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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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• (1100)

[English]

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

This is meeting number 40 of the Procedure and House Affairs Committee.

We are here televised and in public, pursuant to the order of reference of Thursday, March 27, 2014, to study the use of House of Commons resources by the official opposition.

Mr. Mulcair, you are here today. We'll give you five minutes for an opening statement. Please, if you would, introduce the guests that you have brought with you today too.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Official Opposition and Leader of the New Democratic Party, NDP): Mr. Chair, that is exactly what I was proposing to do.

First, I would like to introduce Gisèle Dupuis, Director of Operations, Office of the Leader of the Opposition; Raoul Gebert, Chief of Staff of the Leader of the Opposition; and James Duggan, chair of the New Democratic Party's legal committee. They are here with me in the event more specific and technical questions are raised, and the time for this meeting will be better used if they are allowed to answer those kinds of questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have not appeared before a parliamentary committee in a long time. I did so dozens of times when I was minister because parliamentary committees usually have to study government activities.

[English]

I understand that the members of this committee are quite keen to learn how to serve Canadians better and how these best practices are within the rules. The NDP is totally transparent, and we believe in and practice accountability.

I'd like to take this opportunity to contrast our approach with the approach of the Conservatives. For example, Stephen Harper, Maxime Bernier, and Stockwell Day, all refused to appear in front of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security about security breaches caused by the Conservative government. Christian Paradis and Lisa Raitt refused to testify in front of the government operations committee about illegal lobbying activities involving them. Of course, the Prime Minister won't be testifying before this committee concerning the use of the Conservative Party

database in thousands of illegal robocalls during the 2011 election, constituting electoral fraud on a level never seen before in Canada.

Those are the direct findings of a very highly respected federal court judge, Richard Mosley. Of course, we all know the level of respect the Harper government shows our judiciary. I could go on, but it's an interesting contrast in transparency, accountability, and respect for our democratic institutions, and Canadians will be the judge.

I'm here today because in 2011, four and a half million Canadians voted for the NDP and four and a half million Canadians stated there was a need for change and that it was time to do politics differently. Under the leadership of Jack Layton, that's what we ran on and that's what we set out to do because after 30 years of Liberal and Conservative corruption, scandal, and mismanagement, from the Liberal sponsorship scandal to the Prime Minister's chief of staff paying \$90,000 in hush money to silence a sitting senator, Canadians deserve better.

[Translation]

In the wake of the orange wave, the NDP faced the major challenge of hiring and setting up political staff for 58 members in Quebec. The task of hiring and training more than 150 people to serve Quebec was enormous.

That is why, in June 2011, the new NDP members from Quebec decided, at Jack Layton's suggestion, to pool their resources. Our objective was to help them set up their offices and provide local support to members to assist them in their riding duties and, for some, in their roles as members of our shadow cabinet. The ultimate aim was to provide better service to the public and to be more directly involved with and more attentive to citizens. These were all parliamentary duties.

For example, parliamentary employees prepare direct communication products and manage media relations and community relations to support official opposition members.

There was also a genuine need to create a francophone environment so that we could create products in French to provide better support for our Quebec members.

[English]

Our parliamentary staff does parliamentary work. Our party staff does party work. Our parliamentary staff are involved in direct communications, media relations, and stakeholder relations, all functions in support of MPs and the official opposition.

•(1105)

[*Translation*]

That was all put in place following extensive consultations with the House of Commons administration, including its legal services, finance services and the officers of the pay and benefits service. There was so much consultation that pay cheques were delayed until November 2011 when they could be approved.

Hiring for the Montreal region began in August 2011. The hiring process was conducted in accordance with the procedure established at the time under the collective agreement between the New Democratic caucus and Local 232 of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, or CEPU. All members of that bargaining unit perform parliamentary duties only.

Employees who perform non-parliamentary duties belong to Local 225 of the Office and Professional Employees Union, or OPEU.

The respective duties of those bargaining units are very clearly defined and determined. Competition notices are always published according to prescribed periods. Obviously, the points of hire are clearly indicated.

This decentralization of services to Montreal and Quebec City was a major success. That is undoubtedly why we are here today: we were too successful.

Members can rely on constant support whether they are in Ottawa or in their ridings. This enhanced regional capability increased the efficiency of our teams, the scope of our consultations and the reach of our communications.

[*English*]

We also know that while the Conservatives were opening more and more regional ministerial offices—17 as of now, in fact—the NDP had to continue to adapt. As part of our duties as the official opposition, we have to monitor the work of the government on the ground in order to hold it to account. So, as the new—

The Chair: Can you wrap up, please? You're a minute past your time.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Yes, I have exactly a minute left to go.

As the new official opposition, New Democrats made the decision to engage with citizens in every province and territory. We know it's a concept foreign to Conservatives and Liberals, who prefer to talk with lobbyists in Ottawa, but Canadians deserve better. While our opponents are wasting parliamentary resources attacking the NDP, New Democrats are using these resources to reach out to Canadians in their communities, because Canadians want politicians to be more accessible to them in their own communities, where they live, where things happen, and where they can be heard and listened to. That's why we set out to talk to them, consult with them, and listen to them as often and as broadly as possible.

All of these, once again, are clearly parliamentary activities. This is our commitment to Canadians and that is what we set out to do.

I'll skip ahead, because you're impatient to get started and I don't blame you. But I will tell you one thing. This is not the first time the

NDP is innovating the way parliamentary activities are undertaken in order to serve Canadians.

I'll end with this, and it's a quote from a report prepared for the Privy Council Office in 2005:

It's a rare event that an extension to parliament is invented without any design or debate, yet essentially, the introduction of constituency offices to Canada was a spontaneous act that didn't occur until an enterprising MP decided to create one. Credit at the federal level is shared between Ed Broadbent, who opened an office funded in part by the Canadian Autoworkers Union in 1968 and Flora Macdonald, who opened her Kingston office with the aid of a part-time university student in 1973.

We're proud that our effective extension to Parliament has resulted in better services to Canadians. I'll be happy to answer your questions in the unlikely case that you still have some.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mulcair.

Mr. Julian, on a point of order...

[*Translation*]

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

I do indeed have a point of order.

[*English*]

I think you'll agree with me on this. We heard from Richard Denis, the deputy law clerk and parliamentary counsel, who specifically said to the committee a few days ago:

Given these factors, it is our opinion that the Committee should exercise caution in its proceedings in order to avoid unnecessarily compromising the confidentiality normally afforded to Members by the House Administration....

Furthermore, Mr. Denis said:

...we would therefore recommend generally that the material provided by House Administration be retained solely for the use of Committee members and not be released to the public.

As you know, Mr. Chair, this has been raised with you. We've had everything that has been put out partially leaked within minutes of the material being distributed to committee members. This is deplorable, as you know. This is not the way procedure and House affairs—

•(1110)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian. The committee has already seized itself with research on that point. I believe you know that, so I won't take this as a point of order and we'll move on to another question.

Mr. Peter Julian: This is a new point. This was from yesterday.

The Chair: Will you very quickly get to it then?

Mr. Peter Julian: Well, I'm saying that this has happened—

The Chair: Then your committee is still seized with the same thing, and we will be doing our research to determine cause, as we already suggested.

Mr. Woodworth, you have seven minutes, please.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): I have a point of order.

I'll try to be brief, also. I only want to be clear on the scope of this committee, because I read with very great interest the

[*Translation*]

memorandum from Richard Denis, who is Deputy Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel. I wanted to ensure that was consistent with the chair's vision. I was somewhat scared yesterday as I listened in the House to some of your answers, which suggested that the process had been characterized in some way.

In response to a request that you submitted dated May 6 last, Deputy Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel Richard Denis clearly explained, in a memo dated May 9, the difference between the exclusive jurisdiction of the Board of Internal Economy and the powers, as it were, of this committee.

Incidentally, I congratulate your service, which took three days to draft the quite impressive legal opinion that appears in the file.

I will spare what you have probably read, but I will read Mr. Denis's conclusion:

Based on the foregoing, your committee may proceed to review the matters referred to it by the House, being mindful that it does not interfere with or usurp the Board's exclusive jurisdiction under section 52.6 of the *Parliament of Canada Act* to determine the proper use of House of Commons resources provided to Members for the carrying out of their parliamentary functions.

I am raising a point of order because, in response to an enthusiastic question by certain colleagues, you suggested that you would do exactly with what your law clerk told you not to do. Consequently, I would like you to clarify your position somewhat.

I would prefer to have it done now rather than have anyone look back in five months and question the appropriateness of certain conversations, as some people do.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

The order of reference, Thursday, March 27, was from the House of Commons as a whole. Certainly, the reference was sent to this committee to study the use of House of Commons resources by the official opposition. The reference came from the House of Commons. I'm suggesting that the Speaker of the House agrees with what we're doing, so the committee will carry on with the reference from the House on the study of this matter.

Mr. Woodworth, a round of questions, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Good morning, Mr. Mulcair. Welcome and thank you very much for being with us today.

[*English*]

We all know that you prefer questions that are a simple yes or no. I hope you won't mind if I proceed in that fashion today, beginning—

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Not only do I not mind—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: That's not a question, sir—

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: —but I would have been disappointed if it had been otherwise.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: —it's simply a statement.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: We were anticipating it and that's how we prepared, Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I will begin with trying to establish some facts with you, but I would be grateful if you allowed me to ask my questions, beginning with a simple fact.

Your Quebec MPs hired staff sent to work at 4428 Boulevard Saint-Laurent, Montreal.

Yes or no...?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: That's what was indicated in all the documents sent to the House of Commons and discussed with the IT people—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Yes or no is fine, Mr. Mulcair.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: —discussed with the personnel pay and benefits people.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I would appreciate it if you would simply answer my question—

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Every step of the way this was discussed with the people here in the House of Commons—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: A point of order, Mr. Chair—

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: —and that is the address, Mr. Woodworth.

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth has a point of order.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The question was really quite simple and capable of a yes or no answer.

Mr. Mulcair began to run on, I assume with the intention of delaying my next question. That's not the way it works in committee. Mr. Mulcair had his five minutes to make his explanations, self-exculpatory or not. I would be grateful if you would instruct the witness to simply answer the questions and allow me to move on to my next questions.

Mr. Peter Julian: On this same point of order, Mr. Chair...

The Chair: Certainly.

Mr. Peter Julian: Well, having been around here for 10 years and having seen Conservative ministers responding to questions, every single time they ask for some time to elaborate. I think Mr. Woodworth is being just a bit disingenuous if he pretends that's not the practice here. As you know, Mr. Chair, that's how committees function. We allow the witnesses to give the response that they need to give.

•(1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

It's not completely a point of order, but let's, from a cooperation point of view, try to keep questions and answers about the same length and see if we can just get that done that way.

Mr. Woodworth.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I'd like to finish my answer, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask my next question, and that is, Mr. Mulcair—

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I did not get to give a complete answer to Mr. Woodworth—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: —were these staff paid by taxpayer dollars through the House of Commons, yes or no?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Woodworth, your question was whether or not the employees were working on Saint-Laurent.

