does its meetings in camera, are they both problematic in your opinion?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I think they are both problematic. If their approach is to go in camera first by default, using basically the same set of rules, then I'm not sure it matters who's behind those doors. The point is that the public is not welcome.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** What about the idea that we virtually put it into law that the Board of Internal Economy has to meet in public, with some possible exceptions—there might be issues related to security or staff responsibilities, but with odd exceptions—and maybe even require unanimous consent of all the members?

How would you respond to that?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** That makes sense. That sounds like what Mr. Walsh was suggesting to the committee: having two subcommittees, I believe it was for finance and for administration. They could then deliberate outside of those doors and come back.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** But what we would be seeing here is that the Board of Internal Economy would be meeting in public. It would always be open to the public to participate. What Mr. Walsh was referring to, and I'm definitely open to the idea with respect to the Board of Internal Economy, is that it meet in public, almost without exception. It would almost be the law of the land that it would be meeting in public.

But then Mr. Walsh brings in a new idea: that we might establish a subcommittee. That subcommittee might deal with those issues it had to deal with—examples might be security or personnel issues—but then would report back to the Board of Internal Economy or whatever that other group might be, and the discussion would continue before it could be ultimately passed or accepted, but it would occur in public.

What do you think of that?

• (2030)

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** That makes sense to me. If you have conversations that are going to be in camera anyway at the subcommittee level, then let it happen. Then to bring those to a public forum, or rather a publicly accessible committee, makes total sense.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** I'm not sure how long you've been a journalist. One issue for me for many years, and I've raised it with Speaker Milliken, is the issue of pay and pensions. There's the expectation or public perception that politicians should not be directly or indirectly setting their pay and pension.

In Manitoba they have established a commission. Do you have any thoughts regarding that issue, or could you provide some thoughts on it?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I'm not sure I can comment on behalf of the CAJ about the direction of pay and subsidies.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** What about providing your personal opinion, if you're comfortable in doing that?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Sure.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Do you feel it is appropriate that money, whether it's the Minister of Finance or the Board of Internal Economy involved, be shuffled between the two of them? Is this something that's appropriate at this level, or should it be done independently—much as occurs in the case of Elections Canada with the boundaries redistribution, for example?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** As my personal opinion, I'm not sure there's a public outcry right now about how politicians set their salaries. Every time a legislative chamber increases salaries, of course, it is a news story for a few days, but I'm not sure there's any public movement to change that system.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** With the idea of proactive disclosure, we're saying that Canadians have a right to know where you're flying from and to, and that you should be listing how much you've paid and your hospitality expenses and so forth, and that we're putting it on the Internet. Is this something that you think all parties should have to do eventually ?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I think it makes total sense to do that. Of course, as I've said, the more detailed the better. The more the public understands exactly how its money is being spent, the better the understanding and the better it is for Parliament.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Should we have to wait until the law or regulation is changed to do that, or do you think we should be able to do it on our own?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I don't think anybody should wait to do that.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Sure.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Butt, you have four minutes.

**Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here tonight.

One of the things we're seized with as a committee is looking at making recommendations. If we do actually recommend to replace the BOIE with something else, do you have a preference? Do you think that whatever might replace it is better or worse if we maintain the membership of elected members of Parliament, rather than independent people from the public who might be appointed by some agency—the Parliament of Canada, or whatever?

Is there a value in having MPs on the Board of Internal Economy? At the end of the day, we as elected members of Parliament are directly responsible for these expenditures and for the way the House of Commons works. Do you have a preference as to whether these be

independent individuals or continue to be elected members of Parliament?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Our concern is less with the composition of the board and more with the way the board deliberates—whether it's in private or in public.

**Mr. Brad Butt:** Is the main concern of journalists and reporters the lack of detail in the expenses? We can all do what Mr. Julian does, which is take last year's report, which the House of Commons has already produced, and upload it on his website. It's not real-time data; it's not what he spent money on last week. It's last year's report.

