



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 135

Tuesday, November 26, 2024

Chair: Mr. Ben Carr



Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Tuesday, November 26, 2024

• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):
Good morning, everybody.

We are here for the 135th meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Typically, I remind witnesses—although I think Mr. Reid is well aware—that we put our earpieces, when not in use, on the stickers in front of us to protect the well-being of our interpreters.

Colleagues, we are here today on M-109, an instruction to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding amendments to the Standing Orders, and on the study of Bill C-65, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act. We will return to C-65 in the second hour of our affairs here today.

For the first hour, we have our colleague Scott Reid, the MP for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, with us. It's always nice when we have a colleague from the House of Commons join us in their capacity as a witness.

Mr. Reid, we very much look forward to hearing from you today, sir. Thank you for making yourself available to the committee. I'll turn the floor over to you for five minutes. If you feel like you need a little bit more time, that's not a problem. Then we will head into our opening rounds of questions.

With that, colleagues, we will begin.

[Translation]

Mr. Reid, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC):
Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to speak in English today, because I speak much faster in English than in French.

[English]

We'll all benefit if I get through this as quickly as I can.

The purpose of M-109 is to ensure that, in the future, it will be possible to amend the Standing Orders only with the consent of all recognized parties.

This guarantee would be achieved by amending the Standing Orders so that, when a debate on any future amendment to the Standing Orders is under way, the rules that can be used to limit debate, under all other circumstances, will not apply. Henceforth, when the subject being debated is an amendment to the Standing Orders, the

following four rules would cease to apply: Standing Order 56.1(1) (b); Standing Order 57, which is the provision we normally mean when we use the term “closure”; Standing Order 61, which is also known as the “previous question”; and Standing Order 66(2)(c), which is what we usually mean when we refer to time allocation.

If you examine the text of M-109, you'll see that, in article (b) of the motion, the four subarticles designated by the lower-case Roman numbers (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) limit the application of the four debate-limiting rules I just enumerated. Additionally, M-109 contains two additional subarticles, designated as (b)(v) and (b)(vi). These subarticles serve the complementary purpose of ensuring the Standing Orders cannot be amended via an opposition day motion or a private member's motion, unless there is all-party consent. Instead, if any private member's motion or opposition day motion amending the Standing Orders is approved in the House, it will be sent to the procedure and house affairs committee to be studied and referred back to the House within 75 days, which is exactly the same process being used for M-109.

If M-109 is adopted, the practical result will be that it will never be possible again, in the absence of all-party consent, for a mere majority in the House to force a vote on any proposed amendment to the Standing Orders.

Another word for “all-party consent”, of course, is “consensus”. In the absence of consensus, debate would simply continue as long as one side is willing to continue putting up speakers. Now, importantly, all-party consent is not the same thing as a requirement for unanimous consent. I think a requirement for unanimous consent to change the Standing Orders—a Canadian version of medieval Poland's *liberum veto*—would be unwise.

Therefore, it's worth noting that, as a practical matter, the mechanism of delay by drawing out the debate is really only available to organized groups of a certain size. A group of MPs with a dozen members—which, under our rules, is the minimum size for maintaining recognized party status—is big enough, I think, to deny consent by proposing an endless series of subamendments and speakers. However, an individual MP or a handful of MPs do not have the stamina needed to unilaterally sustain a protracted debate on a motion that has the resolute support of the other 330-odd members of the House.

It's equally important to stress that M-109 would in no way limit the use of closure, time allocation or the previous question to any subject matter other than debates on the Standing Orders themselves.

M-109 was unanimously approved, as we all know, on June 19 of this year. I want to stress that this did not cause any standing order changes to come into effect. Rather, the motion had two effects: First, it instructed the procedure and house affairs committee "to undertake a study on the advisability of amending the Standing Orders" as outlined above; and second, it required that "the committee report its findings to the House no later than 75 sitting days following the adoption of this motion." This means, in practical terms, that the committee has until late February to submit a report to the House.

Now, if committee members wish, I can advise them as to what I'd suggest the committee's report might say. My suggestion is based on the way this committee dealt, 10 years ago, with a similar motion I authored, one proposing to amend the Standing Orders to change the way the Speaker of the House of Commons is elected—a change ultimately adopted by the House.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my remarks, and I'm at the disposal of the committee.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Reid.

I will take a moment to say that it's a very fascinating piece of legislation, and one I'm looking forward to hearing debate on. Often, at this committee, we have the privilege of working with legislation that has a direct impact on the working procedures and conditions that we, as parliamentarians, undertake every day. Thank you for being here and for your opening remarks.

Mr. Cooper, the floor will be yours for six minutes.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Reid.

Our Standing Orders descend from the House of Commons in Westminster. They are the rules of the game for this place, as you stated in your second reading speech. Over the past 150 years, a convention has developed whereby the Standing Orders ought not to be changed absent consensus. Is that correct?

Mr. Scott Reid: That is the convention. It hasn't gelled as firmly as some other conventions that exist. For example, the confidence convention is more firmly gelled, but I would say it's an incipient convention or a convention that is on its way to gelling.

• (1110)

Mr. Michael Cooper: When you say it hasn't gelled in the same fashion, how often has it been that the Standing Orders have been changed absent consensus?

Mr. Scott Reid: There are more times than I thought. In the course of preparing my remarks a very long time ago, I asked the Library of Parliament to prepare a review of all the occasions on which the Standing Orders have been changed without the consensus of the House. They came up with a longer list than I thought. Some of them are fairly small changes, but the major ones, the ones I point to that really stand out are.... Let's see if I can get these

right. Andre is here and knows this stuff cold, so he can correct me if I miss anything.

In 1913, the previous question was used as a way of limiting debate to introduce the provision that we call "closure". The closure provision was used in the 1960s to introduce what we call "time allocation". It was in 1968, I believe. On that occasion, not a single opposition member from either the NDP or the Progressive Conservatives supported the government on the changes. It was used again by the Mulroney government on at least one occasion, by the Chrétien government on, I believe, at least two occasions and, most recently, by the current government in 2023. That would have been with reference to changing the Standing Orders to allow virtual sittings of the House to be added as a permanent change.

I know I've missed a few, but those are the big ones.

Mr. Michael Cooper: As you noted, Mr. Reid, in your speech—and you've just illustrated it—closure has been consistently used when the goal is to change the Standing Orders in a fashion that would give new tools to the government to more effectively limit the amount of debate that takes place in the House of Commons.

Is that a fair observation?

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes. I mean, time allocation would not have come into existence, at least not in its current form, without the use of closure, and closure would not have come into existence without the use of the previous question. As to the previous question, that's something we inherited from the British. I'm not exactly sure when, but we did so pre-Confederation.

Yes, the tendency has been that—and this should surprise nobody—a government is motivated to want to restrict the ability to protract debate when it's finding the debate is too protracted, which, by definition, means at a time when the opposition is attempting to draw out debate.

I've gone to some lengths, both in my remarks in the House and today, to avoid commenting in some sort of general way on the merits of time allocation or closure. I was a deputy government House leader for 10 years, so I was part of a government that used closure and time allocation on occasion, and some would say on more than one occasion, so I'm not trying to do that. However, when it comes to placing further restrictions on the House's ability to debate and conduct business and slow things down for the purpose of giving proper examination, regardless of the partisan stripe of who's in office at that time, that is, I think, not the direction we want to head in.

Everything about our system is designed to allow more debate to occur. That's why we have three readings on legislation. That's why we have committee hearings at which amendments can be suggested. The House essentially divides itself up into smaller bodies so that it can do multiple pieces of business at the same time. That's why we have two houses of Parliament instead of just one. We could be unicameral, as all the provinces are, but I think it's actually wiser to go in the direction that has been employed at our federal level and in all state legislatures in the U.S. and in all state legislatures in Australia with one exception, which is to be bicameral.

In general, being slow and deliberate in your actions is reasonable. There are times when it's okay to move more quickly and to suspend the rules. That happened during COVID, for example. When the House was recalled, there were lengthy, all-day hearings—I think it was on March 20, 2020—on suspending the Standing Orders.

I remember I came to the House intending to deny unanimous consent when I thought that was what was going to happen, but once it became clear there had to be discussions, the government and the opposition parties were able to cobble together something that ultimately was, I think, an improvement over what might initially have gone through.

You can, when there's a need, find a way of getting to these things quickly—maybe somewhat messily, but quickly.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Cooper.

Mrs. Romanado, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Through you, I'd like to thank Mr. Reid for being here with us today.

I want to start by saying that I, of course, support this motion and what Mr. Reid is trying to get to.

One area I wanted to check with Mr. Reid, who has much more experience than I do in this, is that there is no reference to Standing Orders 51(1), 51(2) and 51(3), which are about the requirement that, "Between the 60th and 90th sitting days of a Parliament on a day designated by a minister of the Crown...[the] House take note of the Standing Orders and procedure of the House and its committees".

Basically, this is when we have the opportunity, once every Parliament, to have a wholesome discussion about the Standing Orders and to make recommendations. In Standing Order 51(2), we reference the expiration of proceedings deemed referred to committee.