[*Translation*]

The answer is that they were initially located on Papineau Street, and then they—

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, the question was answered. I would like to move on to my next question—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: No, sir, I am giving you the full answer to your question.

They were initially located on Papineau Street, and then they were located on Saint-Laurent Street. It was all approved at every stage by the House of Commons pay and benefits service, as discussed with the House.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Chair, I didn't ask about approvals—

The Chair: On a point of order, Mr. Woodworth...?

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Yes, Mr. Chair. I did not ask about approvals. I would like to ask my next question, and I don't appreciate the witness preventing me from doing so.

The Chair: I will—

Mr. Peter Julian: On the same point of order, Mr. Chair, if Mr. Woodworth would actually listen to the response that was given by the Leader of the Opposition, he could see that there were actually two parts in the answer to his question. If he does want the answers, he has to listen to them.

The Chair: That's debate, Mr. Julian.

We'll let the questioner ask the questions and the witness answer the questions, and hopefully we'll get this going.

Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mulcair, these staff were paid by taxpayer dollars through the House of Commons, yes or no?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Every step of the way, we were in discussion with pay and benefits of the House of Commons, who sent the BlackBerry numbers for the Montreal phones—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Don't you know whether they were paid by taxpayer dollars, Mr. Mulcair?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: They knew that they were working in Montreal, and of course, it was paid—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you. That's the answer to my question.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: —out of the budgets that are consented to the leader of the official opposition, which, by the way, have been reduced—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Mulcair, did all of these Quebec MPs have a signed lease—

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: —by the Conservatives by 8%—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: —in their name at 4428 Saint-Laurent Boulevard in Montreal?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: —at the same time that the Prime Minister's budgets were being increased by 10%.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Did all of these Quebec MPs have a signed lease in their name at 4428 Saint-Laurent Boulevard, Montreal?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I'm not sure I understand the question.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Did all of these MPs who hired employees to work at 4428 Saint-Laurent Boulevard have a signed lease in their name for that location?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Chair, the answer to that question is in the document I submitted today before the meeting started, as you requested in the House yesterday.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Is that a yes or a no?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: You have the answer in the document I submitted, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I'd like your response today, Mr. Mulcair, if you're willing to answer questions.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: The answer is that it never cost taxpayers a cent to lease that office. It was entirely paid for by the party. Here I have—

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Were there signed leases by the MPs, Mr. Mulcair?

An hon. member: A point of order, Mr. Chair—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Chair, the answer is obvious. It is in the lease that I submitted to you today. My colleague is well aware of the answer to his question. I am prepared to table all the cheques if that can be of help to him. Even if that is not necessary, I am inclined to submit all the cheques the New Democratic Party has signed to prove that not a single cent of taxpayer money was used to lease that office.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: That's not my question, but I think the witness knows that. I'm going to ask—

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth, if I can help clear this just a little....

Before the start of the meeting today, I was shown a copy of the lease in one language, and some other documents in the other official language. Therefore, they cannot be distributed, and that's why Mr. Mulcair is talking about a document delivered today, but the committee is yet to be able to see it.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Gentlemen, in any event, whoever has the base lease, it does not preclude members of Parliament from having subleases. But I'm going to take the witness as saying that members of Parliament did not have signed leases in their names at 4428 Saint-Laurent Boulevard, Montreal.

I'm going to ask my next question.

Mr. Mulcair, you've been quoted as saying that you and your MPs were completely respectful of all the rules while you were sending House of Commons paid staff to 4428 Saint-Laurent Boulevard, Montreal, and you have confirmed that today, too. Yes or no...?

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: That is exactly what we have said from the beginning.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you.

[English]

But did you and your team—

An hon. member: A point of order—

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: We know the rules and we discussed the matter at every stage with the House of Commons people responsible for pay and benefits.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I'd like to ask my next question since the question has been answered—

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: We were in constant contact with the legal service of the House of Commons. Everything was approved by those people and by us. That is why it took some time. According to all those people, we were obeying the rules. Every time an issue arose, it was resolved by discussion. To our knowledge, we complied in every way.

• (1120)

[English]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Mulcair, did you and your team inform yourselves from the rules before you reached the conclusion that you were respecting them all, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Chair, I am the kind of person who checks. We have looked at the entire matter in detail on several occasions in the past few weeks.

I am going to cite one of the most important rules. It is useful to refer to it in response to my colleague's question. I am going to do it in his language so that he misses nothing.

[English]

This is straight from the Members By-Law of the Parliament of Canada Act:

duties and activities that relate to the position of Member, wherever performed and whether or not performed in a partisan manner, namely, participation in activities relating to the proceedings and work of the House of Commons and activities undertaken in representing his or her constituency—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: A point of order, please...?

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth has a point of order.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I did not ask the witness to quote whatever rule he's quoting. It's not the rule I'm interested in and surely I'm entitled to ask questions about what I'm interested in and not be prevented by the witness rambling on about what he wants to explain. He had his five minutes. He has other members here at the table who will give him an opportunity to explain whatever he wants to explain. Surely I'm entitled to ask my questions.

The Chair: You are entitled to ask questions. The answers may be a different thing.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: On the same point of order....

The Chair: Ms. Boivin.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: He's the one who asked if the leader of the official opposition had, with his MPs—

The Chair: I don't need an interpretation of the question.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: So let him answer. That's what he's explaining: what he did.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to ask you about a rule that I'm interested in, Mr. Mulcair, and I'm going to quote it to you from section 4.1 of the Members' Allowances and Services Manual.

Members may share office space with another Member, a member of a provincial legislature or an elected municipal representative.

Are you familiar with that rule, yes or no?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Yes, of course I am.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Do you agree that the plain words of this rule do not authorize members of Parliament to share space with a partisan political party, yes or no?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: No, I don't.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Do you see that referenced in the rule anywhere, Mr. Mulcair?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Yes, I do.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Can you read to me where in section 4.1 you find authorization for a member to share space with a partisan political party?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Chairman, on April 8, 2014, some one and a half months ago, there was a change of rules and I'll read it to you:

...adopting the following provisional amendment to the Members By-law:

Place of work

93.1(1) No employee of a Member or House Officer may have as their regular place of work any space in premises owned, leased or under the effective control of a political party.

Now, what's interesting here is that it comes into force on April 14 and it has the effect of preventing employees or contractors whose salaries are being paid by the House of Commons from working on premises owned or leased by a political party.

The Chair: Mr. Mulcair, I have to stop you.

Mr. Woodworth's time is up.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Oh, darn.

The Chair: I'm going to go to Mr. Julian. Something tells me he may allow you to finish.

Mr. Peter Julian: I certainly will, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Woodworth, I think it's rather rich, and I think—

The Chair: Mr. Julian, I have a point of order from Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, the rules of this committee preclude the clerk from distributing to members of the committee any document that is in one official language only. It is, of course, therefore, very convenient for the New Democrats that the lease was submitted in one language only.

However, it is also the case that I approached the clerk and asked to see it. The rules do not prohibit members from taking a look at documents if they choose to do so. In fact, the constitution clearly states, the Constitution of Canada, that any individual may interact with Parliament in the language of their choice.

Therefore, I don't really care what language the lease is in, whether it's in French or English. I wanted to see it and I would like to be able to see it. So I wonder if you could instruct the clerk to allow me to take a look at that lease in order to determine the information that Mr. Mulcair refuses to share with the committee.

The Chair: I have no problem with you looking at the lease. I just cannot distribute it because our rules are that it must be in both official languages. Without unanimous consent, I can't distribute it.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's fine. I'll go up and take a look. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Carry on, Mr. Julian.

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

I'm going to ask a series of questions. I appreciate Mr. Mulcair's being here. The PROC committee has been trying to get Mr. Harper here on a number of issues that have been raised, and of course, the majority has been refusing that.

I'm actually going to start with where Mr. Woodworth ended up, which is the issue of co-location.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: On a point of order, Mr. Chair...

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I'd just like the member opposite to pronounce my name correctly. It is Woodworth.

●(1125)

Mr. Peter Julian: I apologize.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Otherwise, I will start calling him Mr. Julisian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I've been called worse, Mr. Woodworth.

The Chair: Let's keep it through the chair. I'm having a lot of fun with points of order today, but it sure is dragging out the committee. So let's see if we can get through one line of questions without it.

Mr. Peter Julian: I apologize to Mr. Woodworth.

Now there is an office, actually, that I'm well familiar with in Chilliwack because he was talking about co-location. It's 7388 Vedder Road in Chilliwack. It's a co-location. At that same address, we have Mark Strahl's MP office, paid by taxpayers' money, and the Conservative Party of Canada. It's the same address, same location, a co-location, and obviously the BOIE says that's fine.

So my first in the many questions I have for the official opposition leader is if he is aware of how many Conservative MPs do the same thing, and have that co-location where they have a Conservative Party of Canada office with their riding office.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Julian. I see my guidance on points of order may have gone unnoticed.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Chair, I know you've asked that we be judicious in our use of points of order; however, I do feel there is some misinformation that needs to be corrected here. I'm certainly aware of the Chilliwack office he's referring to. There are, in fact, two separate leases. One is a Conservative Party of Canada lease; one is the member of Parliament's lease. They just happen to be in the same shopping mall.

There's a very clear difference between this and what the NDP is doing, where they're using taxpayer resources in the same office.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Again, it's 7388 Vedder Road, common address, co-location.

I'll move on, though. I'll ask you a number of questions. You probably won't have time in the seven minutes to answer them, but I hope, Mr. Mulcair, you'll answer them in the minutes that follow.

Can you confirm that the NDP is conforming to the new rules the Conservative-dominated BOIE imposed on April 8?

Secondly, what were the barriers between parliamentary staff and non-parliamentary staff? I'm talking about physical barriers, collective agreements, different unions, supervisory barriers? Were there ever any grievances filed by non-parliamentary staff about parliamentary staff doing their work? Did the job descriptions follow the Members By-Law? It's very clear that if a person is doing an individual member's duties or electoral fundraising, those kinds of things, those would not be parliamentary duties.

How much money was paid by the party instead of by taxpayers? How much money was saved by having the party pay the lease? How much have you saved? How much has the official opposition budget actually decreased since 2011, and how much has the PMO budget increased at the same time?

I wanted to have you respond about the expansion of Conservative ministers' regional offices across the country. That budget seems to have substantially expanded, in fact, in many areas where Conservatives have no MPs, such as in Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, and Montreal.

Those are my questions. Please answer them as you can, perhaps in this section or later, and thank you for being here.

The Chair: Mr. Mulcair, do you have a yes or no answer?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Chairman, such a substantive question now deserves a substantive answer now.

With regard to the place of work, there has been a change that came into effect on April 8, 2014. There's a basic principle of statutory interpretation. It's best expressed in French.

[*Translation*]

It states that Parliament does not speak in vain.