Are you folks looking for more real-time, direct...? For example, when I flew from Ottawa to Toronto this week, do you want to see the cost of that on a website somewhere in real time? Is that the greater level of transparency that journalists and reporters are looking for? Or are you satisfied with what we're seeing now, which is that the expenses are being reported? There's a time lag, and it could be of a month or two months or even, in the case of the member's annual expenses after they've been done, several months after, for the previous fiscal year. What kind of transparency improvements are you looking for around individual MPs' expenses in real time?

● (2035)

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Real time would be unbelievable. I suspect that would be quite a change to implement.

Having said that, I don't think it's any journalist's expectation... I'm inadvertently speaking on behalf of a lot of people I haven't spoken to specifically about this, but I would suspect that many journalists don't mind the current system whereby there is quarterly reporting, because the point is that it be within a reasonable amount of time that these things are being reported. It's more about the detail of the expense, not the frequency of the reporting.

**Mr. Brad Butt:** My last question is about in camera aspects. You would agree that there are certain items that have to be discussed in camera: a legal matter, a personnel issue, something that is extremely sensitive. As I understand it, and I'm not on the Board of Internal Economy so I don't know this specifically—I've read some of the minutes of the meetings—there are often many issues at these meetings that are very sensitive and that have to be in camera.

I know your line was that it's better to be open, but it sounds to me as though many of the items dealt with at the Board of Internal Economy, regardless of what changes are brought forward, are still going to have to be in camera. They are sensitive personnel matters, and legal issues are involved. It's great to say that you want maximum transparency, and I think we all want to see as much transparency as possible, but there are some fiduciary responsibilities in that “in camera” definition, and the Board of Internal Economy is the one committee of the House of Commons that deals with those very sensitive matters.

You're not suggesting that we throw those wide open or throw caucus meetings open to the media and the press as well. I assume you would respect the fact that some items have to be dealt with and maintained in camera.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Butt, and we hope we get an answer to that at some point.



Mr. Christopherson, you have four minutes, please.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that.

Thank you very much for your attendance today.

I'm going to start with another quote from the Auditor General, from yesterday. He said:

In particular, we noted that members of Parliament hold positions of trust and have responsibilities to their specific constituents and to Canadians in general that are considerable. In my opinion there are three fundamental elements that contribute to the fulfilment of these responsibilities. They are transparency, accountability, and good governance.

I'd just like to paint a picture for you and get your thoughts on whether you think it would be an improvement or not over what we have, and on any other holes in it that you see, or if perchance there are parts of it you like.

Right now, all the work of the BOIE is, for the most part, done in camera. You've acknowledged that most reasonable—if I can use that word—people will acknowledge there are some matters that do need to be in camera. We can articulate what those are: certainly people's medical records, legal circumstances, staff issues, and things like that, which really don't belong in the public domain because those people have rights.

What we're talking about is the potential for an organization, similar to what they've done in Britain, that would take all those issues that relate to MPs' expenses and running our offices and all the areas you're looking for, the line items and everything, and put them in this stand-alone agency.

Now, I've heard you say you really don't have a lot of thought as to who is making the decisions. I find that a little surprising, simply because there is an issue of arm's length. In terms of good governance, there are reasons that arm's-length bodies are created, and we're looking at this as an extension of that. One of the problems is that in BOIE debates, discussions, there can be partisanship. There won't be with people who are chosen from the public and there are criteria and it's a public application. The whole process of hiring these folks, actually, or appointing them is in law, and they actually have the regulations for that.

That would be a stand-alone body. They have no partisan interest. They have a stand-alone mandate and that mandate is to answer in this case to the Canadian people—the British people, in their case—on their monitoring and oversight of MPs' expenses and related matters.

You've acknowledged those in camera things. They started out in public. It's interesting. I think Tom mentioned they did start that way, and then they went in camera, which speaks to the issue that reasonable people will see times that you need to be in camera, and then they issue minutes. So they're in camera, not secret meetings.