I want to get your opinion on whether M-109 would need to encompass this part or whether this could stay as a stand-alone.

Mr. Scott Reid: I don't think M-109 needs to deal with this. M-109 deals with the expiration of debate resulting in something coming to a vote. I believe what happens here is that, upon the expiration of debate, the item simply drops from the Order Paper. It's the opposite problem. Sometimes you want to be able to sustain debate on things because you think you could achieve a result.

What I'm proposing is basically to make it less easy to achieve a result.

Sherry, I'm cheating, and I'm going back and answering one of Michael's questions here through twisting slightly what you asked me. There's the whole idea of delay versus getting on with business quickly and the balancing act that's involved. You do have to be able to get on with business, obviously, but when we have a situation where there's an actual tie vote in the House of Commons, it's interesting what happens in that situation. The Speaker breaks the tie, but the Speaker doesn't stand up and say, "I've thought it over and I like this piece of legislation, so I'm voting for it." What the Speaker says....

I remember the first time this happened when Peter Milliken was in the chair, he knew that he might have to break a tie one day, so he had a little piece of paper in his pocket, ready for that moment, and he pulled it out and he said that the precedent is that, when the Speaker is breaking a tie, the Speaker always does so in a way that continues the debate on the belief that it might be possible to achieve the necessary level of support, which of course is 50% plus one. Therefore, if it's an item at second reading, the Speaker votes in favour so that it can go forward. If it's an item at third reading—this is obviously a reference to bills—the Speaker votes against it, rather than causing it to leave the House and move on. I think that is the guidance here.

That being said, I think your underlying question is this: Could we beef up the Standing Orders with reference to the debates on the Standing Orders or the process for reviewing the Standing Orders? I agree, and I think something that we don't have room for here, at least it's not stated explicitly, is dealing with practices that are not part of the Standing Orders—so the practices of the House. That's all the stuff that you find in O'Brien and Bosc, which is all about our conventions and practices. I think we should spend some time looking at that.

I think it would be helpful, for example, right now, if we could come to a clearer agreement on what constitutes parliamentary language and what constitutes unparliamentary language, so that we can be clear on what the naughty words are and what the naughty words aren't. Also I think it would be helpful if we could have greater clarity for all of us on this thing we say where you can't do through the back door that which you can't do through the front door. I think a clearer understanding of what that is would be very helpful.

It would mean, when the Speaker stands up and says that's out of order or when the Speaker declines to do so, there would be more legitimacy. We would all say what he or she is doing we support, even if we didn't get what we wanted on the point in question. There would be greater support for the Speaker's actions. That's the definition of legitimacy.

• (1120)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I actually sat in on part of a study for the former member of Parliament for Pierrefonds—Dollard, Mr. Frank Baylis, when he introduced his PMB regarding sweeping changes to the Standing Orders. I believe you were actually on PROC. I'm not quite sure, but I recall being on that committee for that study.

It was changes such as limiting the power of parties to determine who speaks in question period, and so on and so forth. It died on the Order Paper, but there were only about two hours of debate that would have been devoted to this extensive motion, and I believe you supported it at that time. Could you elaborate a little bit on your thoughts on that now?

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, right, it was a sweeping motion. I remember when I talked at the time, I said, "I think, Frank, this might be a bit too sweeping." It's easier to get things through if they're modest in scope, which is part of the goal with M-109, to make it narrow in scope. However, having said that, he was hitting at something that frustrates all of us, which is that we've allowed our practices to move us in the direction of greater centralization.

The practice of a list being submitted to the Speaker, there's no standing order about that. It's a practice. The Speaker could, in theory, say, "I'm simply not looking at that list. I'm going to see who stands up and respond to that person," as still happens at least some of the time in the United Kingdom and in some other parliaments. However, it's difficult for the Speaker to unilaterally say they don't like that particular convention. The Speaker is all about following the precedents.

I chair my party's caucus. They don't want me to start saying I'm picking and choosing the conventions I like about how we behave there.

The Chair: Mr. Reid, as much as I'd love to hear you talk about what goes on in your caucus room.... I will permit you a few more seconds, but if you could wrap up, that would be great.

Thank you.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's very sage advice. I'm not supposed to speak at all about what happens there, as a matter of fact.

The point is that he was, I think, moving toward using a standing order to lock in a replacement to a convention. Sometimes that's what's necessary when the conventions have gone in a direction that is no longer reflective of what the House thinks they ought to be.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Romanado.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm delighted today that we're discussing a substantial amendment to the Standing Orders, in connection with which I was personally insulted. We have worked many hours on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The Bloc Québécois

tabled a dissenting report. That said, there were a multitude of recommendations on which consensus could be reached.

It's understandable that, in an exceptional case like the COVID-19 pandemic, extraordinary measures were taken. But when it's all over and we have to make a major amendment to the Standing Orders of the House, I'm delighted that it's being tabled today. People and my fellow citizens ask us what our committee is for when, basically, decisions are made behind the scenes by the House leaders. I'll tell you something: There was no consultation between them, and that's unacceptable.

My question is this: Is this proposal going to guarantee that there will be no fast-tracking or shenanigans so as to ensure, when we talk about the Standing Orders of the House, that this won't happen again?

Mr. Scott Reid: I am certain that if Motion M-109 is accepted, there will be no means of accelerating or limiting debate. The means of limiting debate would be cancelled for discussions and motions on the Standing Orders. It wouldn't apply to other things, only to debates on the Standing Orders.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you for speaking French. In any case, even in English, we have to speak at a moderate pace for our interpreters.

So, I understand your good intention. I've just heard that, on the government side, although they've tabled this and are coming around, perhaps to ease their conscience....

So, I don't know, is it unanimous on your side? When there's consensus in a legislative process—we're talking about democracy here—it is indeed possible to speed things up potentially when there's an emergency. So, do you think your bill has a good chance of being passed?

• (1125)

Mr. Scott Reid: Are you asking me if there's a chance of this being passed?

I think so, yes. It was unanimously accepted by the House. I think the idea of a stronger level of consensus than a simple majority of 50% plus one vote is a very important idea in our federation. That's why we have a few formulas for amending Canada's Constitution. The level of consensus required is higher for the most important parts of the Constitution. It's a concept that's absolutely essential to true democracy. Majoritarian democracy without safeguards is not a secure democracy. I think guardrails are always a good idea.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: In closing, I want to tell you that people from Laurentides-Labelle were telling me that they were impressed during the pandemic by the fact that we were working together. We had a global problem, particularly within our own borders. We demonstrated that we were capable of working together. I think it was a moment that made me want to continue in politics. I may say so, since I will never seek to be a minister and be in power.

However, when people see that, once the emergency is over, our system ensures that it's partisanship at all costs—which we've been experiencing for months, I'm sorry, but your party is paralyzing Parliament—it reassures me to know that, minimally for the substantive Standing Orders, I hope the bill will pass.

Do you think it would be possible to revise what's been done, or is it more for the future?

Mr. Scott Reid: Revise what?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Revising previous decisions.

Mr. Scott Reid: For example, the decision that was made—

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: The decision that was made in June, yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: I don't quite understand.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: That's okay, Mr. Reid. I'll ask the question again during my next turn.

It's for the past and also the future. Can we go backwards to make changes, or do we start on day 1?

Mr. Scott Reid: All right, I understand better. It's going to start to apply in the future.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: That's fine.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau. I'm glad you mentioned that there are indeed times when we work together. In fact, I hope we'll continue to do so.

Ms. Mathysen, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): It is the dream, Mr. Chair.

I, too, am in favour of this. It's very nice to have this kind of conversation. I think it brings out the policy wonk in all of us and our deep-rooted geekiness and love for this stuff. I know it does for Sherry anyway.

I can't help but think of where we are now. On the changes that you're talking about making to those Standing Orders, I do agree. They are the rules that govern us all, so we need to be a part of the decision on how they're made.

Again, within the context of what's happening now and the standstill we find ourselves at, this would add an additional tool for that gamesmanship, for that seizing of Parliament or for the filibusters that occur. Have you thought about that in any way in terms of the potential negative use of, ideally, a really positive idea?

• (1130)

Mr. Scott Reid: I've tried to constrain it as narrowly as possible, so it really only deals with changes to the Standing Orders themselves.

I think there is a valid parallel with the protracted debate that's been going on now in a very narrow sense, a very narrow but important sense, which is this: If you want to see what in the future a debate would look like in an attempt to amend the Standing Orders that did not have all-party support, then what's going on in the

House of Commons is a pretty good example of what it will look like. There would be some kind of deadlock.

The point is to not cause that deadlock to occur. Rather, since it's obvious that it would happen, it's to make the government more.... Since one assumes it would normally be the government that's proposing changes to the Standing Orders, and most often a majority government, it would make it necessary for them to make compromises. They might not get all they would want.