[*English*]

When that change was made to say that you could no longer have someone at the regular place of work, the space owned, leased, or under the effective control of a political party, that's because it was not interdicted prior to that. So that's why that change was brought in. It was like trying to tell somebody who is just driving to the cottage for Victoria Day weekend in a 100 kilometre per hour zone that after they got to the cottage, it became a construction zone and the speed limit was reduced to 70, and that even though they had arrived before the speed change was made, somehow they're going to get a ticket.

We respected the rules as they existed, and it was implicit in Mr. Woodworth's question and I would like to get to it. For the space that we're talking about, the lease was 100% assumed by the NDP. I offer again—the cheques are bilingual as far as I can tell—I can certainly help them all, because we've had our services put together a copy of every single cheque. You'll see that the annual rent is approximately \$100,000, every penny of which is assumed by the NDP.

No one questions the fact that our MPs' employees are allowed to travel back and forth. No one questions the fact that the OLO employees are allowed to travel back and forth. That's the very essence of the very first section of the Members By-Law. It says:

duties and activities that relate to the position of Member, wherever performed and whether or not performed in a partisan manner

That's the first article of the rules governing members of Parliament. It continues:

namely, participation in activities relating to the proceedings and work of the House of Commons and activities undertaken in representing his or her constituency or constituents.

It doesn't matter how you're performing it, and it doesn't matter where you're performing it.

To hear the Conservatives tell it, we would have had to have hired that staff here in Ottawa, as the Liberals like to do, and only talk to lobbyists.

We're innovating. We're working across Canada. We're listening to Canadians. Mr. Julian just asked an important question about matching the Conservative move. They're spending millions of dollars for themselves on these ministerial offices across Canada. Our job as the official opposition, as an integral part of our democratic institutions, is to hold that government to account. We can't do that if we're here in Ottawa alone.

No one would question the fact that they're allowed to work in Montreal. So the most interesting aspect of this is that if someone on our communications staff was organizing, as they did this week, a press conference in Montreal for Hoang Mai, our Transport critic, and that person was to help him, according to the Conservatives the best use of taxpayers' money would be to pay the kilometres back and forth to Montreal and keep that person working here in Ottawa.

Since it is allowed for that person doing the press relations to work in Montreal, there is nothing to prevent him from being based in Montreal. There was nothing until April 8, 2014, preventing him from working out of a space paid for by the New Democratic Party of Canada. After April 14, we had to make a change, which we did. We respected all the rules before. We respect all the rules after that change, but there was a change.

The amendment that I just read was a substantial change to the existing rules, and it's a little bit like my cottager who's going to be looking at a change in the speed limit. There's no way you can apply that retroactively.

• (1130)

The Chair: We're out of time on that round.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Oh, darn.

The Chair: I'll go to Mr. Casey for seven minutes.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mulcair, in preparation for the meetings here today, we have been provided with a package of documents. One of those documents is a memorandum from the Clerk of the House of Commons. I'm sure you've had a chance to read it. That memorandum references a meeting that took place on October 13, 2011. The purpose for the meeting was that some NDP employees had indicated their residence to be in Montreal but their place of work to be in Ottawa. At that meeting, the NDP deputy chief of staff was asked directly where these employees worked, and she responded "in Ottawa".

Can you explain why the NDP deputy chief of staff would have misled the House of Commons administration with respect to that?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: That's an interesting question, because it's so comically loaded it's worthy of nothing but contempt.

You are affirming that is the case, whereas if you look at that package, you'll see that on September 22, 2014, Marie-Dominique Sicé wrote to Christian Boileau, the same person who's talking at the House of Commons, and it says this:

Bonjour Christian,

I just took up to the 11th Floor (Suite 11-45) fifty-one (51) Employment Forms from each Quebec NDP MP for staff working in Montreal.

These were the forms that divided up the number of people who were going to be paying the salary for each of the people based in Montreal.

We also have voluminous correspondence non-stop with the IT people in the House of Commons every step of the way. We also have every posting, because we are unionized, and every one of those public postings explains that it's a job in Montreal. We also have every single letter of nomination sent to the House of Commons authorities that either mentions specifically the address in Montreal of the work, or the person's address in Montreal. Every step of the way, the House of Commons, its staff, have been informed.

You are referring to something that someone today is saying happened three years ago. This is not a formal meeting. There are no minutes of this meeting. This is what your interpretation is of a snippet of a conversation or an exchange between two people.

Jess Turk-Browne, to my knowledge, was an exceptionally capable public administrator. She left several years ago to go work to help register women to vote in Pakistan, where she spent more than two years. She's back as far as I know, but I haven't spoken to her since she left for Pakistan. I find it grossly unfair for you to make that affirmation that she somehow broke the law.

• (1135)

Mr. Sean Casey: Thank you.

Let me address a couple of things that you raised in your answer.

You said there were no minutes of the meeting. You are also aware that there is, included in the package in preparation for this meeting, an email from Sophie Hart to Robin Kells, which reads:

Here are the minutes of the meeting between NDP (Jess Turk-Browne), HRS (Christian Boileau) and FS (Nathalie Charpentier)....

So that would address that point that you made, sir.

As for the next point, you referenced an email of September 22 from Marie-Dominique Sicé to Christian. You conveniently, sir, did not reference the response. The response was on October 7. Christian Boileau to Marie-Dominique Sicé, the email that you referenced in your response, sir, says:

In the email below it is indicated that the employees all work in Montreal. On the employment forms we received for the 9 employees, it is indicated they all work in Ottawa. Can you please confirm their work location?

It was that exchange of emails, sir, that gave rise to the October 13th meeting, the October 13th meeting in which Jess Turk-Browne indicated that these employees worked in Ottawa.

So let me come now to the Clerk of the House of Commons. Again in that same memorandum, the Clerk of the House of Commons says:

At no point was the House administration informed that the employees would be located in Montreal or that their work would be carried out in co-location with a political party's offices....

What you just said in your answer, and what Audrey O'Brien just said, cannot both be true. Which is it, sir?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: What I've just said is true. I'm not going to let you impugn the motives of someone who worked for us a few years ago, and Audrey O'Brien is someone who is deserving of the respect of every single person in this House. She's an outstanding public officer, who has served with dignity and deserves all of our respect, and not to be the object of your tricks.

Here's the answer to your question. Every step of the way, we published notices that said the job was in Montreal. They were public. We sent documents to the House administration that either referenced directly the fact that the job was in Montreal, or gave the person's address in Montreal. They had BlackBerry phone numbers that were 514. Their home addresses in Montreal were where their cheques were sent to. We held a press conference to celebrate the opening of the Montreal office. It was carried everywhere from the Montreal *Gazette* to *The Hill Times*. I'm not David Copperfield, I can't make an office disappear. It was open. It was transparent. It was public.

You're referencing something that completely obviates the mass of information that proves conclusively that the NDP was totally open, transparent—

Mr. Sean Casey: Point of order, Mr. Chair....

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: —and sincere in working with the House administration on this issue from day one.

The Chair: Yes, you have a point of order, Mr. Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: The question was fairly straightforward, and now we're into a bit of a soliloquy. There's a lot of information to get through. I would appreciate it if the witness could be directed to restrict his answer to the question, and to follow your guidance with respect to the length of the question and answer.

The Chair: Let's keep trying. The answer should be the same length as the question, but let's try and keep within the right parameters here, folks. Let's see if we can get some information out.

Mr. Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: The chief financial officer, Mark Watters, also seems to have an inconsistent opinion with yours with respect to the House being informed every step of the way. In fact, two months ago he wrote this, pertaining to Ottawa-based staff that was to be sharing amongst a number of Quebec-based MPs, "I do not believe that the NDP set up a Quebec Office." That's two months ago.

How do you square that with your assertion that the House administration was informed every step of the way?

The Chair: Mr. Casey, thank you. Your time is up. The witness can answer if he would like, or we'll move to—

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: We have correspondence that follows on those exchanges in 2011, dozens and dozens of emails back and forth. I can quote them for you from October, 2012 up to January, 2014, direct correspondence with the House of Commons, sent to them with the Montreal addresses with the title the person will be occupying in Montreal.

I believe one part of your confusion comes from the fact that you believe we said they were working in Ottawa. If you look at the forms, it talks about the fact that you either have to say they are being administered out of Ottawa or being administered out of a riding office. They were always administered out of Ottawa. That was also in the notices, that was also in the documents, and it was, indeed, the case that they were being administered out of Ottawa.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mulcair. I'll stop you there.

We'll go on to Mr. Woodworth for four minutes, please.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I must say that in five years of sitting on a committee, I have never seen a witness as evasive as this witness. That said—

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Peter Julian: On a point of order, personal insults are not appropriate.

The Chair: The chair will take care of the rules, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Woodworth, you have four minutes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I am going to continue to try to get answers, so I'll ask you, Mr. Mulcair, do you agree that MPs are not allowed to use free mailing privileges or other House of Commons resources for activities designed in the context of an election to support or oppose a political party, yes or no?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I guess the answer to that is this lovely picture of Stephen Harper boasting strong economic leadership, and this somewhat unflattering picture of me talking about reckless spending and higher taxes.

You see, this is something invented by the Conservatives. That's why we took it, you see, back to the Speaker of the House of Commons when Bob Rae starting using franked envelopes to attack the NDP, because we thought that had been taken care of. It turns out it hadn't been taken care of, and the Speaker ruled, with a minor change to the number that could be sent, that it was absolutely legit.

Now, the NDP sometimes has a reputation for being overly generous in our interpretation to make sure we don't follow this sort of thing, but we've started to say, "You know what? We'll very directly communicate with the Canadian public using the exact same tactics and techniques as the Conservatives and the Liberals" because in my 36 years in government, Mr. Woodworth, I've never seen the governing party get together with its handmaiden in the third party to convene the Leader of the Opposition. But you know what, I'm here, and I'm going to answer all your questions.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you, Mr. Mulcair.

Is it your position that a statement of the following nature may be sent using free mailing privileges of the House of Commons?

[Translation]

I am talking here about this kind of comment: "With an experienced leader like him, our party is in the best position to beat the other parties in the next federal election in 2015. Together we can do more. Join us and we will get the country back on the right track."

[English]

Now, I regard that as election campaigning. Do you think that's suitable House of Commons use of resources?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: From Stephen Harper's mailings—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Yes or no...?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: "Thomas Mulcair and the NDP have very different priorities than those of our Conservative Government. Indeed, in Mr. Mulcair's first year as leader, he showed where his priorities really lie. He continued to support a \$21.5 billion tax on carbon"—which is a bald-faced lie—"a tax that would increase the...".

Look, this is what you do, and that's what we do. We all do it.