However, on the flip side, by taking those things out of BOIE, I would suggest to you that it leaves a lot of other areas that are wide open to be public matters because we're debating them the same way as we debate anything. There are only certain times when you'd need to go in camera—security, and things of that nature—but for the most part, for the operation of the House and the building, there is not a lot of secrecy there. So it would actually, in the model I'm painting for you, provide the BOIE to have more of their meetings

open, and to have a stand-alone agency that's accountable to the people directly and overseeing our wages, expenses, and related matters.

What are your thoughts on that picture?

● (2040)

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Well, if the picture you're painting leads to a meeting that the public can attend, then I like at least that part of the picture.

I'll just make one point of clarification on the composition of the board and my not having a preference, really, on who fills it. I just mean that from the perspective of the CAJ and from the journalist's perspective, transparency isn't at stake in the same kind of way. I won't get too academic, but if you have people behind closed doors, it doesn't matter to me who they are, the issue is that the door is closed. That was my rationale there.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Lukiwski, you're back for four minutes.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Thank you very much.

Should I call you Mr. Taylor-Vaisey? I hate mispronouncing a name, and when you have a last name like mine you get very sensitive.

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I get it. No one has said it wrong, it's amazing. You got it right, yes.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Okay.

Mr. Taylor-Vaisey, I'm going to challenge your profession a little bit here. I can understand completely what you're saying, and if I were in your profession I would probably be asking for the same thing. You're a journalist. You want to know. You want to gather information. You want to print information. You want to broadcast information. But I ask you to take, perhaps, a little self-critical look, because much of the information that is published now, frankly, is simply not reported upon.

Peter is talking with great pride about how he publishes, and has for seven years, all this information. Those are summary financials that are published with expenses for every MP. It's open to the public. It's open to journalists. I haven't seen, outside of one or two stories every second or third year, much concern or examination from journalists.

I gave the example a couple of meetings ago, and I will again—Kevin doesn't like this because I'm going to be picking on my friend, Ralph Goodale. It's quite clear in the financials on the travel expenses. Ralph and I both live in Regina, Saskatchewan. I live in Regina Beach; he's in Regina proper, but we both fly out of Regina to Ottawa and back. We both attend the same number of sessions of caucus. I'm here from Monday through Friday. Ralph is usually here Monday through Friday, but, amazingly, last year his travel expenses were over three times mine. His were about \$122,000 and mine were \$38,000. Do you know something? We never saw a story on that.

If all of this information is here, and if you're suggesting that the public is clamouring for this information—and maybe I'm mischaracterizing your words—why aren't you writing stories about the information you have now?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** As a mini newsroom, this is the funniest-looking newsroom I've ever come across. That's a good question, though.

I don't want to speak for journalists who may have found interest in that story about discussing expenses between two MPs. Maybe it's a worthwhile—

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** But in general. I gave you only one example.

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Sure.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Much of the information is perhaps not as much as you'd like to see. There is information out there now in more detail than there ever was before, but I haven't seen a whole bunch of stories about it.

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I think that's because most of it is not newsworthy. Some of it might be, and that's why it's important for it to be there for the public and for journalists to see. I would never suggest that every airline ticket is going to be a news item.

The answer to your question is simply that there aren't a lot of news stories about expenses, relatively speaking, compared to the amount of information that's out there, because most of it is not extremely newsworthy. If it is newsworthy, it's our judgment in newsrooms to publish it.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** I go back to a point I made earlier. If all of the rules and bylaws are made public, so you know exactly what constraints we as MPs have—what we can and cannot do, in other words—and if the board adheres to those rules and bylaws and if the decisions made are published, why isn't that important then? As you said yourself, a lot of this may not be newsworthy. If it were, you would already know about it. If there were problems like we saw in the U.K., you'd know about it and you'd report it, but there haven't been.

I'm trying to get my head around why it is so important to be able to actually sit in a meeting to hear the discussion between members who reach the same decision that is published right now and that you are not reporting on.

• (2045)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

We will go to Mr. Bellavance for four minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here.

As a former journalist, I can understand this concern about transparency. I can understand it even more now that I belong to a non-recognized party.