No change would occur because of this with regard to any debate on any subject other than the Standing Orders. Of course, what's happening in the House right now is not a debate on the Standing Orders. It's a debate on an order the Speaker made.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: This is based, though, on the idea that there are majority governments most of the time. I've been here as an elected official for only five years, but I've worked on the Hill for over 18 years now. In most of that time, there have been minority governments. Did you consider that in the draft? Did you have any considerations of where it might go because of that seeming change in how governments are being elected?

Mr. Scott Reid: It's an interesting question. Canada has veered back and forth between minority and majority governments. I was mostly thinking about the need to protect ourselves in the event of a majority government. It seems to me that the greatest procedural concerns are in existence when there's a majority government.

I also tried in this to make it possible to amend the Standing Orders via a private member's motion, which of course is what we're talking about doing today, only if the same rules are respected. You can't do an end run and produce a private member's motion on changing the Standing Orders, have it adopted after two hours, vote and have it go into effect. That could be done. That could be an end run. In theory, it could be done by anybody, but I suspect it could be done most effectively by having a government backbencher move a private member's motion to completely change the Standing Orders in whatever way the government wants. You have two hours of debate and it's through. That was a hole I was very anxious to plug, actually.

Lindsay, here I'm kind of cheating and using your question to answer a question that you didn't ask. I do think that the proper way, when a private member's motion contemplates changing the Standing Orders, is to have that motion, if adopted, automatically directed to this committee for whatever hearings seem appropriate and then referred back to the House after a set period of time. The motion suggests 75 days.

At that point, it would still be possible, if there was not consensus, for that concurrence debate to be dragged out. Alternatively, if at the committee a consensus has been achieved—there's no better place to achieve consensus than here, and we'd all get input from our House leaders—it seems to me that this is a good way of ensuring that ideas can bubble up through the private members' system.

If they have flaws, those flaws can be.... Sometimes they're not attempts at *force majeure*. They're attempts at doing something with good faith, but something's been missed in the details. It's a good chance to catch it.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I'll cede my time. That's fine.

The Chair: Okay. I'll roll it over.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To pick up on part of the line of questioning put by Ms. Mathysen, I'm wondering if you could clarify, Mr. Reid, that if this motion were adopted and the Standing Orders were changed accordingly, and there was an attempt to change the Standing Orders when there wasn't consensus, pursuant to convention, it theoretically could result in protracted debate in the House.

In terms of how that would impact other business of the House, could you clarify that the debate would take precedence in the time of concurrence, but thereafter it would not take precedence? It would only be debated at the adjournment of government business and, therefore, would not impede the government from moving forward other pieces of legislation.

• (1135)

Mr. Scott Reid: The answer to your question is that you've summarized it exactly right. It would not wind up gumming up the business of the House.

Also, if the government insisted on trying to push through a set of standing order changes that were opposed by the opposition parties, what would happen? It would be this endless debate, but of course the government wouldn't try this. Since it's obviously pushing against an immovable object, it would recognize that it's necessary instead to go back and compromise on the substance of the standing order changes. That's in fact what would happen.

That is exactly what happened in the example I gave from March 2020. Realizing that their initial proposal to change the Standing Orders would not be met with success, the government House leader at the time, Pablo Rodriguez, stood up and simply asked the Speaker if they could suspend proceedings while the House leaders met to work out changes.

That's what happened. It took all day, but it wasn't endless. It took a day to sort out a very complicated series of changes. They included not just standing order issues but also passing the CERB legislation.

That's what would actually happen. There would be negotiations, I think mostly behind closed doors, with the House leaders, which of course is already part of our routine. Every Tuesday the House leaders meet, or should meet, to discuss all kinds of business that, if conducted in a more formal venue, would otherwise be very time-consuming.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

You cited the rare instances where governments have moved ahead, absent a consensus, to essentially put more power in the hands of the government to control the business of the House. That being said, in recent years there have been attempts—and successful attempts—to change the Standing Orders in fairly significant ways. I think of the McGrath commission of 1985, which was the special committee set up by the Chrétien government.

Perhaps you could elaborate on those processes and how the Mulroney government, the Chrétien government and perhaps even the Harper government.... You spoke a little bit about the changes to the Standing Orders with respect to the election of the Speaker. It would be helpful if you could elaborate on how that worked itself out, for a better understanding of the convention and historical context.

Mr. Scott Reid: The first two examples you cited—the McGrath commission and the one under the Chrétien government—involved having a report done up on the assumption that some detailed research was required. It's a subject that requires detailed work.

With regard to the motion to change how the Speaker is elected, what happened on that occasion.... This, I think, is the model that could work in this situation. It was a private member's motion. It was moved by me and sent to this committee. The committee reviewed the proposed standing order changes and then it wrote back. I just happen to have its report right here, as a matter of fact. The 21st report of the procedure and House affairs committee stated:

The Election of the Speaker is a matter for all Members to decide. The Committee does not oppose nor endorse motion M-489 brought forward by Mr. Scott Reid and feels that the entire membership of the House of Commons should have the opportunity to vote on whether or not to change the Standing Orders in the manner suggested by M-489.

In order to accomplish this purpose of having a vote in the House, the Committee recommends that Standing Order 4 be amended as follows:

What followed was the suggested motion to change the House standing order.

The point about all this was that it allowed the members to make the decision. What actually happened in the House was that it was a completely free vote and every single party in the House divided—even the Green Party. At least one member of the Greens, the Bloc, the NDP and also the Liberals and the Conservatives went on either side. The result was that it passed by some number, obviously. I can't remember the exact number. I think that's a good model here.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Turnbull, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thanks, Chair.

Thanks, Mr. Reid, for being here.

I note that we had some good, nerdy PROC-related discussions in the past on the code of conduct for members of Parliament when we did some work on that, which was overdue. I appreciate your being here. I appreciate your putting forward M-109 and the chance to engage with you on this.

I note that Mrs. Romanado brought up your work in 2019 with Frank Baylis and, I think, another group of MPs at the time that put forward some pretty sweeping changes to the Standing Orders. That's kind of the end run, almost, that you described, which is kind of interesting. You kind of took that path in trying to change the Standing Orders through a private member's motion that was pretty sweeping, some of which I agreed with, like the parallel debating chamber. I'm not saying I wouldn't have necessarily supported those changes, but you did so in a way that you're now trying to prevent with this motion.

Are you kind of having a moment of conscience here, where you're trying to prevent your former self from what it was maybe inclined to do back then?

I mean that in jest a little bit.

Mr. Scott Reid: Of course.

In all fairness, that was not my motion. That was Frank's motion, which I supported. I think what Frank was up against, if memory serves correctly, was that we were right at the end of a Parliament and it was going to be hard for him to get it through. I think that was what was driving him. Anybody who's ever had a private member's motion or bill that comes up toward the end of a Parliament knows that feeling. I have sympathy for what he was trying to do.

I think that in practice, he was biting off a very large chunk and it would have been difficult to deal with it all. To give the proper... With something like setting up a parallel chamber, you really have to sit down and look at the other places that have done it—the Australians and British—and see how well what they proposed works. That was not the only subject matter. There were a number of other things he had in there.

The motion that I proposed that dealt with the election of the Speaker was a narrower topic. It was using the preferential ballot for electing the Speaker. Initially, I had this idea that we would put this forward, it would be debated and then the House would adopt it. It was in the process that wiser heads than my own directed and said that this really ought to go to the procedure and House affairs committee. In retrospect, they were 100% right. It was helpful to see what other jurisdictions had done. We were not the first ones to try this. The British do it in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords as well. That was very informative and useful.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It sounds like you've been learning along the way, which I think we all do.

One of the questions I have is that this motion would, assuming it goes through and everyone supports it, which I think is likely... PROC would have to study any substantive changes to the Standing Orders in the future. One of the challenges I find is that we get members on PROC who are a bit nerdy about procedure—even Ms. Mathysen said she was happy to nerd out on this topic—and I put myself in that category. However, many other members of Parliament are not on PROC.

How do we ensure they have a fulsome understanding of what the proposed changes to the Standing Orders would imply for the practices of Parliament, such that they can make an informed deci-

sion when they're voting? That is my question for you. I have another one to follow up on that.

Mr. Scott Reid: I think it's a problem that you have with any piece of legislation or any change to the Standing Orders. We all have an obligation to either inform ourselves or, as I often do, to find somebody whose knowledge and insight you trust deeply and consult with them. I know that I regularly rely on Michael Chong, for example, and Tom Kmiec, as two people who have insights that I wouldn't have on my own. I think that's the best way of doing it.

Maybe I'll stop there.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Your motion allows essentially that every member of Parliament would have an opportunity to speak in the House on any proposed changes to the Standing Orders and that there could be no limit to that debate. It could be as protracted as it needs to be, potentially.

How do you ensure that a majority government couldn't whip a vote? Essentially, I think you're ensuring that the vote might be procedurally free, but it wouldn't necessarily be politically free. In the case of a majority government, at any point in the future they could propose changes to the Standing Orders. If it comes to a vote, obviously they could whip that vote.

