



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

PROC • NUMBER 070 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, April 18, 2013

—
Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Thursday, April 18, 2013

• (1105)

[English]

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

Committee, this is a great change. We're not going to talk at all about redistribution today, but we will later.

For this hour we have our favourite special guest. Speaker Scheer is here today with Madam O'Brien, and we're always happy when they come to visit us. Thank you for coming.

We're going to let Speaker Scheer start with a bit of a statement on estimates, and he'll introduce his guests as we meet them.

Speaker, please, the floor is yours.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Speaker of the House of Commons): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's a great pleasure to be here once again to present the House of Commons main estimates for 2013-14 and the supplementary estimates for 2012-13.

It's my pleasure to be here today along with the Clerk, Audrey O'Brien, and our chief financial officer, Mark Watters. We also have some others from the House administration team with us today: Stéphan Aubé, chief information officer; Marc Bosc, deputy clerk; Richard Denis, deputy law clerk and parliamentary counsel; Pierre Parent, chief human resources officer; and Kevin Vickers, our Sergeant-at-Arms.

The main estimates for 2013-14 include cumulative reductions resulting from the House of Commons strategic and operating review, along with a sizeable reduction related to temporary funding. As you would expect, the increases that are accounted for were carefully reviewed by the Board of Internal Economy.

The main estimates for 2013-14 total \$428,771,000. This represents a decrease of 3.85% compared to the 2012-13 main estimates funding levels.

[Translation]

For reference purposes, you have received a document outlining the year-over-year changes between 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. I will provide an overview of each line item along four major themes: budgets for members, House officers and presiding officers; House administration; strategic and operating review; and employee benefit plans.

To start, I would like to speak to the funding of \$400,000 that is required to accommodate the special requirements of members. You will remember that we discussed this item in November, when I was here to present the supplementary estimates (B).

In June 2012, the Board of Internal Economy determined that as of fiscal year 2013-2014, the House administration will include the funding for the special requirements of members in its annual main estimates. This is in order to streamline the funding process and reduce the frequency of supplementary estimates requests.

You will agree that it is essential that all members of the House of Commons be afforded the required resources so that they may fulfill their parliamentary functions. We must also ensure that special requirements of members are adequately considered so that they are not inhibited in the performance of their duties.

[English]

Next, further to a board decision, you will note an annual budget decrease of \$5,000 for the termination of the payment of the annual accommodation allowances for the Speaker and Deputy Speaker. This is directly related to a question that came out of this committee on one of the previous visits I made.

Our next item also reflects a budgetary reduction. This reduction of \$600,000 is further to a statutory pension adjustment to the members of Parliament retirement compensation arrangements account. The cost to the House of Commons for contribution to members' pension plans is determined and managed by Treasury Board based on actuarial calculations. This adjustment is required to reflect the current Treasury Board estimated contributions to this pension account.

As per Treasury Board policy, with respect to members' pension accounts, regular actuarial reviews are conducted by the chief actuary of the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions in order to assess these accounts and adjust contributions as required.

Now I would like to cover a few items relating to the House administration. First of all, the main estimates allocated an additional \$3 million in compensation for House administration employees. In keeping with the Expenditure Restraint Act, there had been a freeze on funding for salaries from 2010-11 to 2012-13. With the expiration of this freeze, the Board of Internal Economy has approved this funding for 2013-14, which will benefit unrepresented employees, as well as employees within protective services, the cleaning services group, the technical group, and the law group.

[Translation]

Next, the main estimates account for temporary funding for two parliamentary conferences: the 40th Annual Session of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie and the 11th Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region. Both of these funding decisions were taken by the Board of Internal Economy, further to a recommendation by the Joint Interparliamentary Council.

Funding will be covered in the usual manner, with 30% being paid by the Senate and 70% being paid by the House of Commons.

As such, the 40th Annual Session of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie requires temporary funding of \$42,000 for 2013-2014. The assembly will be held in Ottawa in July of next year.

As you may know, the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie is an international assembly comprised of member sections representing parliaments and interparliamentary organizations from around the world. The annual session serves as the principal venue for members to express their views on parliamentary and political issues. The agenda is set based on the priorities announced during the Summit of La Francophonie and the activities of other groups of La Francophonie.

[English]

Additionally, the 11th Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region requires temporary funding of \$35,000 for 2013-14. The event will be held in Whitehorse in October 2014. The Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region is a biannual conference with representatives from the eight Arctic countries: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, the United States, and the European Parliament.