Don't...Mr. Woodworth. You're not dignifying yourself.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I didn't hear a reference to the 2015 election in what you just read. Surely it's beyond the pale for a member of Parliament to be enlisting support for the 2015 election through the free mailing privileges of the House of Commons.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: We have more, Mr. Woodworth. Do you want me to start reading John Baird's mail-outs? They're identical.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Mulcair, we have a point of order.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Again I'm quoting from

[Translation]

Richard Denis, Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel,

[English]

who wrote to you on the 9th of May, Mr. Chair, about the scope of this committee on *franchise postale*, and it says quite clearly on page 4:

[Translation]

The postal frank is not a resource that is provided by the House of Commons. Rather its existence is recognized and provided for in section 35 of the *Canada Post Corporation Act*. The nature of the frank dates back to before Confederation; since that time, the frank has been recognized and carried forward through the various Acts that have been enacted to govern Canada Post/Postes Canada. Given that it is a mailing privilege of Members of Parliament, your committee could look at its extent and scope and make recommendations on its purpose and the use to which it may be put by Members. On the other hand, the Board's role regarding the postal frank relates to the "administration of the free mailing privileges" as per paragraph 30(a)...

I believe that all these questions from Mr. Woodworth are inadmissible. If you want to hold a meeting specifically on franking privileges,

[English]

be my guest. I'd love it, because frankly I'm tired of that type of literature from all parties.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll carry on with Mr. Woodworth's questions.

• (1145)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mulcair, you've asserted that you and your representatives disclosed your staffing arrangements to the House of Commons administration, but do you agree with me that not once did you disclose to the House of Commons administration that paid House of Commons staff would be working in a partisan political office, yes or no?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I'm going to read to Mr. Woodworth an exchange of emails from November 22, 2011.

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth, there's not much time left. I hope it's a short section.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: This is from the House of Commons to us:

[*Translation*]

Hi Marie-Dominique,

Here is how the cheques will be distributed for the 8/9 Montreal employees.

...

There follows a list stating "cheque to home" in Montreal, "direct deposit" to a bank in Montreal and so on. It also states the name of an employee who had been terminated. It is signed by Christian Boileau.

The House of Commons knew at every stage that these people were working in Montreal until the change in regulations last month. They were entirely free to work—

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Mulcair—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: —where they wanted, including at an office for which rent was paid by a political party.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mulcair—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: We cannot be much clearer than that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mulcair.

Maybe I need to be clear that when someone's time is up, I'll give you notice that it is, and you will catch my eye and we'll work well together.

We'll move now to Mr. Christopherson for four minutes, please.

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

I think we've sufficiently established that there was no secrecy going on here. Everybody knew, and that last email that says would you arrange this with the employees in Montreal, if somebody is trying to hide something they're doing a really poor job. Having established there was no secret, and that it was known that the office was there, Mr. Mulcair, you mentioned earlier that there were physical, supervisory, and legal barriers in the collective agreement that would separate the functioning of the staff between the parliamentary side and the partisan side.

Would you expand on that for us so we can understand exactly what happened on the ground in that office on a day-to-day basis?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Yes.

The actual lease includes an annex where you can clearly see the three closed offices that were for the three party workers. They had separate spaces closed off, and the rest of the space was shared.

The two collective agreements are quite substantial, as is normally the case. Anyone who has worked in that atmosphere understands that it is a great illustration of the old principle that good fences make good neighbours. In other words, when you have a collective agreement, for one, they know what work is reserved for their bargaining unit, for their section, for their union. There's never been a problem with that.

I checked with the heads of both unions before coming here today, and I asked if we've had grievances. There have been none. That means that these things have been enforced and applied very strictly, that we've followed, every step of the way, the physical separation of the work, the actual separation by job category and function, as prescribed in the collective agreements.

Now, it is worth pointing out—maybe it won't come as a surprise to anyone, because I know no one in the NDP is surprised about it—that we are the only political party in Parliament that is unionized. In other words, we're the only ones who can make this proof, because actually, the whole question here today is whether or not we were performing parliamentary duties. We have to go back every time to section 1 of the Members By-Law. The question is not whether or not they could work in Montreal. That's established in article one. That's set out right away. They can work in Montreal.

The question then becomes, were they allowed to work in a place that was rented and where the rent was paid for by a political party? The answer to that is yes. Up until the month of April 2014, they could do that. You wouldn't have had to bring in that new rule if it wasn't already allowed. That new rule was brought in because it was allowed.

We followed the new rule once it was brought in. Every step of the way, we've been open and transparent with the House of Commons. We've been open and transparent with this committee. We've respected the rules.

I'm very proud of the fact that we're the only unionized shop in Canadian and indeed North American politics. It also gives me the advantage to say that I know that the two have always been separated.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you.

So we've now established that they can work there, that it was no secret, and that the people who were there were performing, as they should, the separation between parliamentary functions and party functions—probably not that much different from what we saw with Mr. Strahl's office and the Conservative Party being at exactly the same address, in the same mall, just a couple of units over.

So my question—

Mr. Blake Richards: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

•(1150)

The Chair: Let's not plough the same ground, Mr. Richards.

On a point of order....

Mr. Blake Richards: We continue to hear this allegation.

An hon. member: It's not an allegation; it's a fact.

Mr. Blake Richards: These are two separate offices, in two separate locations in the same strip mall, with two different leases.

An hon. member: It's a fact.

Mr. Blake Richards: It's very much different from what the NDP is doing with their taxpayer-funded offices.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Julian, when I'm ruling on a point of order, I don't need your help. I actually take great offence to your help.

We'll go back to Mr. Christopherson.

You have about 12 seconds left.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Is there a ruling, though?

The Chair: I told him it was not a point of order, but thank you for your help too.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Okay. Excellent. I missed it; sorry.

Mr. David Christopherson: It's funny that he keeps jumping like that. I wonder why he's so sensitive.

When did the Saskatchewan office open up, Mr. Mulcair?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Of course there is no Saskatchewan office, but there will be a person working for me in Saskatchewan. If we had to rely on the lone Liberal there, not much would get done, and the Conservatives of course take the place for granted. There are issues like the movement of grain, the bumper crop, the inability to get it to market. Being there, on the ground, matching move for move what the government does...because our role as official opposition requires us to do that.

We will be hiring someone in Saskatchewan, but no, there won't be an office.

The Chair: Thank you.

Again, the chair doesn't want to have to yell over, but please, when I say thank you, that probably means bring it to a close there.

We'll go to Mr. Woodworth, please.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mulcair, I'd like to go back to the issue of mailing. For a moment I'll leave aside the question of using taxpayer dollars through free mailing privileges to send out thousands, and hundreds of thousands, of election campaign pieces.

But would you agree with me at least that the NDP and the Liberals and the Conservatives, that no party should be allowed to use House of Commons envelopes to send out election campaign materials relating to the 2015 election?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: There's a great article in *iPolitics* that summarizes the situation. It's by Elizabeth Thompson, dated April

10, 2013. It has to do with what we thought at the time was a misuse by the Liberals and Bob Rae: a direct attack on Craig Scott, our extraordinary member of Parliament from Toronto—Danforth.

We asked the Speaker to rule, and it was brought to the Board of Internal Economy. He made a couple of tweaks with regard to the numbers, but he essentially confirmed to the NDP that this type of very personal attack, partisan attack, by the Liberals against the NDP was indeed allowed.

So I'm sorry, we're not going to roll over, if the others are allowed to use these techniques, and.... The Conservatives invented it. There is a little bit of humour in listening to Mr. Woodworth on this today. We respect the rules.

By the way, I will remind Mr. Woodworth that section 1 of the Members By-Law talks about our "duties and activities...wherever performed and whether or not performed in a partisan manner".

That's the key to our discussion here today, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Mulcair, you're conveniently overlooking the rule that says that it is not a parliamentary function to engage in activities in the context of an election. I believe that there is no authority whatsoever from any ruling that says that one can engage in election activities with the use of House of Commons resources. Do you agree with me about that, yes or no?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Well, that goes back to a recent issue involving Bourassa, when there were allegations that we had sent things out during the writ period.

You know you can't do much more than ask Marc Mayrand to look at it. When he wrote back within 24 hours, he said the NDP didn't send it out during the writ period. We had respected all the rules there as well.

Well, that's the best proof we can offer. The director general of elections of Canada has said that everything that we did respected the rules.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Mulcair, I'm very sorry that you won't at least agree that House of Commons resources should not be used to send election materials regarding the 2015 election. I surely hope that you will put a stop to that with your members, but I'm not too optimistic.

I'd like to go back to the other point. You've produced no statement or evidence or email whatsoever that confirms that you or your party advised the House of Commons that you would be having House of Commons-paid staff working in a partisan political office.

I want to ask you.... Surely you understand the ethical issues that arise and the poor appearance that arises from having House of Commons resources working out of a partisan political office. Do you not understand that?

•(1155)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Well, I also understand that when this change was made on April 8, 2014 it was conclusive proof that it wasn't interdicted prior to that date. So we respected the rules before and the minute this new rule was adopted and this amendment was brought in, we respected that as well.

I'm sure that the member is not suggesting that through his retroactive retrospective reflections we're somehow bound by something that didn't exist at the time.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Mulcair, all you have to do is look at section 4.1 of the Members' Allowances and Services Manual and you will see the rule that requires that members only may pair with other members, provincial members, or local municipal officials. There's nothing there that authorizes paid partisan political party offices.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: There was nothing until April 8, 2014, that interdicted it. That's why the rule was brought in, the new rule. The rule changed. The amendment was brought in and interdicted it, and we've respected the new rule ever since.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mulcair.

You have the next four minutes also, Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

In that case I'd like to move on to the issue of the Saskatchewan job posting and ask you about that. Just let me find my note, Mr. Mulcair.

Do you admit that your job posting for the House of Commons-paid position in Saskatchewan said that this was for the purpose of assisting members of Parliament with outreach to their constituents, yes or no?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I'm sorry, I'm not sure I caught the sense of your question, Mr. Woodworth. Would you like to try again?

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Do you admit that the job posting you put out for a House of Commons-paid position in Saskatchewan stated that the position was to "Assist Members of Parliament with outreach to their constituents", yes or no?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: It was boilerplate, based on provinces where we did have members. It was a mistake and it was corrected right away.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: All right and it was corrected after the media drew it to your attention that, in fact, you have no members in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Well, would that it were possible for us to create members of Parliament based on an ad, but that's not the way it works. So, yes, we did make a mistake—I hate to admit we made a mistake—and we corrected it.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: So, in the future, I take it you are going to commit that you will not try to hire House of Commons-paid staff to assist your MPs with constituents they don't have. Can we get that commitment from you?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: You can have my commitment that we will go into Saskatchewan and we'll be the only political party listening to people, and when we win a majority of seats in Saskatchewan in the next election, it will be thanks to that, Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Now, let's just get it on the record clearly, Mr. Mulcair. You're saying that your representatives told the House of Commons administration that the staff that you were hiring under this scheme would be working in a partisan political office. Is that what you're telling us?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: We're telling you that prior to April 8, 2014, there was nothing that interdicted that. In all of our correspondence—we have dozens and dozens of letters and emails with the House administration—it was made clear that they were working in Montreal. They're allowed to work in Montreal and up until April 2014, they were allowed to work in premises paid for by a political party.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: You're kind of avoiding my question. I'm going to take it that you never told the House—

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: There was nothing wrong with it until April 8, 2014, Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Mulcair, you have lots of time to give yourself supporting explanations. My question was, did you tell the House of Commons staff, that is, administration, that these staffers would be working in a partisan political office, yes or no?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Woodworth, there was nothing interdicting that prior to April 8, 2014.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: All right. So you didn't tell them because you didn't think you needed to, is that what you're saying?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: We didn't tell them because we didn't have to. There was nothing forbidding it. They could work wherever they wanted. On April 8, 2014, the rule changed.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you. You finally answered my question.