• (1145)

Mr. Scott Reid: The answer is that nothing I'm proposing would preclude whipped votes. In fact, I think they likely would be whipped votes in many cases. You know, what I've suggested here is a method that would, if the parties agree, lead to a free vote, but it could be a whipped vote. Nothing that happened in the motion I read, or the report from the committee 10 years ago, precluded parties from holding whipped votes if they wanted to. That's an internal matter.

Obviously, when you get all-party consensus, by definition you're saying that the party leadership and the party caucus, through whatever internal mechanism they have, decided as a whole to say either “we'll have a free vote on this” or “we'll have a whipped vote”.

Presumably, the key point is that the whipped vote, if there is one, is in favour. If one party says they're having a whipped vote against it, then you'll get all those speakers. If we're voting in favour, then many people will choose not to participate in the debate. There'll be no need for them to do so.

The Chair: We're a minute over. Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: I appreciate that.

Mr. Reid, I know that you talked earlier about what's on the naughty list. I don't know if the word “nerd” is unparliamentary, but since it's self-professed on the part of members I'm going to let it slide.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What will remain with me in fact is, among other things, a comment. For me, for a substantial regulation, it's necessary that it be a free vote. At the same time, it makes me wonder about something. Honestly, every legislator....

When you look at what's happening elsewhere in the world, they're all free votes. I hope the MPs here are really okay with partisan votes, because otherwise, people watching us are going to tell us that's why there's cynicism towards politics.

Of course, I welcome a free vote. I also want it to be consensual. I even dare to hope that we could go even further and keep parliamentary tactics and strategies, but in a slightly more....

I went through a 44-hour parliamentary filibuster. That was really something. Going through what we're going through makes no sense to the people who need us.

That was my comment. If you want to respond, you have one minute.

Mr. Scott Reid: All right.

I don't have any comments to make about the processes that are going on right now in Parliament, in the House.

On the question of free votes, some people think that in the Parliament of Canada, all votes are forced votes, that votes are absolutely under the control of the respective parties and that MPs serve only to do whatever is asked of them. I don't think that's the reality.

In a Parliament under the Westminster model, parties have positions determined by conventions. For example, if there's a vote on the budget and the financial package and you're part of the political party that forms the government, you'll vote in favour of those measures. If you're in opposition, on the other hand, you'll vote against them. That's part of our system.

Private members' bills make room for individual ideas. I think free voting in this place is a very important part of our political system here.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms.—

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I know I'm running out of time, but I appreciate my colleague speaking French.

The Chair: Absolutely. Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

[*English*]

Ms. Mathysen, I rolled over your 20 seconds from before, so you will have two minutes and 50 seconds.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Wow. Fancy that.

I just want to double-check something, because I'm not sure. Are we going to be hearing from the House administration on this piece of legislation as well?

The Chair: Currently, that is not scheduled. Of course, the committee can make its own determination on that, Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Okay. I would suggest that, although I wanted to hear from Mr. Reid about the consultations he did, or maybe didn't do, on that with the House administration.

What were the overall feelings, or were there any suggestions that they provided?

Mr. Scott Reid: The wording of the motion changed from.... In my head, it looked a lot simpler than it wound up being.

When you're trying to change the Standing Orders, it's very difficult to write something that's grandiose sounding. You really have to say, "This rule is being tweaked this way and that rule is being tweaked that way," in order to make it fit into the existing set of Standing Orders. That was done with the assistance of the clerks, who understand this stuff so much better than I do. That was how the consultation took place.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I have only one other question. You mentioned before this centralization of power and the role of leaders, House leaders, whips and so on. My concern is that we were discussing rules around harassment. It got to this point where, especially within the House, we can write all the rules we want, but at the end of the day, there's a lot of peer pressure involved and there's a lot of acceptance of how we behave and so on.

Is that the same feeling you have of the Standing Orders? We can change these rules, but there has to be something further.

What would you suggest is that something further to get us to a point where we come to a consensus and we seem to recognize that there are things that are bigger, like a pandemic, so that we can move past this to get to a better place that actually serves Canadians as it's supposed to?

Mr. Scott Reid: I think the most important thing is that people like me, who are trying to change the rules.... You are dealing with an institution that is several hundreds of years old. The Canadian Parliament has roots that go back to 1791, and before that at Westminster for centuries beyond that. People like me understand that we should be making modest adjustments. We're not revolutionaries. There are other places where you can be a revolutionary more effectively.

We're dealing with the Standing Orders. You say I'm a small part of a long continuum or stream. I should keep them as small as possible and let the conventions that are evolving, and generally evolving in the right direction, I believe, on the whole....

We're more inclusive, for example, of mothers and nursing mothers in the House of Commons than was true when I came here a quarter of a century ago. There are a zillion other examples. We have rules on harassment now that we didn't have in the past. I could think of more examples, but I'd run out of time.

I think we're heading in the right direction on our conventions for the most part. We should only adjust on a limited basis through statutory change. That's the kind I'm considering.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Mathysen.

My understanding is that the Conservatives have ceded their time back to the committee.

[Translation]

Mr. Berthold, would you like to ask a question?

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Yes.

The Chair: All right. Excuse me, I misunderstood.

Mr. Luc Berthold: This really won't take long.

The Chair: You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

This is a pretty important topic, so let's see if we can reach a consensus here. I agree with Ms. Mathysen, who suggested that we invite the senior officials of the House of Commons, including the clerk, to a one-hour meeting, to ask them questions about all the implications of Motion M-109.

If everyone agrees, I propose that we ask the clerk of the committee to schedule a one-hour meeting with the clerk of the House, the law clerk and parliamentary counsel of the House and other administration officials. I think it's a good idea, given the changes that may be coming.

• (1155)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I agree, but I also have other witnesses to propose.

The Chair: All right.

[English]

Maybe what we can do here, colleagues—as I'm getting the sense that there is some agreement here—is just save that for the very end, because once Mrs. Romanado gets the floor she has a couple of questions.

Mr. Berthold, we'll come back to that, before Mr. Reid leaves, to just get consensus from the committee that they do, in fact, want to hear...and to go to the committee business aspect of that. We don't need to use your time to do that. We can come back, of course, because I just want to allow for some discussion before we—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, it was only a suggestion, because I thought my NDP colleague's proposal was relevant. We can proceed.

The Chair: I agree. I'm going to give the floor to Ms. Romanado for five minutes, and then we'll decide if we want to invite more witnesses.

[English]

Colleagues, while Mrs. Romanado has the floor, could you actually just give some thought, please, to Monsieur Berthold's suggestions, so that we can very quickly move on that? It will come around quickly.

Mrs. Romanado, you have up to five minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I probably won't take the full five minutes. I just want to get clarity.

Mr. Reid, my colleague mentioned that, at the end of the day, if a whip whips a vote, wouldn't that undo the intent? However, I think that the intent of this motion is to make sure all members are heard or have the opportunity, should they want, to debate an item with respect to the changing of the Standing Orders. It's not, at the end of the day, what the outcome of a vote would be, but that, at least this way, it's not a government being able to limit the debate or people's ability to participate in that debate. That's the intent of this motion. Is that correct?

Mr. Scott Reid: Well, not quite.... Actually, the intent is not that all members be heard. That's why I specifically made the point that unanimous consent is not being sought here, but all recognized parties being sought.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Actually, that's where I was going with this. You mentioned “all recognized parties” when you had debate on this motion. Currently, a recognized party has 12 members. We are moving to 343 after the next election. Do you think that also needs to be reflected?

We also had situations in which there were more people sitting as independents. Therefore, if we go with only recognized parties or a consensus versus unanimous consent—which I can understand—that also limits the ability of smaller parties, then, to have an opportunity to weigh in on that. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Scott Reid: I think that, if you're a very small group, it would be hard to have a significant impact on this debate. We could go for, say, unanimous consent. The reason for not doing that is that, once there is one member who can hold things up, they then have a basis for log-rolling. Is that really what you want?

That's why I mentioned the *liberum veto*. If you want to just go and read about the *liberum veto* online, it was how the Polish parliament was run in the 17th and 18th centuries, and it was not a very effective way of running a government—I'll just say that.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Just before we end, are there any other aspects of this motion that you think we should strengthen to ensure the intent of it is fully realized?

Mr. Scott Reid: Of course, I think it's perfect the way it's written. However, maybe something to think about is that, if you're looking for things to ask witnesses about, you might want to inquire about the way in which opposition day motions and private members' motions are being dealt with, which are (v) and (vi), I think, in the list. They're being treated a little differently from the closure and time allocation items that are simply being put off the table. The clerks might have something interesting to say about that.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Colleagues, I feel like I've returned to second-year political philosophy class today. It was a very fruitful discussion.

I went around the table briefly. There seems to be agreement that we have another meeting on M-109 to invite the House administration and potentially others. However, what I did hear from colleagues is that there is a desire to make sure that Bill C-65 is tended to before we call another meeting on M-109.

I'm looking around. I feel as though head nods are telling me that there's an implied majority here. If colleagues want to vote, we can do that. There's a majority that says yes. Is that clear to everybody?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I'll work with the clerk to make sure that we find time in the calendar. Please make sure that you submit witnesses beyond House administration for that one meeting.