As I said earlier to Mr. Milliken, in the first seven years I was an MP, my party was represented on the Board of Internal Economy. I trusted my whip, who reported what he could to us. Not all the discussions were systematically made public, even for party caucuses.

Now I am in exactly your position, even though I have been an MP for nine years. I don't know much about what has happened in the past two years. The Board of Internal Economy brags about transparency, but even the MPs, particularly those whose parties are not recognized or who are independents, are suffering from the lack of transparency. This is especially true for journalists, even though they in some way represent the public. But the money being spent is taxpayers' money, who deserve to have watch dogs—pardon the expression—check what is going on and how the money is being spent. Yes, there is a lack of transparency, internally and externally.

However, although Mr. Milliken said that there were no major changes in his 10 years as Speaker, I have seen a change. More information is available now, online for example, but there is much more on each expenditure.

Would you be satisfied if, rather than indicate a bunch of expenditures and the amount an MP spent on travel, we said what the trip was, and where the MP went and when, for example? All that information is submitted to the auditor anyway. As far as I'm concerned, I don't have a problem with it, but the 307 other MPs should do the same. It shouldn't be up to each individual to decide what information to provide.

What additional information would be useful to you in doing your job?

[*English*]

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I think, if I can use the members' expenditure reports as a guide, it would be more detail about each line item. I wish I had one right in front of me so that we could go line by line and talk about what value there may be to each.

But I would just say more detail. There is more detail there, of course, than there has been in the past, but with more detail breaking down salaries and purchases, we would know what people were buying.

So just greater detail—that's really what it comes down to for us. It gives us a greater sense of a politician's judgment when they're spending public money.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Mr. Lukiwski gave us an example earlier. But if this story about Ralph Goodale had happened in Quebec, it would have certainly been in the newspapers. I'm convinced of it. For us, the media report on details of MP expenditures at least once a year.

Far be it for me to tell you how to do your job, but I would still like to point out that every MP's reality is different. I myself am not one of the biggest spenders in Quebec: out of 75 ridings, I rank about 44th. Having said that, I don't want to judge the others who have higher expenses. Since my riding includes 40 municipalities and covers 3,000 km<sup>2</sup>, I have not one office, but three. So I need employees who drive two hours to get from one constituency office to another to work.

• (2050)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I'm telling you my life story. Interesting, isn't it?

**Some hon. members:** Oh! Oh!

[English]

**The Chair:** Time flies when you're having fun.

Madame Turmel, four minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nycole Turmel:** Thank you.

I'm trying to understand what you expect of the Board of Internal Economy. As you can see, everyone is in favour of transparency. But how we are achieving that transparency is not as clear. There have been some changes at the Board of Internal Economy, and there will be more changes in how our expenses or budgets are posted on the site. That should help.

You also noticed from our discussions that our position has not changed much. The current government does not seem to want an independent board or any real openness within the committee. But that is what you are after: openness and the possibility of knowing what is going on.

There are minutes. The former Speaker, Mr. Milliken, said that the minutes were published, that they were very clear and that that should suffice.

As a journalist, you have to work with BOIE representatives. Do you think you have enough information? If we maintain the status quo, what additional information, be it minutes or BOIE reports, would help you do your job and meet the public's needs?

[English]

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I think—

[Translation]

**Ms. Nycole Turmel:** I'm sorry for interrupting you, but I want to clarify that the status quo is not what we want.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** No, not at all.

**Ms. Nycole Turmel:** I wanted to make that clear. We would like the submissions to be fully independent and open.

[English]

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** As it stands, I think the status quo, if it were to endure.... This is not ruining Canadian democracy. I don't think the status quo has been disastrous. Our opinion is we can improve things. I think that's the answer to the first part of your question.

As to the second part, I'd say that what we'd like to see in the minutes would be similar to what we'd see from a standing committee. We'd like to see as much detail as we can of conversations, where that's possible. It has been raised a few times, the question about there being legitimate times to go in camera. Of course, I would submit to that. But otherwise, as much detail of

conversations as any member of the public can reasonably expect of a standing committee.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nycole Turmel:** MPs are currently trying to post their expenses on the sites. Do you think the information posted there is currently sufficient or do you expect to see the Board of Internal Economy officially post it on the site to look at the difference?