In fact, you also told them that they could send paycheques to Montreal, but you never actually told them that these staffers would be working in Montreal, isn't that correct?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: We actually did, and a good example of that is the hiring of David Patry; that's a good recent example from January of this year. It's sent to the House of Commons and it's about him working in Montreal and working with us and working for the party in Montreal. We were clear on that. We were transparent on that. We respected all the rules that existed at the time, but of course you can't respect a rule that has yet to be adopted, Mr. Woodworth. I think that even you realize that.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Of course, I'm just referring you to rules that have been in place for years, Mr. Mulcair.

Apart from that, do you agree—

Am I out of time?

The Chair: You are.

Madam Boivin, you have four minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Chair, I could probably have five minutes. That is what was just allotted to Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Mulcair, thank you for being with us today. I find it absolutely fascinating to see the leader of a party take two hours out of his time to come here. I would have hoped the Minister of Justice would do the same thing for the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, but, in his two appearances, he took advantage of votes that were held on time allocation motions to shorten his appearance. I barely saw him 20 or 25 minutes each time.

That said, Mr. Woodworth's insinuations, those we sense coming from our Liberal colleagues and the comments we have read suggest that there is some confusion. When I say confusion, I mean about the role of party employees at the Montreal office and that of caucus employees and members from Quebec.

I would like to clarify once again how the structure operated, apart from the way it is described the two agreements.

How did you make sure that the work done by one of the groups actually focused on parliamentary issues? Our Liberal and Conservative colleagues are trying to insinuate that irregularities were committed in that regard. What we see in the media is fairly consistent with that.

Mr. Mulcair, I would also like you to take a moment to tell us about the new rule, which was introduced in April. It seems to me I read that it would come into force at the end of this Parliament. You have not had the opportunity to go right to the end. As a lawyer, I thought it was a very smooth move to change the rule along the way. That may seem sensible in cases involving someone that one does not really like too much. However, it has been confirmed that that was not the aim. As they say in the courts, when you want to reach an unreasonable settlement, make sure it points in only one direction. That is the impression I get from this.

I would like you to tell us about all that, particularly about Mr. Woodworth's insinuations. According to them, our employees were doing partisan work, that is to say work for a party, rather than parliamentary work, the work for which they were being paid.

I would like you to comment on the document in question.

• (1200)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Thank you. Your question consists of two parts. I will address them one after the other.

This is important for Parliament. It appears in section 1 of the most important by-law enacted pursuant to the act governing the House of Commons. It is a worthwhile exercise to read that section. I have read it to Mr. Woodworth several times, but that does not mean he has understood it. I will read it to you as well.

In section 1, "parliamentary functions" are defined as follows:

"parliamentary functions" in relation to a Member, means the duties and activities that relate to the position of Member, wherever performed and whether or not performed in a partisan manner, namely, participation in activities relating to the proceedings and work of the House of Commons and activities undertaken in representing his or her constituency or constituents.

Ms. Boivin, you raise a very interesting, even mesmerizing point. We noted that it was the party that paid the rent in Montreal. We know there was nothing preventing those people from working in Montreal, according to what I just read you. We know that those people reported to Ottawa, and that is entirely consistent with the

information that was submitted. We also know that the House administration was aware, at every stage, that these people were working in Montreal. Lastly, we know that Joe Comartin, my colleague and yours, wrote a long letter in December 2011. Silence is consent. Joe has thoroughly established what is happening.

The most intriguing part...

Mr. Chair, I will finish my speech in 30 seconds.

[English]

The Chair: The member doesn't have 30 seconds to finish his round—

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: The most intriguing part is that the new rule will not apply until 2015. Why do they want to abolish it after the election? No one is saying.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Mulcair, thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Woodworth.

You have two four-minute spots in a row.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mulcair, you say you're familiar with the rules, yet you want to ignore 4.1 of the Members' Allowances and Services Manual. Are you familiar with bylaw 61, which says, under "Responsibilities of Member", that:

...a Member may

(a) hire employees for the Member's Parliamentary office or constituency office.

Are you familiar with that, Mr. Mulcair, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Chair, we obeyed the rules at every stage. The House of Commons was aware, at every stage, of the staff we were hiring in Montreal.

• (1205)

[English]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Chair, I'm getting used to the witness not answering my questions, but I'll keep asking them anyway.

Mr. Mulcair, are you familiar with bylaw 1, which defines parliamentary office to mean an office that is located on or near Parliament Hill? Are you familiar with that or not, Mr. Mulcair, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Chair, I have said it on several occasions. It is spelled out, not in a form or a booklet, but in a by-law made under this country's master statute, the Parliament of Canada Act. In accordance with that by-law, we are entitled to set up our staff and to have them work where we want. Until April 8, 2014, there were no regulations prohibiting anyone from working at an office for which rent was paid by a political party. Now that such a rule is in force, we are obeying it as well.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Is it your position then, Mr. Mulcair, that the NDP is not obligated to comply with bylaw 61 of the Members By-Law, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: We have always complied with all regulations, Mr. Chair. That is clearly stated in all the documents I have just put before the committee. I have acted in an open and transparent manner since the start of this exercise today.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Mulcair, since we know that the bylaws define parliamentary office to mean an office located on or near Parliament Hill, can you and I at least agree that 4428 Boulevard Saint-Laurent, Montreal, did not meet the definition of parliamentary office for your MPs?

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: The employees who work in Ottawa have a very real right to go and lend a hand, for example, in the organization of a press conference in Montreal. In that case, mileage should be paid. We make better use of taxpayers' money when we concentrate a portion of our staff where they are required for work purposes, with Ottawa as administrative home base. That has also been clear from day one.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Mulcair, I understand that you want to play by your own rules. I'm only asking you to acknowledge what the existing rules have to say. Can we agree that since 4428 Boulevard Saint-Laurent was not a parliamentary office, it was at least a constituency office for your MPs? Isn't that what was going on?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Chairman, section 1 of the Members By-Law states that "the duties and activities that relate to the position of Member, wherever performed and whether or not performed in a partisan manner" constitute parliamentary functions.

That's the definition we've always respected. Our parliamentary staff only did parliamentary work, and our political staff did political work, and never the twain shall meet. That's the issue before this committee. We've respected that every step of the way.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: So you don't want to tell me whether you think 4428 Boulevard Saint-Laurent, Montreal, was a parliamentary office or a constituency office under the rules. Is that your answer?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Since no one is questioning—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I'm questioning.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: —because section 1 couldn't be clearer on the fact that employees are allowed to work wherever we assign them, the difference is that we're making a better use of taxpayers' money. Instead of paying back and forth in kilometres from Ottawa to Montreal to take care of a press conference in Montreal, we're actually basing a concentration of employees there. There was nothing wrong with it until April 8, 2014. When the rule changed, we respected the changed rule. It's an amendment. It's not a retroactive amendment. It's not a retrospective amendment. It's one that we're following.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Mulcair, you know about bylaw 61(1), which says if members have to hire employees either for their parliamentary office or for their constituency office.... Do you agree with me that is why the employment form that every member signs has a box to check off either for Ottawa office or for constituency office? Do you agree that check-off is trying to enforce bylaw 61, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: We have always indicated, and rightly so, that home base for those employees for administrative purposes was Ottawa. Working at an office for which rent was paid by the party was entirely accepted, acceptable, legitimate and lawful until April 8, 2014.

We obeyed the rules before the rules were changed. We have obeyed the new rules since the rules were changed. Prior to that, there was absolutely nothing preventing us from doing what we did. We were open with the House of Commons employees. We consulted them at every stage of that work, whether it was in setting up those employees or drafting their letters of employment.

I would just take the liberty of saying that the Interpretation Act provides very clearly that—

• (1210)

[English]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I'd like to ask a question, if you'll allow me to.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: —where one thing is permitted, that does not mean that something else is prohibited.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I know you really don't like my questions, Mr. Mulcair, but let me ask you another one.

Are you acknowledging then that your members of Parliament deliberately led the House of Commons administration to believe that these staff were being hired for a parliamentary office and not a constituency office?

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Chair, all the documentation is perfectly clear. It is extraordinarily clear from these documents that we said at every stage that their home base for administrative purposes was, of course, Ottawa. However, they were entirely free to work in an office for which the party paid rent.

Is the member suggesting that employees may not be exempted from that section? That would be entirely contrary to section 1 of the by-law, which, in defining the term "parliamentary functions", provides that those employees may work where they want.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: May I ask another question, Mr. Chair?

Perhaps I should respond. I am not suggesting anything other than Canadians ought to be shocked that House of Commons employees are being sent to work in a partisan political office, and that House of Commons envelopes are being used to send 2015 election appeals.

Surely, it's clear. I agree with you on one point, it is clear. It's clear that a parliamentary office means an office located on or near Parliament Hill. That's a rule that was in place all along.

Surely, Mr. Mulcair, you have to acknowledge that.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I know that the member is going to find this difficult to understand, but rule 4.1 is about using House of Commons' money to rent parliamentary office space. The NDP did not use House of Commons' money. That's what's been established. I will offer again; they haven't accepted the offer. I will give him every single cheque, for every single month, that the office was open. Every penny was paid for by the party. That became a problem in April 2014, and we respected it. It was never House of Commons' money. That's what he doesn't seem to understand.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Mulcair, it was House of Commons' money that paid the people working there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Christopherson, you're up. You have four minutes, please.

Mr. David Christopherson: I like that point. I'd like to come back to that.

We hear the rhetoric. The rhetoric is that House of Commons' money is being used to support partisan activities. The fact of the matter is that no House of Commons... My question to you, Mr. Mulcair, is it accurate that no House of Commons' money was spent to pay the rent for the Montreal office?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: It's so clear from the documents that I have, Mr. Christopherson. I guess that's the reason why the Conservatives don't want to look at them, because it disproves their thesis. I have them here. We've made copies for everyone. They can see that every single penny of every month of rent was paid 100% by the NDP, which was, again, absolutely allowed under the rules until last month. When that rule was changed, and when it was amended, we started following the new rule. There's never been a problem with that at any point.

Mr. David Christopherson: So the office was paid for by the party. The House of Commons staff knew the people were working in Montreal. There was no attempt to hide the fact that the Montreal office was there. In fact, there was a media event to promote the opening of it. We've established that there were clear separations between the functions of people who were on the parliamentary side versus those who were on the partisan side.