Other than that, Mr. Reid, thank you very much for availing yourself to the committee and for your thoughtful insights today.

Colleagues, we have a couple of witnesses for our next round on-line. We're going to have to briefly suspend in order to transition over. We'll be back in a few minutes for our next hour on Bill C-65.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: What is the deadline for our clerk for witnesses for motion M-109?

The Chair: That's a good question. I'd say it's probably a few weeks away, but we can discuss it after the meeting.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: That's fine.

The Chair: We will suspend the meeting briefly.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

[*English*]

The Chair: Colleagues, welcome back.

I see that we have Mr. Barlow and Ms. Barron here, so welcome to PROC, colleagues.

We are continuing our study on Bill C-65, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act.

The witnesses appearing today are those we had slated to appear last week, but the affairs of the committee made it such that we weren't able to hear from them at that point, and we're going to try that again.

I'd like to welcome, from Apathy is Boring, Samantha Reusch, the executive director. Appearing as an individual, we have Daniel Mulroy, lawyer, who is appearing by video conference. From the Indo-Caribbean Educators Network, we have Peter Deboran, retired principal and member of the steering committee, who is also appearing by video conference.

Each witness will have upwards of five minutes. We'll begin with Ms. Reusch, followed by Mr. Mulroy and Mr. Deboran, to give open statements. We will then go into lines of questioning from members of each political party.

With that, Ms. Reusch, I turn the floor over to you.

Ms. Samantha Reusch (Executive Director, Apathy is Boring): Thank you.

Good afternoon, members of the committee.

My name is Sam Reusch. I am the executive director of Apathy is Boring. Founded in 2004, we're the largest national non-partisan organization that engages young Canadians aged 18 to 34 in our democracy.

We're proud to work with youth from all sides of the political spectrum. It's not about who they vote for but rather that they participate in the democratic process and have their voices heard on the issues that matter most to them, including the economy, housing, equality and affordability.

I'm here today to express support for several amendments included in Bill C-65, while also providing a real-world perspective on how to improve this bill to increase voter turnout and trust in our institutions amongst youth.

First, I want to address the proposed amendments related to on-campus voting. We know from our work across the country that, when young people are given accessible and convenient ways to participate in Canada's democratic process, they're more likely to vote. On-campus polling stations also provide meaningful opportunities for student organizations to engage young electors on campus. Importantly, this sends a powerful message to Canadian youth that their vote matters, something that is essential to reducing motivational barriers to participation.

Second, Apathy is Boring also strongly supports the proposed amendments targeting election interference. Further, we support the latest recommendations by the Chief Electoral Officer that call for expanding the current foreign interference measures to apply at all times.

Deceptive campaigns that manipulate and distort public opinion harm Canada's democracy and must be banned. When hidden resources are used to mislead, divide and push agendas without Canadians' knowledge, Canada's democratic process is undermined and our collective trust in institutions is put at risk. This is a risk that we cannot afford.

Importantly, this is not an issue of freedom of speech. It's a matter of removing the ability of specific actors to deceptively influence our elections directly or to finance those activities furtively. Making disinformation that seeks to undermine or influence our elections illegal and prohibitively costly is a crucial first step to addressing this risk. Youth have a huge stake in preserving our democracy and perhaps especially in our capacity to engage in genuine democratic discourse in our increasingly digital world. Moreover, we must increase awareness of this subject amongst Canadians through transparent and effective oversight and enforcement to underscore the serious nature of safeguarding our elections.

Last, while we commend the work undertaken to date to improve the Canada Elections Act and Canada's democratic process, let me close my remarks by providing a final recommendation to further improve the system under which we collectively operate towards a more inclusive, resilient and informed democracy.

While Bill C-65 directs Elections Canada to further study a three-day voting period, we recommend expanding the scope of this recommendation to weekend voting, as examining both in parallel would be the most efficient use of government resources and could assess the impact in both urban and rural Canada.

Indeed, research suggests that holding elections on weekends could increase voter turnout. Weekend voting addresses a prominent barrier, lack of time, cited by one in four non-voters as the reason they didn't vote in the 2019 election.

This lack of time has only been exacerbated by the cost of living crisis that Canadians are facing. Youth are one of the largest groups of non-voters and, in the most recent survey data, 78% believed that weekend voting would make it easier for them to vote. By prioritizing weekend voting, we would ensure that every citizen has the opportunity to exercise their right to vote, regardless of their schedule or other commitments.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your questions.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Reusch.

Mr. Mulroy, the floor is yours for upwards of five minutes.

Mr. Daniel Mulroy (Lawyer, As an Individual): Thank you.

Good afternoon, committee members.

First, I'd like to thank the committee for the invitation to make today's submissions, and I would give a particular thank you to those who aided in the rescheduling of today.

My name is Daniel Mulroy, I am here in my capacity as a human rights and constitutional lawyer and as a disability rights advocate. I am also here on behalf of my client, Mr. Dean Steacy, to address the accessibility of voting for persons with disabilities.

Through my brief submission, I'll introduce Mr. Steacy and his experience as a disabled voter, as well as the legislative mandate that requires Elections Canada to explore accessible electronic voting options to accommodate disabled Canadians. I will also request that this committee consider telephone voting as a viable and secure means of accommodating and franchising disabled voters.

Mr. Steacy—who intended on being here today but due to accessibility issues with the Zoom link will be viewing through ParIVU—has voted in every provincial and federal election since turning 18. From 1976 through to 2003, he was able to cast his ballot secretly, meaningfully and independently in accordance with his rights guaranteed under section 3 of the charter.

However, in 2003, Mr. Steacy permanently lost sight in both of his eyes. Since losing his sight, he's lost the ability to secretly, meaningfully and independently cast his vote in federal elections. Mr. Steacy's experience is not unique. Arguably, the most fundamental barrier for persons with disabilities is the exclusive reliance on the paper ballot and the unwillingness to adopt solutions based on available, accessible and secure technology. Allowing these barriers to continue puts Canada in violation of human rights, the charter and its international obligations pursuant to article 29 of the

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Steacy is currently in the final stages of launching a charter challenge against the Canada Elections Act, alleging violations of sections 3 and 15 of the charter, as it denies persons with disabilities the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the electoral process and discriminates against disabled electors.

I am here today on his instructions to exhaust all avenues before returning to the courts.

Elections Canada has long recognized the existence of discriminatory barriers in our elections process, and since 1998, it has been aware, one, that technology is essential to accessible voting and, two, that telephone voting is the most viable and secure option.

Parliament has also provided Elections Canada with a clear mandate to explore electronic voting options.

In 2014, section 18.1 of the Canada Elections Act was enacted, requesting that the Chief Electoral Officer devise, test and study an alternative electronic voting process for use in future elections with Parliament's approval. Despite this mandate, no alternative voting process has been tested or proposed for adoption by Parliament, to my knowledge.

Further, in 2018, section 18.1 was amended through the inclusion of subsection 18.1(3), which states, "The Chief Electoral Officer shall develop, obtain or adapt voting technology for use by electors with a disability, and may test the technology for future use in an election." It also added subsection 18.1(4), which provides that voting technology used for the inclusion of disabled electors needs only the approval of the responsible "committees of the Senate and of the House of Commons" for its use in future elections. However, the Chief Electoral Officer has not developed, obtained or adapted any such voting technology nor sought approval for its use in a federal election.

It is unacceptable that removing the major barrier to inclusive, independent and confidential voting by persons with disabilities has not been accomplished, despite the clear mandate handed to the Chief Electoral Officer 10 years ago and the information being available to Elections Canada for the last 25 years.

Telephone voting stands as the most secure, viable and accommodating voting procedure available, and it would represent an enormous step forward for individuals facing informational barriers, literacy barriers and transportation barriers and for those with visual barriers, like Mr. Steacy.

We respectfully ask this committee to review and report on whether Elections Canada has fulfilled its legislative mandate under section 18.1 and to report on the efficacy of telephone voting as an accommodation that will enable persons with disabilities to exercise their democratic rights on an accessible and equal basis.

Thank you very much.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Mulroy.

Mr. Deboran, the floor is yours for up to five minutes.

Mr. Peter Deboran (Principal (retired), Member of the Steering Committee, Indo-Caribbean Educators Network): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and everyone. Thank you so much for your kind reinvitation to present to you today on behalf of ICEN, the Indo-Caribbean Educators Network. I'm here about the concerns of ICEN vis-à-vis our letter in support of amendments to Bill C-65.

As you are all well aware, Canadian society has come a long way in recognizing the basic human rights of each of us, starting with the legal status of women, Canadians of African heritage, indigenous rights, queer rights, gender-expression rights and so on. As we have progressed, there has been a focus on recognizing peoples' lived experiences as a way to, if not eliminate, then at least ameliorate the effects of discrimination and exclusion of marginalized individuals and groups of people in our society.