Currently, journalists have to trust that an MP has reported everything, which is not necessarily the case, and that it is being done honestly and correctly. But you have no way of knowing if it's true or not.

I would like to hear what you have to say about that.

[English]

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Sure. Right now, journalists and the public are expected to trust politicians and people of influence, people with power, that everything is going reasonably well, things are handled with care and that everything is above board. In a perfect world, that would be fine, but we don't want to have to trust the word of people who are talking behind closed doors. They may be honest with us, but we don't want to have to trust that.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That's four minutes.

Mr. Richards for four minutes.

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

It has been brought up a couple of times, but I want to go back to something that has been discussed a little bit previously and ask you a couple of direct questions in regard to it.

It has been noted already during the meeting that both our party, the Conservative Party, the government, and the Liberal Party are currently moving toward posting more proactive disclosure—our hospitality, our travel expenses in line-item type status—so there's an ability to see where an MP has travelled, what was spent on that travel, hospitality type of expenses.

I guess I would want to ask you, looking at something like that, would you see that as a move toward greater transparency, and would you see that as a positive step?

• (2055)

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Yes. If political parties compete with each other to be more transparent and post more things online that shed light on their expenses, that's something that I think the public would welcome.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay.

If something like that were to be made mandatory so that all parties would be doing it, we'd have to obviously drag the NDP kind of kicking and screaming toward it. Despite their protestations otherwise, certainly there's no question that actions speak louder than words. They talk a little bit about accountability and transparency over there, but we in our government live that, we embody it. You look at our record and it's a move toward things like the Accountability Act, that kind of move. We're trying to bring them kicking and screaming toward that transparency.

If something like that were to be made mandatory, so that all parties were doing it and it was a mandatory system, would that be something you would see as an improvement, something that would be greater transparency and something that journalists would appreciate?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Yes.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Absolutely. Okay. Well, I appreciate that. Thank you very much for that, and I hope that we can bring them into that—

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** I don't really want to endorse the preamble, but I will confirm the spirit of it—

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I understand. Of course you have to be non-partisan, and of course you wouldn't want to endorse that, but certainly we would have to do that. We'd have to bring them kicking and screaming, and we hope to do that.

**An hon. member:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Well, as I've said, to talk about something is one thing and to show action, like we've done, is another. Now—

**Mr. David Christopherson:** We'll see when the votes come.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I just want to move towards the board minutes—

**An hon. member:** You had your turn.

**The Chair:** Members, to the witness or the chair, but not to each to other.

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

You talked about the board minutes themselves.

Obviously they are now being posted and you are able to see some of the decisions that have been made by the board. As a journalist yourself, have you read those minutes? Are they something that you look at on a regular basis? Have you looked at them once or twice...?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** The Board of Internal Economy minutes?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Have you in fact read them?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Yes, I've read them. I haven't been assigned a great many stories dealing with the Board of Internal Economy myself, so I don't regularly seek them, if that makes sense.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Yes.

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** But I have read them and seen them, back to 2011.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay. Now having done that, when you look at those decisions.... Try to be conservative in your estimate, I guess, but when you look at those decisions and you try to imagine what led to those decisions and the discussion, in trying to picture what may have been in camera types of discussions to arrive at certain decisions, what would you see—

**The Chair:** There are just a couple of seconds to answer—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** —as the percentage of those that would possibly be in camera?

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Offhand, I don't know. We'd have to look over them right now together.... I don't know them that intimately. I'm sorry.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Fair enough.

**The Chair:** Thanks to all of you.

Mr. Taylor-Vaisey, thank you very much for coming today and sharing your thoughts with us. It's been helpful. It's great to have a journalist once in a while who we get to ask questions of.

**Mr. Nick Taylor-Vaisey:** Thank you for having me.

**The Chair:** Committee, we are finished for tonight. We will see all of you at 11 o'clock tomorrow morning in room 253-D.

This meeting stands adjourned to the call of the chair.







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