I'd be interested to see where the government goes from here, because I don't know what's left. Everything that has been raised has been adequately covered off piece by piece—minus the rhetoric, I grant you. You've removed the rhetoric. You're left with what I just said, which is that there's no House of Commons money involved in the paying of this office; the House of Commons staff knew that our staff were working in Montreal; there was no attempt to hide the fact that this office was there, open, and functioning; and lastly, there is a clear separation between the work being done by those on the parliamentary side and those on the partisan side. We've

established that. It will be interesting to see where else the government wants to go, because so far they're not getting anywhere.

Now, my question is this. To put it in a broader context, Mr. Mulcair, I want to take you back. You mentioned in your opening remarks the reason why you opened up these offices and why you were looking at the Saskatchewan office. I want to put that in the context of a government that is opening up ministerial offices all across the country—17, I believe. So I would like you to speak to that objective you had in light of what the government was doing—with 100% taxpayer money, by the way. I'm not saying that's partisan work, but it's a presence and they're there.

Then I'd also like to put it in the context of what your budget is, as the leader of the official opposition, and what the budget of the Prime Minister's Office is, and what the increases have been to your budget versus the increases to the cabinet budget the Prime Minister has access to.

I wonder if you would respond, Mr. Mulcair.

• (1215)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Thank you, Mr. Christopherson.

As you know, one of the primary institutional roles of Her Majesty's loyal opposition is to hold the government to account. Of course the fact that the government has been adding these offices at a rapid pace has made our job more difficult. We have to hold them to account. That also means following them at ground level.

It's interesting to note that from 2011-12, when the election took place, to fiscal 2012-13—so in one fiscal year—the Prime Minister's Office has increased its own budget by 7.4%. This is completely different. This is exclusive of the millions of dollars they're spending on these other offices, whereas—

The Chair: Mr. Mulcair.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Yes, I'm just going to get one number, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The time is up.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I'm going to get one number and—

The Chair: In the next answer, I'm sure you might be able to do that.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: That's fine.

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm really surprised that the NDP members haven't been giving their leader more opportunity to answer questions, but I'm going to give him a few more.

First of all, Mr. Mulcair, I understand that in fact the lease at 4428 Saint-Laurent Boulevard, Montreal, is in the name of NDP caucus services. Will you at least confirm that much with a yes or no?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Yes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you. That's the first one. Thank you.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: It was signed by Nicolas-Dominic Audet, who was the first person hired, and it shows—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I knew it couldn't last.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair:—on his hiring form here in the House of Commons that his address for his work is in Montreal. He was the first shared employee.

The Chair: Let's try to work a little bit on answering the question.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Sure. We almost got there.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: You told me I was going to get a chance to answer, but I'll have to wait for the next one.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Mulcair, NDP caucus services is funded by taxpayers through the House of Commons.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Absolutely true.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you very much. Yet, although the lease is in the name of an NDP caucus services funded by taxpayers, it has the NDP partisan symbol on the door, not the House of Commons, correct?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Absolutely true.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Now, do you think there might be something a little wrong with the appearance of the House of Commons funding an office that has a partisan label on the door, rather than a House of Commons label?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: That would be completely the case, Mr. Woodworth, were it not for one fact that gets in the way of your narrative: the fact that every single month of rent has in fact been paid for by the NDP itself.

When we looked at this at the beginning, we said that there was never going to be a debate or discussion about who was paying for this. The party said we were going to pick up the tab and there would never be a discussion about this. I guess we underestimated the extent to which you are capable of making something out of nothing. There's not one dollar of taxpayers' money that has ever gone towards that office.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I'm going to go back to the rule that you conveniently want to ignore and I'm going to read it out loud again for you:

Members may share office space with another Member, a member of a provincial legislature or an elected municipal representative.

Now you're a lawyer. You know that rules of interpretation say that when a rule has a list that it's exhaustive and there's no indication of anything else being allowed. Don't you agree with that?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Well, the rule that you are trying to refer to is usually called *ejusdem generis*, but in fact the rule you should be trying to use is *expressio unius est exclusio alterius*.

• (1220)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: That, as a matter of fact, is exactly the rule that I'm referring to.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: That rule would have you understand that when you include something, you're excluding others.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Exactly.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: When you come up with a new rule on April 8, 2014, that says as of April 8, 2014, you can no longer do this, that means that prior to April 8, 2014, you could do this.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Not at all, Mr. Mulcair—

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: By the way there's an excellent work entitled *Bibliographie sur la rédaction et l'interprétation des textes législatifs*, 375 pages, published in 1979 by the Éditeur officiel du Québec. I am the author of it and I'll be glad to give you a signed copy.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Everybody in this room, Mr. Mulcair, knows that the April rule was designed to simply stop you from violating the previous rules.

To use your own words *expressio unius* means that when we say you can—

Mr. Peter Julian: Point of order...

Mr. Stephen Woodworth:—partner and share space with a member of Parliament, a member of provincial legislature, a municipal officer, that means nobody else, and especially not a partisan political office. Don't you agree, yes or no?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: If only you knew anything about statutory interpretation and the interpretation of documents...

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I know quite a bit, Mr. Mulcair.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Here you go.

A voice: We're about to find out.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: April 8, 2014, the following amendment to the Members By-Law...

As of April 8, 2014:

93.1 (1) No employee of a Member or House Officer may have as their regular place of work any space in premises owned, leased or under the effective control of a political party.

What that means, Mr. Woodworth, is that up until April 7, 2014, there was nothing wrong with it. That's what that means, Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Well, Mr. Mulcair, that's only so if you ignore the rule that existed before that date, which you seem to be intent on doing.

So let me ask you from the standpoint of a non-lawyer, an ordinary Canadian, do you really not perceive the ethical difficulties with sending House of Commons staff to work in an office that is leased by, run by, labelled by a partisan political office? Do you not understand the ethical issue that this rule 4.1 that was in existence in 2011 was designed to prevent?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: The amendment that I referred to earlier, Mr. Chairman, came into force on April 14, 2014. The member would of course be right if on April 15, 2014, we still had that staff in an office paid for by the NDP. We did not. They now work out of my riding office.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: So, Mr. Mulcair, you are in fact insisting that it's perfectly fine for House of Commons staff to work in a partisan political office. That's okay with you, is that your evidence today?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: You have to go back to the definition of parliamentary function. That's what this debate is supposed to be about: "duties and activities that relate to the position of Member, wherever performed". So going back to the rules of interpretation that we both seem to enjoy, "wherever performed" is not limitative. It is all-inclusive, "wherever performed" including in an office in another city, because nobody is suggesting, at least I haven't heard it yet, that we're not allowed to take employees, pay their kilometres, and have them work somewhere else because "wherever performed" means "wherever performed". That means there was nothing wrong with having our staff working in an office that was paid for by somebody else. We never used a penny of taxpayers' money for that office.

What we did do was make the party pay every single penny of every month of rent and when it became impossible for us to do that after April 14, you know what? We respected the new rules, which is what we've done every step of the way.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I certainly regret the fact that you see nothing wrong with House of Commons employees who should be fulfilling parliamentary functions being housed in an office that is labelled with a partisan political label, and by the way, in which the telephones are answered with the message, "would you like to give a donation to the NDP?" and so on and so forth.

Be that as it may, Mr. Mulcair, don't you think that a member should not—

The Chair: I'm going to have to stop you there.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I'm out of time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Julian, you have seven minutes, please.

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

I feel almost sorry for Mr. Woodworth, but—

The Chair: Question the witness.

Mr. Scott Reid: Point of order, Mr. Chair...

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I know this is Mr. Julian's time, of course. It's just this.

Mr. Mulcair has referred to all of the cheques since the lease began and he indicated that he would be willing to offer these to the committee if they were asked for, which left me with the thought that he might be under the misapprehension that if we don't ask for them they won't be submitted. Just in case that's the case, do you have them there?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you very much. I'll take a look at those.

The Chair: Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thanks, Mr. Chair, yet another answer has been given.

I feel sorry for Mr. Woodworth. He started off by talking about co-location until it turns out that their Conservative members are doing the co-location actually with taxpayer paid offices. He talked about

partisan mailing until the Leader of the Opposition raised the issue of the incredibly partisan mailings the Conservatives and Liberals do. He also raised the members' services manual without mentioning—and I'll reference this to the leader of the official opposition—that they had to impose the new Members By-Law 93.1, which comes from the decision on April 8.

To not mention that I think is disingenuous to say the least, Mr. Woodworth. What you're saying is that you changed the Members By-Law, and it shouldn't have happened.

• (1225)

The Chair: Mr. Julian, perhaps I'm invisible again to you.

Mr. Peter Julian: No, never.

The Chair: When I go to speak then you say, "Yes, Mr. Chair, how can I help you?"

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, Mr. Chair, how can I help you?

The Chair: Please, you're questioning the witnesses, not the members of the other side.

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

The other point I wanted to note for my colleague, the member of the official opposition, was that if Mr. Woodworth had actually read through all of the material—because he referenced the House administration—he would have seen all of the job contracts.

[*Translation*]

For example, there is "Caucus Services for Quebec". That was submitted to the House administration.

Further on, it states:

Media Officer
NDP Caucus Services for Quebec
Montreal, Quebec

And further on:

Press Secretary
NDP Caucus Services of Quebec
Montreal, Quebec

Frankly, if the member had reviewed all the documentation, he would already have found the answers to his questions without wasting the committee's time.

Now I would like to put some questions to my colleague, the leader of the official opposition.

He has already responded with regard to barriers. That was important for him, as is the issue of grievances.

Unless I am mistaken, cuts have been made to the budget of the Leader of the Opposition since 2011. That is a fact that my Conservative colleagues did not mention. Mr. Muclair, I would like you to state the exact percentage that has been cut. I would also like you to compare that reduction with the enormous increase in the budget of the Office of the Prime Minister and particularly the increase in the number of ministerial premises or offices across the country, both in the regions where the Conservatives have no elected members and in those where they have several.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is important to recall that there is currently a very big gap between the budget of the leader of the official opposition and that of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister's budget is approximately 300% larger.

To assist you in understanding how those budgets have evolved, I should say that the government is using its majority to strangle the budget of the Leader of the Opposition. The opposition budget has been cut by 9.8% from 2011-2012 to 2014-2015, whereas, in a single year, from 2011-2012 to 2012-2013, the government once again used its majority to increase the budget of the Office of the Prime Minister by 7.4%. It should be noted that the government has opened several new regional offices for its ministers during the same period. That has cost a total of several millions of dollars. As you so well said, that was often in regions where the Conservatives had virtually no—

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Mulcair, I'm going to stop you there. Our study is on a reference from the House on the spending for political purposes. You're talking about government spending and you're going a little far afield of where we are today.

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

The Chair: I thought it might get there, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair.