Despite this, there's little information available about the peoples of the Caribbean diaspora in Canada. We know about specific countries there—for example, Jamaica or Guyana or Guadeloupe—but what is not known is that these countries comprise highly multicultural populations and that peoples on the subcontinent of India before partition make up the largest or the second-largest ethnic group in many of these countries. This is due to the colonial expansion of the English, French and Dutch empires, for example, which forced the migration of Indian workers, starting from the very early 1800s to the early 1900s. These peoples have contributed immensely to the cultures, languages, foods, politics, economies and the arts of each of the countries they were brought to.

In Trinidad, for example, where my family is originally from, the largest ethnic group is actually of Indian ancestry. The second-largest is of African ancestry. The culture is infused with strains of Portuguese, Spanish, Chinese, Syrian, Lebanese, Jewish and the last of the indigenous peoples, running through the heart and the history of the peoples of this island, which, for decades, was known as the most multicultural country in the world. That honour was bestowed on another country in the 1970s, and we're all, I believe, the richer for it.

These hybridized peoples of Trinidad have successfully exported calypso; soca, a blend of African and Indian musical traditions; chutney; and delicious curried chicken rotis and doubles to the rest of the world. It is my hope that, if you have never tried a good Trini roti, you will find a way to do it soon.

That said, the ancient country they came from, India, has a cultural and religious tradition that has been dated objectively back as far as 8,000 years ago. At its height, around the years 1500 to 3000 BCE, it produced vast works of literature, including the world's longest epic poem, the *Mahabharata*, dwarfing other epic poems hailing from Greece and Rome.

Prior to European colonization, India was the richest country on earth for well over a thousand years, with a GDP comprising almost one quarter of the world's GDP combined. Therefore, it will not surprise you to know that the highly developed cultural and religious traditions of classical India have endured in the practices of its peoples wherever and however they went. The Indian diaspora, whether in Mauritius, Singapore, South Africa and throughout the Caribbean, has contributed to and influenced the countries it has found itself in via its foods, music, dress and religions.

Hinduism, a religion that does not seek to convert, is the third-largest religion in the world after Christianity and Islam. This is why we find it necessary to entreat you today. Although we Indians from the Caribbean are a minority group within the Caribbean and more so in Canada, we wish to share with you that Diwali, a major holy day, is practised, observed and celebrated by Hindus in every country they have shared their culture with.

Diwali, known as the festival of lights worldwide, is nationally recognized and celebrated across countries such as Trinidad and Guyana in the Caribbean, in Mauritius, Malaysia and Singapore, and in India, Nepal and other countries across the world. In other words, the whole country celebrates Diwali, not only people who identify as belonging to the Hindu tradition.

Diwali holds immense significance for the Hindu, Jain and Sikh communities and much of the Buddhist community, and symbolizes the triumphs of good over evil, liberation over impetuosity and insight over ignorance. Diwali also marks the Hindu new year for some communities, thus making it a blessed occasion for new beginnings. In northern India, it is usually a five-day celebration. It is a time for families and friends to come together in celebration, reflection and prayer.

• (1220)

To provide some context of ICEN's involvement, I wish to share that—

The Chair: Mr. Deboran, I'm sorry to interrupt. As much as I think the testimony you're providing is quite fruitful and helpful, we are over time. I would ask you to just come to the conclusion of your remarks, please, sir.

Mr. Peter Deboran: Absolutely.

In other words, what I'm trying to say is that we are here on behalf of the many people who celebrate within their cultures across this country of ours. Quite frankly, we have found in the past that our electoral days have been set on Diwali. For example, in 2022, there was consternation across the whole of southern Ontario, with hundreds of thousands of communities unable to actually go to the voting process because they had to choose between their faith and their civic duties.

We are saying that, while Canada is justifiably proud of its tradition as a multicultural country, we ask all of you, we urge all of you, to look to set future dates for elections with a sensitivity and a respect to the many thousands of Hindus and other multicultural communities who will be observing Diwali in 2025. As you move forward in the future, please take a look at other religious traditions that are just as important in our multicultural society as those who practise the Christian and Jewish faiths.

Thank you so much for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Duncan, the floor will be yours for six minutes.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being with us this afternoon.

Mr. Deboran, I want to ask a question. We're always learning new things, and you gave us more details about Diwali. You mentioned the proposal of moving the election date back a week, from October 20 to October 27, which did get and has gotten, rightfully so, a lot of negative feedback, not on the Diwali aspect so much as what is seen as moving the election back a week for pension guarantees for MPs who would miss it otherwise by a day.

I just want to ask this for you to be on the record. In order to not conflict with Diwali next year and the fixed election date, the only option is not just to move it back one week to October 27, as was proposed by the NDP and Liberals. In fact, the election date could be moved and advanced ahead to not conflict with Diwali and the celebrations that go on.

One week before would be Monday, October 13, which would be Thanksgiving. I think we would agree that would not be an ideal time. If I were to say Monday, October 6, would that be a date that would not conflict and be appropriate as well?

• (1225)

Mr. Peter Deboran: Absolutely. The main concern for many of the thousands of people who are conflicted by this is that, like I said, on the one hand we have a country that purports to say we are multicultural in respect to all cultures, faiths and traditions, yet on the other hand, there was this arbitrary date that was chosen. I believe, yes, October 6 would work very well.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I appreciate that. One of the things I think about Diwali, too, is it being a multi-day celebration. I know in my part of eastern Ontario, I always have an interesting Thanksgiving weekend, where on the Saturday I have a Thanksgiving meal with my family, and then I go to a large Diwali celebration at the Benson Centre in Cornwall.

I appreciate your clarification that the election date did not need to move back a week in order to accommodate what you have requested. In fact, the fixed date could be moved ahead to any other time besides October 20. I appreciate your clarifying that for us.

Ms. Reusch, I want to ask—

Mr. Peter Deboran: I come from a multi-faith family, so like you, we also celebrate Thanksgiving as well as Diwali.

Mr. Eric Duncan: It's a busy weekend for all of us.

Ms. Reusch, in a bit of a different angle, I want to ask you about youth being involved in our democratic process. You mentioned and highlighted in your opening statement about voting, which is obviously very key—getting younger people to cast a ballot.

One of the other things I think is interesting and hasn't been discussed or raised too much yet in our deliberations on Bill C-65 is young people working for Elections Canada and participating

through employment, if they're students or looking for part-time work or extra hours.

One of the things I want to raise or flag and maybe get your initial opinion on is clause 31, which is proposed subsection 171(2) of the bill, which would be adding two extra advance poll days. I'll also ask Mr. Mulroy to respond as well, in his work as a lawyer for disability rights. This is regarding young people, those with disabilities and seniors.

Having four days of advance polls now requires somebody to work 48 hours over four days. The polls are open 12 hours per day. By going now to six, which is the way it's written and if Elections Canada doesn't change its employment rules, we're asking a young person, a person with disabilities or a senior to work 72 hours over six days, plus their travel time each day, plus set-up and take down, plus the training.

Do you see that if we don't get some change, or I think what's been done before, we're going to see young people not participate by being able to work the elections and participate in that aspect of our democracy?

Ms. Samantha Reusch: I don't have an easy answer to this question. I know it's something that we're working with Elections Canada on to recruit more young people to work during the elections. I hadn't considered the time frame of the actual working hours. I'd be happy to submit a longer response in writing. My initial thought is that perhaps there could be additional recruitment done, but I'm not sure about the exact details.

Mr. Eric Duncan: That's one of the things we should get clarification on, because if we're asking for that requirement, as what's been done with the four days, and there's no change to the six, we might see all demographics, not just young people, saying they can't do 72 hours over six days, plus the other requirements. We face further challenges to voting accessibility if there are not enough poll workers in local communities and neighbourhoods to do that.

Mr. Mulroy, from your end—and your work for disability rights, and your work as a lawyer—from an employment perspective as well, with Elections Canada, would that be a flag to you? Should we be getting some clarification or details from Elections Canada on how it would handle this advance poll day change?

Mr. Daniel Mulroy: It's certainly outside of my expertise, but you've raised an interesting question in that it may. Getting more information on that would likely be beneficial.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I appreciate that.

Mr. Daniel Mulroy: From an accessibility perspective, the more days that an individual is able to vote is certainly better. The system that's being purported is in-person paper ballots, which still has a number of barriers for persons with disabilities.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Just recognizing my time, I'd be interested in any comments that the witnesses would have in writing afterwards on this. I call it an undercurrent with some of these bills, where we have good intentions—I'm not saying they are not on adding advance poll days—but we need to make sure we have sufficient election workers. We need to ensure there are polls in neighbourhoods that are close to where people live and are accessible in that format. Any comments you may have on the employment side and the accessibility of polls close to home would be much appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

Mrs. Romanado, the floor will be yours for six minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

I want to follow up on something that my colleague, MP Duncan, mentioned. He mentioned in his line of questioning an advance to the date of October 13. Obviously, we cannot as it is Thanksgiving, and Monday, October 6, is actually Sukkot, a Jewish high holiday. The week prior is September 29, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, and there are municipal elections in Newfoundland and Labrador. The week prior to that is Rosh Hashanah, and September 1 is Labour Day. I've looked at the length of the campaign. It has to be between 36 days and 50 days. Mathematically, I looked at all of the Mondays in the fall. Unfortunately, there are many Mondays that have conflicts.