It was my question and it is absolutely relevant. We've had, I would say, some pretty going-over-the-borderline comments from Conservative members. This is an honest question. Overall, how much has the budget from the official opposition actually gone down? How much has he saved, while the government has been spending millions and millions of dollars expanding their network across the country? It's a perfectly legitimate question.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

I didn't interrupt until we started talking about government offices. Government spending is not the purpose of this committee today.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We'll certainly have the estimates before us in some point of order, and we'll do that. But right now, let's see if we can keep it on the reference that we're here on today.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: It is nevertheless relevant to recall one fundamentally important point, Mr. Chair. While the government is cutting our budgets, it is opening ministerial offices across Canada to do partisan work. That is relevant to this study, since the essential purpose of today's discussion is to determine and understand the definition of parliamentary functions in the context of what has been done.

I must also say I find it highly unusual that, being unable to prove, after an hour and a half of explanations, that there has been any problem whatever, Mr. Woodworth has stepped forward as a witness on the matter of telephone numbers and office responses. What he said is utterly false. It is a fabrication on his part. We have rigorously respected the separation between parliamentary and party duties.

•(1230)

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

[Translation]

I would like to go back to the Members By-Law.

Mr. Woodworth thought he had something there. What happened is that the Conservatives used their majority on the BOIE to change the rules. They have a majority and they use it. The process changed. There used to be a consensus on the BOIE, whereas now the majority decides, regardless of what is just and fair for everyone. The government, which has a majority, changed the administrative rules. The question should have been whether the leader of the official opposition was obeying the new rules, and he has already answered that. The fact that the Conservatives had to make up a new rule so they could claim the rules had somehow been violated already puts an end to that kind of question.

I am going to ask the leader of the official opposition one final question.

All kinds of other attacks have been made against agents of Parliament. Do you think the government should make better use of resources and try to meet the needs of the Canadian population rather than continue this kind of investigation?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: That would have been more interesting and instructive, but I will nevertheless take the liberty, Mr. Chair—

[English]

The Chair: You have five seconds.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: What did you just say, Mr. Chair? I did not understand you.

[English]

The Chair: I said you had five seconds. By the time Mr. Julian had asked his lengthy question, he had left you no—

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: In one of these famous ministerial offices, Saulie Zajdel, of sad memory, now facing criminal charges, was put to work. He was a defeated Conservative candidate, and these guys want to talk to us about partisans?

The Chair: We'll see what the next questioning does.

Mr. LeBlanc, please, you have seven minutes.

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am going to ask a brief question in French, and my colleague from Charlottetown, will follow with more questions.

Mr. Mulcair, when Gilles Duceppe and the Bloc Québécois were accused of using public funds for partisan purposes, your member and house leader at the time, Mr. Comartin, said their people were not paid out of parliamentary funds if they did work for the party. He thought that was beyond argument; there was no doubt about it. He said he did not understand how Mr. Duceppe thought he could clear himself and that the House expected to be able to sanction him and the party to repay the money. Those are the comments that were made by your parliamentary leader at the time, Mr. Comartin.

Mr. Mulcair, during those same weeks, the NDP, with assistants paid by taxpayers, was arranging to lease an office in Montreal. You say it was ultimately paid for by the NDP, and we understand that. However, parliamentary employees at that office were organizing electoral training sessions, for example.

My question is very simple: do you still agree with Mr. Comartin that that represents an inappropriate use of taxpayers' money and that taxpayers should be reimbursed?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: The claim that I said that was ultimately paid for is false. I thought you were a lawyer, but perhaps I was mistaken. There is proof. Cheques here show that was paid for by the party. That is not a matter of opinion; it is a fact. Our parliamentary employees do parliamentary work and party employees do party work. They report to different people. We had organizers who worked there, and they belonged to another local of another union.

The clear and precise answer to your question is as follows. We informed the House from the outset that people would be going to work in Montreal. We were very clear. They had a right to do so. The act says so in any case. Even though the documents prove it, there are not even any grounds for discussion as to whether they had a right to work in Montreal. The question instead is whether they did parliamentary work. The answer is yes. We are the only ones who can prove that since there were two different unions and two different job descriptions.

•(1235)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Mulcair, with all due respect, I must say that my question concerned Mr. Comartin's comments. However, we have very little time, and my colleague from Charlottetown would like to speak as well.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I will nevertheless answer the question about Joe Comartin because it is important.

What happened—

[English]

Mr. Sean Casey: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mulcair, was David Patry paid through parliamentary resources in 2012?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: David Patry was paid with parliamentary resources, yes. He was hired, I think it was in 2012.

Mr. Sean Casey: Would it be acceptable for him to put out a press release reporting NDP party memberships using parliamentary resources?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I think that we all do the same sort of thing. We boast about our *bons coups* and our *mauvais coups*, and some of that work involves, as it says right here in the statute—it

says and it applies to you and it applies to us—that we're allowed to work wherever we want, whether that work is partisan in nature or not. That is the definition in the very first section of the most important regulation under the House of Commons act, and there's no problem with that.

Mr. Sean Casey: So you're comfortable with an employee being paid by the taxpayer sending out a press release with respect to NDP party membership numbers.

Do you also find it acceptable that Mr. Patry wrote a letter to the editor in Sherbrooke using his parliamentary title that was strictly related to the NDP leadership race?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I'm unaware of that and I don't know that anyone did that, so you're making that affirmation and I don't know about it.

Mr. Sean Casey: Would you like a copy?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Sure.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Mulcair, can you confirm that several NDP riding associations in Quebec publicly list the Montreal satellite office as their address?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I'm sorry, I was trying to read the document you just gave me, which you were trying to reference and that I hadn't had occasion to see. It's just a simple explanation of the fact that 59,000 New Democrats across the country took part in the election of a new leader, including 4,600 here in Toronto, blah, blah, blah, strengthened by the election of the new leader, New Democrats, blah, blah, blah.

That's the type of work that you do, we do, everybody does. I don't see what the big deal is, but anyway keep going. What's your next question?

Mr. Sean Casey: Can you confirm that several NDP riding associations in Quebec publicly list the Montreal office as their address?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I wouldn't be surprised. There are people working there who are from the party and it's an office paid for by the party. Sometimes, when you don't have a fully set up and structured riding association yet, you give the party address; no big deal there.

Charles Bussi eres is the *agent financier*. He is in the other bargaining unit. He does work that is quite different. There's not the slightest problem with that. Sorry to destroy your Perry Mason moment, Mr. Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Mulcair, you're a recent participant to this shared employee program, just as a couple of months ago. When you decided to participate, you would have signed an employment form on which you would have checked a box as to whether the employee was working in the Ottawa office or the constituency office. Is that right?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I haven't got the document in front of me, so I won't be able to respond.

Mr. Sean Casey: You've seen the documents. All of the employees who are in the Montreal satellite office and paid for through parliamentary resources would have had a form signed by their employer, indicating that they were either in the Ottawa office or in the constituency office.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: One of the reasons, even though this was set up for the 58 new MPs, and I wasn't one of them.... I already had a full contingent of staff. One of the reasons that I am signing them now and taking them on is for the reason I gave before.

Mr. Sean Casey: Is there anything unclear about the form in terms of being in the Ottawa office or the constituency office?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: As I've said since the beginning of our discussion today, what we call *le port d'attache*, pothere are only two options that are offered on the current form. As I referenced earlier, this is a much better way of using taxpayers' resources. We're grouping people in Montreal. It was legal, completely within the rules until April 8, 2014. The rules have changed as of April 14, 2014, and as of April 15, 2014, we're following the new rules the same way we followed the old rules.

• (1240)

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Mulcair, I'm from Prince Edward Island, and we're very familiar with the “there was something wrong with the forms” defence. It didn't work out very well for the last guy who did it.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. Casey, your time is complete. Thank you.

Mr. Woodworth, please, you have four minutes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mulcair, is or was Daniel Quinn one of the House of Commons-paid staff on Saint-Laurent Boulevard?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: No, Dan Quinn is a party worker.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: All right. So you're aware, of course, that he has advertised a big recruiting day at that office in Quebec. Correct?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I haven't seen it. But as I've mentioned many times before, it's an office paid for 100% by the party.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: So there are partisan activities that are occurring all the time at that office, correct?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: No—very rare.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I see, but certainly partisan recruiting days, correct?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: If you have that, and that's the case, then.... As I've said since the beginning, we've been absolutely clear and transparent on this. It's an office paid for 100% by the party, so of course there are party activities that take place there, with the party staff. We've been clear about that since the beginning.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: In fact, it's used as the address of a partisan political riding association for Pierrefonds—Dollard, correct?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: We just went over that. If you want to have the same answer and eat up some of your own time.... But I think the answer couldn't have been clearer to your colleague who just asked the exact same question.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: The answer is yes, correct?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: The answer is that political parties sometimes give the address of the political party, waiting for a riding

association to be up and running and structured. That's what happens in all political parties—yours, ours, theirs. There's nothing there.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: In fact, at this office staffed by, among other people, paid House of Commons staff, there are sessions for fundraising and election preparedness on behalf of the New Democratic Party partisan office, correct?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: This is a party office. There are several people in there who are party employees. They come under a collective agreement that defines their tasks. Our parliamentary staff do parliamentary work. Our party staff do party work. You're describing some party work. Our party staff do party work.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Well, you've insisted that there was no partisan work done by House of Commons staff at 4428 Saint-Laurent Boulevard. Do you think, perhaps, that Alexandre Boulerice got his pitch for 2015 election support that he sent out with taxpayer assistance prepared at 4428 Saint-Laurent Boulevard?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Well, it's quite possible if it was done by somebody who was working for the party, but I go back to section 1 of the Members By-Law, “parliamentary functions” include all “duties and activities that relate to the position of Member, wherever performed and whether or not performed in a partisan manner”.

Mr. Woodworth, the law couldn't be clearer.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Well, Mr. Mulcair, let me refer you to bylaw 4, subsection 3, which says, “For greater certainty, the following activities, when performed by a Member, are not parliamentary functions”, and paragraph (d) says, “activities designed, in the context of a federal...election...to support or oppose a political party”, very much as Mr. Boulerice has done in this mail-out. Do you agree with me that's not proper?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Woodworth, since the beginning, you've had great difficulty understanding a very clear proposition. At an address where the rent was paid 100% by the NDP, there were certain employees in a union performing work that was party work. At the same address, because it was allowed up until April 14 of this year, we had other employees doing parliamentary work. There's never been any commingling of the two. Party workers do party work. Parliamentary workers do parliamentary work.

It would be a really difficult proposition for you to prove because you don't have that sort of separation. We do. I'm the only one who can come here and say that, under these collective agreements, party workers have always done party work and parliamentary workers have only done parliamentary work.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: What I do have, Mr. Mulcair, is a piece of literature talking about the 2015 federal election, asking people to join in order to put the country on the right track, and it was sent out at the very least with taxpayer funds through the free mailing privileges. How do I know it wasn't done at 4428 Saint-Laurent Boulevard?