Further to that, my question is actually for Ms. Reusch. I had the great pleasure of being on the electoral reform committee back in 2016. Apathy is Boring presented to us at that time. It was on October 3, 2016, in Montreal, and Carolyn Loutfi presented to us. We heard from her that—and you mentioned something along these lines—if youth don't vote in their first two elections upon eligibility, it's very likely they will not continue to vote. At that time, it was suggested that, perhaps, we should look at piloting online voting. You didn't mention that in your remarks. You did mention the weekend voting, which I'll get to.

It's not something we did recommend at that time for many reasons. We now see a lot more with respect to foreign interference in elections, and the use of cyber-attacks. What are your thoughts on that? You didn't mention it. I just want to know—has there been a change in your position on that?

Ms. Samantha Reusch: We don't have a formal position on online voting at the moment. It's something that, to my knowledge, hasn't been explored by Elections Canada up to this point, so it feels like something that's quite far away. I know some provinces are piloting various methods. Similar to you, obviously, they are ensuring that the elections are secure, and that Canadian electors have faith in the results. How the results are counted is paramount for us, given that we've seen, especially since 2016, a declining trust in our elections.

We have a fear that a declining trust could extend to electoral administration, as we've seen in other parts of the world. That would be a primary consideration that I would just name. Any study that's

done should also consider online voting and other forms of ballots or voting

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'm going to build on that. I just returned from the Halifax International Security Forum, where we discussed a lot about disinformation, misinformation, the use of AI and the concerns about deepfakes. We already have a situation where citizens are very wary about what they're seeing online: Is it, in fact, true; is it not?

Do you think that Bill C-65 goes far enough in terms of preventing the use of deepfakes? We heard from the Chief Electoral Officer who expressed one concern. It's one thing to have a candidate or someone pretending to be a candidate, but it's another thing to have a voice-over or a video-over of a candidate saying something that the candidate actually did not say.

What are your thoughts on that?

Ms. Samantha Reusch: I think it's a difficult question to answer because, of course, I think everyone thinks they're capable of spotting disinformation, misinformation, deepfakes and all those things. In all likelihood, we're probably way worse at it than we think, so our level of confidence is perhaps making it more challenging for us to recognize these things.

It's a little bit outside the scope of my expertise, in that I'm not an expert in AI or deepfakes, but I will say that I do think that the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations are good ones and that they should certainly be considered by this committee.

We do support the recommendations made, certainly, around strengthening the legal framework around the regulations on foreign interference, and I think that will also make a big difference in this case.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: My last question is on weekend voting. I'm looking at the chair, and I think I have some time.

I know that at the time of the study on electoral reform, there were a lot of concerns for people, especially young people, who work on weekends. They go to school during the week, so weekends are their only opportunity to work to be able to pay for their studies.

We also heard from gig workers, people who work in the retail industry and so on and so forth, as well as people who work Monday to Friday, nine to five, saying that the only days they have off are Saturday and Sunday. They have to do the groceries, the laundry, clean the house and so on, so they actually prefer to keep it on the Monday.

Is this still, in your experience, the feeling that you're hearing? Do you have any data to support why we should move to weekend voting?

• (1235)

Ms. Samantha Reusch: Thank you for that question.

As I said, in our experience and in the research that we've done, we found that almost 80% of young people felt that weekend voting would make it easier for them to participate. Everyone has different circumstances. There are many young people who work, as you say, Monday to Friday, nine to five, and having two days as opposed to one, I think, is beneficial.

I know there are some challenges with three-day voting, particularly around polling stations, leasing and various administrative elements that are a little bit outside of my scope, but I think it's important that we study and consider the different options, which would include weekend voting.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Would you be able to table with this committee any of the research that you have done with respect to that? That would be very helpful.

Ms. Samantha Reusch: Absolutely.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thanks, Mrs. Romanado.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to refer to quite a bit of information. I'll take a look at the whole situation.

I voted for the first time in 1995, and now I'm with the Bloc Québécois. That says a lot. It's very important to have a good experience for your first and second vote. I couldn't agree more.

That said, there's also human behaviour. Let's face it, when time is limited to go and vote, compared to when you have time to go tomorrow or the day after, the situation is different. Sometimes, we find that when there's plenty of time to do it, it doesn't necessarily mean that more people will go.

Besides, here in Canada, voting measures are extremely voter-friendly when you look at what's happening in municipalities, such as in Quebec. We need to find legal and impartial accommodation measures so that the Chief Electoral Officer can do his job.

I was hearing about voice recognition earlier. I'll ask him if that's an option. I think we've devoted enough study hours to cyber-attacks and fake news, among other things. We're very skittish.

That said, I realize that we're going to run out of resources soon. Earlier, my colleague said that we need more time, but that young people need to work, and that those who don't work could work. In the end, there's no winning recipe.

I find it interesting that we're discussing this together. Beyond what may be hidden—I'm insinuating that we're changing the date because it changes things in some people's pockets, but I'm not going there—at the end of the day, we have a Chief Electoral Officer who is exceptional in this democratic context, and we must have confidence in him. As in Quebec and elsewhere, he can very well postpone the election date. Why is it always Monday? If Monday is Thanksgiving, it'll be Tuesday. There's no winning solution.

That said, I think we're opening the door very wide because, yes, there are federal, provincial and municipal elections. Of course, there will be some overlap, but are we doing this on purpose? I think the Chief Electoral Officer has all the expertise to make this choice. What do you think?

[*English*]

Ms. Samantha Reusch: When it comes to selecting the election date itself, yes, having confidence in a non-partisan Chief Electoral Officer is obviously ideal. I know from experience, having worked with them, that they put a lot of thought and time into thinking through exactly how to administer the election in a way that is open to as many people as possible.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Mulroy, has the possibility of using voice recognition with biometrics been considered? We know that many financial institutions use this method.

I lived with a father who was in a vulnerable situation and needed support. For me, this is important. There are solutions rather than making big changes. Is voice recognition a possibility that has been analyzed?

● (1240)

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Mulroy: Thank you for your question.

The reliance on telephone voting comes from a 1998 report from Elections Canada that KPMG authored, saying that was the most secure and accessible means of voting. That's the reliance.

A colleague brought up the efficacy of voting online, and there are obvious concerns with security when we look to wholesale online voting. Telephone voting for disabled Canadians is not quite the same wholesale change to the current format.

In terms of the current means for voting for Mr. Steacy, for example, through the special voting procedures, he is able to use a Braille template or have a third party cast his vote for him. Mr. Steacy has relied on a glucose meter and has lost sensation in the tips of his fingers. Unfortunately, he's not able to use Braille. Obviously, there are accessibility issues in relying on Braille. If he were able to use Braille, he could not independently confirm that his vote was cast or not spoiled, for example. Relying on a third party, he wholly loses the ability to confirm the accuracy of his ballot.

While there are certainly things to explore in telephone voting—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I'm sorry to interrupt, but there are only 30 seconds left.

For one thing, I'd really like to receive the KPMG report you drew on.

I'd also like to know, in terms of the Chief Electoral Officer's impartiality and now that we've heard plenty of recommendations, if you also believe that he should be the one to choose the change.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Mulroy: That's a difficult question to answer. I would say that the mandate was clearly handed to the Chief Electoral Officer some time ago, and there's been quite a failure on the part of Elections Canada to fulfill that mandate. I think I would leave my answer there.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

[English]

Ms. Barron, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome to the witnesses who are here today. Thank you for the important testimony you've provided to date.

Ms. Reusch, I'm going to start with you.

In your opening statement, you talked about the importance of genuine democratic discourse in our increasingly digital world. I'm wondering if you can provide an example or two of what it is that you're hearing from young adults and youth about what they're experiencing online.

Could you give us a bit of a picture of what that looks like?

Ms. Samantha Reusch: Yes. Thank you for that question.

It's very interesting. We participated in a study on polarization with the Public Policy Forum a few years ago and did a number of focus groups with young people about how they were feeling about online discourse and how it either helped or didn't help their sense of democratic participation or their desire to participate. The prevailing feedback we got was that it just made them feel disconnected from.... They were confused about their own opinions, disconnected from other citizens and uncertain about our institutions.

I think the general confusion and swirl and anxiety of engaging online created really difficult circumstances for them to assess, make decisions and understand how people they respect and care about think about things. It made discourse more difficult. A lot of conversations are happening online in an environment that is incredibly polarized and increasingly extreme. Just generally, as you're trying to figure out your own political orientation, it's not conducive to good, civic discourse.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much.

Was it your sense that this also impacted voter turnout?

Ms. Samantha Reusch: In terms of barriers to voting, we know that there are access barriers, which we've discussed a little bit today. Those are with respect to electors with disabilities. On the other side, there are the motivational barriers that keep people from getting to the polling stations. A lack of trust in institutions can be a major one. We hear these things over and over across thousands of conversations: My vote isn't going to make a difference. Elected officials don't care about me. The parties are the same.