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth, thank you very much.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: What you have, Mr. Woodworth, is the exact same thing that the Liberals do, the exact same thing that the Conservatives do. We have example after example after example.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Christopherson, please, you have four minutes.

• (1245)

Mr. David Christopherson: Thanks very much, Chair. I appreciate that.

In my last comments, I said I was looking forward to sort of a new front being opened that might actually get the government somewhere, and the Liberals too. That didn't happen, so I don't need to spend my time shoring anything up because they haven't done any damage to the very clear straightforward case that Mr. Mulcair has put forward. So what I'd like to do is return back to this April 8 change to the rules, because it's key to all of this in many ways.

This is new. Now it says, in subsection 93.1(1):

No employee of a Member or House Officer may have as their regular place of work any space in premises owned, leased or under the effective control of a political party.

Does that currently exist right now, Mr. Mulcair?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: The rule came into force on April 8, 2014, effective April 14, 2014, and we've been obeying it since it came into force.

Mr. David Christopherson: So the second the rule was changed, you immediately brought your party into compliance. Prior to that... The government's trying to suggest that retroactively, this clarification, this interpretation—call it what you will—should be applied to something before April 14. Would you please again just explain how that doesn't make any sense and that it's not how law-making works?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: You can just imagine if somebody were to create a penalty after the fact for something that you've already done that wasn't, up until then, an offence. That's the essence of the argument on the Conservative side of this discussion today.

The reason that the new rule was brought in—and it is a completely new rule—was because up until that date, there was nothing wrong with it. We've been clear, open, transparent that this was an office paid for by the NDP, 100% with NDP money, and when the rule changed, those employees were gone immediately from that office. We've continued to follow the rules as they're now established.

As for a clarification on how the amendment 93.1 can be interpreted as anything other than an attack on the official opposition, because it expires in 2015, I'll let the Liberals and the Conservatives explain that to you.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you.

If I might, I just want to stay with this, because there's a part here that I find interesting, and I would appreciate your thoughts on it. Subsection 93.1(7) makes the point that the section becomes effective April 14. You've addressed that in terms of what the NDP was doing prior to that date, and what they did upon the April 14 new rule's coming into effect.

It's interesting, the subsection before that, Mr. Mulcair, at 93.1(6), says, "This section is repealed effective on the dissolution of the 41st Parliament." If this is such a good rule, protecting taxpayer money, do you know—because I don't—why this rule dissolves at the end of this Parliament and doesn't exist in the next Parliament?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: It is intriguing to ask that question, because you can immediately imagine that Conservatives heading for third if not fourth party status, and Liberals heading for maybe third party status, if they're lucky, could want to bring back a rule on the dissolution of the next Parliament. Here's the rub. If it was such a problem, why make this rule change apply for only the next couple of years? When we saw the rule change applying only until the next election, it was immediately clear to us—the jig was up. This whole exercise is about Conservatives using their majority, along with their Liberal buddies, to try to stymie the extraordinary work that the NDP official opposition has been able to do across Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, and we're well past time.

I'll go to Mr. Woodworth for four minutes, please.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mulcair, I'm going to read to you what Speaker Scheer had to say in his statement about the April release:

The Honourable Andrew Scheer, Speaker of the House of Commons and Chair of the Board of Internal Economy, has confirmed that the Board is conducting an investigation into the use of House of Commons resources in offices outside of the Parliamentary Precinct or constituency offices. This investigation is further to allegations of improper use of House resources brought forward to the Board, specifically related to the Members By-law (section 4.3).

While the investigation is proceeding, the Board is acting quickly to end the performance of parliamentary work and political party work from the same location, adopting the following provisional amendment...

What that really says is that this amendment was adopted to stop you and your party from ignoring all of the rules, which I've been quoting to you for the last hour and a half. Isn't that correct?

• (1250)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Chair, I would appreciate it if Mr. Woodworth were to provide Anne McGrath, our party general secretary, with his address so we can share the fee of our attorneys. I thank him for proving our case for us. It's exactly that.

This rule was brought in so that as of April 14, 2014, what was allowed up until that date would no longer be allowed. Both Mr. Scheer's short statement and the rules of statutory interpretation are conclusive. Prior to April 8, 2014, there was absolutely nothing that interdicted the use of an office paid for by a political party as long as the separation was such that we were practising—parliamentary workers doing parliamentary work, party workers doing party work. It was allowed. It became disallowed on April 14, and following that date we respected the new rules the same way we respected, at all times, the old rules.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Chair, I'd like to defer to my colleague, the parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Thank you very much. I'm glad to be here.

The one thing that is clearly apparent in all of this testimony that we've heard this morning—and some may argue that there is just a difference of opinion or a difference of interpretation. But there's one thing that is crystal clear, that there is a huge contradiction in the testimony provided by Mr. Mulcair and documents provided by the House administration in one key point.

Mr. Mulcair has stated, as have his colleagues on many occasions, that he was excruciatingly clear with the House administration that the employees under question were located in Montreal. He has said every step of the way they let the House administration know that those employees were to be housed and located in Montreal.

The problem with that, and where the contradiction lies, is in a document of May 9, a memo. I believe it was to Mr. Preston from the Clerk of the House of Commons, Audrey O'Brien, who, as characterized by Mr. Mulcair, is above reproach. Her integrity is never questioned, nor should it be. I agree with that totally.

However, in that memorandum of May 9, on page 8, Mr. Mulcair, if you want to reference it, point 21, it says:

At no point was the House Administration informed that the employees would be located in Montreal or that their work would be carried out in co-location with a political party's offices.

There is a huge contradiction, and because of that, Mr. Chair, I want to give notice to the committee, and particularly for the benefit of Mr. Mulcair:

That, in light of the discrepancies between the evidence of the Leader of the Official Opposition and the documents produced in response to the Committee's order of Tuesday, May 6, 2014, the Committee continue its study, pursuant to its Order of Reference of Thursday, March 27, 2014, on the matter of accusations of the Official Opposition's improper use of House of Commons resources for partisan purposes;

That, in view of the evidence adduced to date, the Committee expand its study, if further evidence warrants, to topics incidental to matters relating to the election of Members to the House of Commons, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a)(vi);

That the Committee accept the request of the Board of Internal Economy of Wednesday, May 14, 2014, to provide it and the Speaker with a report, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a)(i), in addition to any report the Committee may provide to the House in relation to this study;

That the Committee invite additional witnesses, including, but not limited to, the Member for Saint Maurice-Champplain and the Clerk of the House of Commons, to appear in relation to this study; and

That the Clerk of the Committee advise the Leader of the Official Opposition that the Committee is prepared to recall him to appear as a witness, if necessary, following further evidence adduced during this study, provided that it shall be deemed to be a continuation of his appearance on Thursday, May 15, 2014.

I will be moving this motion for approval at our next meeting of Procedure and House Affairs.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

• (1255)

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I will cede my time to my colleague, Mr. Casey.

The Chair: Mr. Casey, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Sean Casey: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mulcair, on April 9, your deputy leader Megan Leslie said, "Well, we actually checked this out before we did it. We got approval from the Speaker."

Can you point us to the documentation or tell us of the conversation with the Speaker to approve this?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'll try to kill two birds with one stone, because of course it wouldn't be very fair to us not to let us answer Mr. Lukiwski.

With regard to the government continuing to use its majority, that's all this is about. The government used its majority at the Board of Internal Economy to change a rule. We respected the rule before. We respect it now. The government is going to use its majority.

Look, normally these committees are used to hold the government to account. We're absolutely transparent. We have literally dozens of documents that show that the administration was aware that these people were working in Montreal, but that's never even been the case.

The Chair: The motion from Mr. Lukiwski will be debated at this committee next. We're not debating it now.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, but given the stunt that you've just allowed from that side, I should at least be given a chance to respond.

The Chair: If indeed pulling a stunt is moving a motion at committee, I have allowed it.

But when a motion is tabled at this committee, it's a notice of the motion and we will not discuss the motion until the next meeting.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Right, but we're here together today—

The Chair: Yes. Right, but that's what I just ruled on.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: —on a specific subject.

Pardon me?

The Chair: That's what I just ruled. We're not going to discuss that motion right now, as our committee would normally not.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Right, so you let him come in and make that statement but you won't even give us equal time.

The Chair: I'm suggesting that the rules of the committee are, you can table a motion....

An hon. member: A point of order....

The Chair: While I was talking...great.

We have the ability to table a motion. We give 48-hours' notice to the committee, and it will be discussed the next time.

Sorry, but our friends at the committee know how we work.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Everybody watching now has all the information that they need, Mr. Chairman.

They understand that the government is using its majority, with their Liberal henchmen, to try to call the official opposition to account. It's unprecedented. But do you know what? Since we've shown you every step of the way that we respected all the rules today, we're just going to continue to do that, to show you that, every step of the way, we've respected all the rules.

The Chair: Then the rules that I'll follow are that Mr. Casey still has about a minute and a half left before we finish our meeting.

Mr. Sean Casey: Thank you.

My question, Mr. Mulcair, is this. On April 9, your deputy leader claimed that all of this was checked out and approved by the Speaker. That's not true, is it?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: What we're both referring to are the dozens of documents that refer to the fact that people were being hired in the Montreal office.

Mr. Sean Casey: No, we're referring to communications with the Speaker.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: They're from 2011. They're from 2012. They're from 2014. They always mention the Montreal office. When the rule was changed on April 8, 2014, we respected the new rule, the same way we respected the existing rules prior to that date, Mr. Casey. There's never been a problem. Their *port d'attache* was Ottawa. That was clear as well. These documents go back to the past three years.

There's a great letter from Joe Comartin, and I invite you to take cognizance of it. That letter from Mr. Comartin remained unanswered.

[*Translation*]

Silence is consent.

[*English*]

He set out the whole case in that letter, and we have all of these documents that refer specifically to Montreal. He asked a series of questions, because the whole thing had been the object of a serious analysis here in the House. I have far more respect for the officers in this House who were providing BlackBerrys to 514, receiving documents written in Montreal, and sending documents themselves that mentioned the Montreal office, than you appear to.

I know that they knew what they were doing, and we have respected the rules every step of the way.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have come to the end of our meeting today.

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

Madam Boivin does have two minutes, as you know.

The Chair: The chair has some business that he'd like to share with the committee, and it may take that time, so he's given himself the opportunity to do so.

Thank you for helping me chair again, Mr. Julian. You're such a good assistant.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: You're saying I'm losing my time.

The Chair: Yes, what I'm saying is that we're stopping at that point.

With the number of points of order today, we certainly are ruling that there will be a number of spots missing at the bottom of this meeting today.

We have a document coming out from the clerk today. You'll receive it today at all your offices about the documents and stuff that we have out. Please take note of that.

I'd like the committee to also take note that May 27 would be one of our normal meeting days. We're looking at, because of a number of members being in Ukraine for election observation, perhaps not having a meeting that day. We'll give you as much notice as we can about that happening.

Thank you all for your work today. We are adjourned.

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