There's the sense that they don't trust or don't feel part of that system. I think that can certainly be aggravated by the way the discourse takes place online.

• (1245)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much. I think it reinforces the importance of some of the components of this bill as well.

Mr. Mulroy, I'm sorry that you weren't able to provide your testimony at the last meeting, along with Mr. Steacy. I'm happy that arrangements were made for you to be here today.

I'm wondering if you could speak a bit more high level, of course, in a minute or less, about how telephone voting really works. What does that look like for somebody who wants to cast their ballot through telephone voting, if it's available?

Mr. Daniel Mulroy: Certainly. I'll leave the fine details to people who are far more educated on that than I am.

Individuals who would qualify for telephone voting would be individuals who have barriers to polling stations. These would be individuals like Mr. Steacy, who have visual impairments and cannot meaningfully cast their ballot on a paper ballot. What's been proposed is that they would receive a verified code. They would be able to call and cast their ballot via phone.

Today most individuals, including those in low socio-economic positions, have access to telephones, so it's quite an accessible means for casting a ballot. You would be able to phone a designated phone number, verify who you are, verify your identity and then cast a ballot for the individual you choose to vote for.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much.

Mr. Mulroy, do you have any sense of what is creating the barriers to being able to move forward with something like this? Are you hearing any information that I'm not as to why this has not been put into place so far?

Mr. Daniel Mulroy: I haven't a clue. It seems that the data has been there for over 25 years now. The mandate has been clear to the Chief Electoral Officer for decades. Something needs to be done to make voting more accessible for Canadians. There's been an abject failure to do so.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Mr. Mulroy.

Do you think the lack of options for people living with disabilities to be able to cast their ballot in an autonomous way, in such a way that they are confident in their ballot, is a barrier to voter turnout for people living with disabilities?

Mr. Daniel Mulroy: Without question it is. The data also supports that there's a significant gap in voter turnout for persons with disabilities for precisely the reasons you've listed.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much.

Ms. Reusch, you talked about the importance of on-campus voting. I'm wondering if you could expand on that a little more. I've heard from students about not only having the accessible option for them to be able to cast their ballot while on campus but also seeing the community coming on campus to participate in this very important democratic process of casting their ballot.

I'm wondering if you could share a bit more around how important it is that we see on-campus ballots offered consistently every time there is an election happening.

Ms. Samantha Reusch: I definitely agree with those assessments. I'll actually add one of the barriers that we see with students in particular. As was mentioned previously, voting in your first two elections can set a habit for lifelong participation. It's a really key time to get voters voting in their first election. For students who are studying away from home for the first time, it's often a big change in their lives. They're likely living away from home for the first time. There are some unique barriers there around not being certain which riding they should vote in or which one they're registered in, whether it's at home with mom and dad or in their new home. They may not receive a voter information card for that reason. They may not have their parents there to remind them.

Adding these on-campus polling stations allows for that community to spring up around them. It allows them to vote in the riding they're registered in, which could or could not be the riding they're residing in. It at least provides the resources to help them figure that out and allows them to cast their ballot and exercise their charter rights in that way.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Barron.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Chair, I'll be moving the following motion:

That, given that the committee has learned that staff from the Prime Minister's Office and the Office of the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs met with NDP party representatives, representatives from the PCO, and the Chief Electoral Officer on January 25, 2024 on matters relating to Bill C-65, and that the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, along with his parliamentary secretary and staff from his office and the parliamentary secretary's office met with NDP party representatives, an NDP member of Parliament, representatives from the PCO, and the Chief Electoral Officer on March 30, 2024 on matters relating to Bill C-65, the committee:

a) order the office of the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs and the PMO to provide the committee with all of the dates on which any representatives from the Liberal Party, including party officials, ministers, parliamentary secretaries, minister's office staff, and members of Parliament met with any representatives from the NDP, including party officials, and members of Parliament on matters relating to Bill C-65, and the names and titles of the individuals who attended those meetings;

b) order the production of any documents under the control of the PCO, PMO, any minister's office, and Elections Canada, including any documents used as briefing materials in any of those meetings, and any records of conversations, including emails, text messages, or any other form of communication, about those meetings, and any records of discussions that took place at those meetings and/or decisions that were made at those meetings, and that these documents are to be provided to the clerk with no redactions within one week of the adoption of this motion; and

c) invite Daniel Blaikie, former member of Parliament for Elmwood—Transcona and former democratic reform critic for the NDP and a co-author of Bill C-65, to appear before the committee on its study of Bill C-65.

• (1250)

The Chair: Okay.

Colleagues, I'm going to just very briefly suspend because I imagine members do not have a copy of this at the moment, certainly not in both official languages.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, I don't think you received a copy of the motion. Is that right?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I haven't received anything.

The Chair: I think it's the same for Ms. Fortier and Mrs. Romanado.

[*English*]

Colleagues, I'm going to suspend briefly.

Witnesses, I'm going to forewarn you that I imagine this unfortunately is going to potentially take a couple of minutes, and I do not have the ability to extend the meeting today. Bear with us, but there is a possibility that we may unfortunately not have any time remaining for you.

Colleagues, I'm suspending in order to allow for the distribution of the motion in both official languages.

• (1250) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1250)

The Chair: Colleagues, my understanding is that members now have a copy of the motion presented by Mr. Cooper in both official languages.

Mr. Cooper retains the floor, and I'll turn it back over to him.

• (1255)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I put forward this motion given what we learned at this committee, namely that the NDP met with the minister, officials in the minister's office, the PCO, the PMO and the Chief Electoral Officer on at least two occasions regarding the drafting of Bill C-65, which has been held up by the Liberals as an elections bill. It turns out that it is really a pensions bill disguised as an elections bill, because buried within this so-called elections bill is a clause that would secure the pensions of soon-to-be-defeated Liberal MPs and, I might add, soon-to-be-defeated NDP MPs.

The situation the Prime Minister faces is that he is the most unpopular Prime Minister in more than 30 years. Canadians are tired of this corrupt Liberal government, and he knows it. Liberal MPs know it. The problem they have is that the Prime Minister must call an election by October 20, 2025. That means the soon-to-be-defeated Liberal MPs elected in 2019 won't qualify for their pensions.

What does the Minister of Democratic Institutions do? He sneaks eight laws into this bill that push the date of the next election back by a week, under the guise of a conflict with Diwali. Guess what. By moving the election back by one week, suddenly the soon-to-be-defeated Liberal MPs will qualify for their pensions. It is why this bill came to be known as the “loser Liberal pension protection act”. It is, I must say, about as cynical and dishonest as it gets from this cynical, dishonest and corrupt Liberal government. While this bill has become known as the “loser Liberal pension protection act”, it seems it might be better known as the “loser NDP-Liberal pension protection act”, given the role that we learned the NDP played in drafting this legislation.

When the minister was here, he had an opportunity to clarify exactly how many times he met behind closed doors with NDP party officials, Daniel Blaikie and other NDP members of Parliament to devise this scheme to pad the pockets of soon-to-be-defeated Liberal and NDP MPs. The minister refused to answer.

Very simply, Mr. Chair, when the minister, NDP MPs and officials in the PMO, the PCO and so on meet behind closed doors to cynically and dishonestly concoct this scheme to pad their pensions, Canadians deserve transparency. There must be transparency. That is what this motion provides for. It requires the minister and the Prime Minister's Office to disclose how many meetings were held to produce any communications surrounding the discussions that led to this pensions bill disguised as an elections bill, and to hear from the co-author of this bill, former NDP MP Daniel Blaikie. It's a common-sense motion.

• (1300)

As the Prime Minister often liked to say, sunshine is the best disinfectant. Well, this will provide a lot of sunshine on what is a very dark and cynical attempt to pad the pockets of Liberal and NDP MPs.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Cooper.

Colleagues, we are at one o'clock and we are out of resources.

Mr. Eric Duncan: We can call the question.

The Chair: I'm going to move adjourn at this point.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Could we not call the question? There are no other speakers. I pulled my name. If we take one minute just to call the question, I think that would be worthwhile.

The Chair: I'm looking around to see if there are any colleagues who want to speak to this.

Ms. Barron.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: If I have some things to say on this, do we have the time for me to speak to it? This is what I'm trying to figure out.

The Chair: No, we don't.

Just to be clear here, I'm going to move to adjourn the meeting. We don't have time and we don't have resources to get into a longer debate. If the meeting is adjourned, we would have to revisit this if a member wanted to reintroduce the motion and then have a vote at that later date. If there's nobody left on the speaking list right now, then we would have time for that vote.

My sense is that you're indicating that you do want to speak, which we don't have time for now, meaning that we will adjourn. We will not have a vote because there will still be a speaker on the list, which would be you.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think it's only fair that I be added to the speaking list.

The Chair: Okay.

In that case, we cannot go to a vote as we have speakers who want to speak to the motion. However, we don't have resources to continue the meeting, so I'm going to move to adjourn the meeting.

Thank you, colleagues.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>