Let us now move on to the funding of \$22,000 that is required for an increase to the page's remuneration under the House of Commons page program. In December 2010, the Board of Internal Economy approved permanent annual increases to the compensation for pages that are equal to the average increases in tuition fees at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University. We are fortunate to have some of the best and brightest young Canadians participating in the page program each year. By linking their pay to the tuition rates, we ensure they remain fairly compensated for their valuable work and they avoid potential financial difficulties should tuition rates continue to rise. For fiscal year 2013-14, the annual compensation will increase by \$477, reaching \$13,048.

• (1110)

[Translation]

The next line item shows a reduction of \$2.8 million for the 127th General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. These were temporary funds for 2012-2013 for the IPU conference, which was held, with great success, last October in Quebec City.

Let us turn now to the reductions that are being achieved as a result of the House of Commons' Strategic and Operating Review. We did have a discussion on this exercise when we met in November. You will remember that the board approved this savings and reduction strategy in March 2012 and that it will see spending decrease by over \$30 million, or nearly 7% of the overall budget.

[English]

You'll also remember that the 2012-13 supplementary estimates (B) contain a reduction of \$7.4 million related to the strategic operating review from 2012-13. These main estimates include the reduction of \$7.4 million from 2012-13, as well as a reduction of \$9.4 million for 2013-14.

Throughout this process, every effort is being made to minimize the impacts on services to members, while also minimizing the impacts on employees of the House administration.

The reductions for both fiscal years are being achieved through reductions to House officers' budgets and operational efficiencies, reductions for committees, parliamentary associations, parliamentary exchanges, and cost savings and reductions for the House administration.

I will now briefly highlight the major reductions.

As we saw in November with the supplementary estimates (B), the board approved an annual reduction of \$600,000 to House officers' budgets, which represents a \$1.2 million saving for these main estimates.

[Translation]

Additionally, effective April 1, 2013, substantial travel savings will be achieved by requiring the use of flight passes for eligible business class travel and increased use of low-fare economy travel.

Further operational efficiencies will be achieved through a variety of initiatives. You are familiar with the savings that are being achieved through the reduction of printing of parliamentary publications. Efficiencies will also be attained through such initiatives as the renegotiation of contracts for wireless services. Depending on the service provider, the House administration has been able to renegotiate contracts in order to offer new, customized voice and data plans that better reflect the needs of users at reduced costs.

[English]

Secondly, the reductions for committees, parliamentary associations, and parliamentary exchanges will total \$3.4 million, with \$2.6 million for 2012-13 and \$700,000 for 2013-14. These reductions are in line with measures taken by members of parliamentary committees and associations, as well as by participants in parliamentary exchanges. They will continue their ongoing efforts to limit spending and find efficiencies.

Finally, reductions for the House administration total \$6.3 million, of which \$3.6 million is from 2012-13 and \$2.7 million is for 2013-14. These reductions are being achieved through a combination of budget reductions, administrative operational efficiencies, attrition, a limited number of workforce adjustment situations, and the elimination of some vacant positions. In the event that service delivery changes impact House administration employees, the House administration has a workforce adjustment policy in place to help facilitate continued employment for permanent employees and ensure the fair treatment of employees.

[Translation]

The final item that is included in these main estimates is a reduction of \$452,000 for the employee benefit plans. This is a non-discretionary statutory expense that is in accordance with Treasury Board directives.

Effective April 1 of this year, Treasury Board adjusted the annual rate from 17.6 percent to 17.4 percent.

Employee benefit plan contributions cover costs to the employer for the public service superannuation plan, the Canada pension plan and the Quebec pension plan, death benefits and the employment insurance account.

[English]

This concludes my overview of the House of Commons 2013-14 main estimates. I am confident you will agree that these financial estimates aptly represent the House of Commons' fiscal responsibility and commitment to cost savings.

We have focused these discussions on the main estimates; however, I will briefly mention that the House of Commons supplementary estimates (C) for 2012-13 included funding for the estimated cashout of accumulated severance pay for House of Commons employees for 2012-13, which is partially offset by reductions resulting from the reprofiling of funds from 2012-13 into 2013-14.

At this time I'd be happy to answer any questions this committee may have.

• (1115)

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

Mr. Lukiwski, you're first, for seven minutes.

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

Good morning, Speaker Scheer.

Madame O'Brien, it's good to see you again.

My first question is about something not directly contained in the main estimates, but something that the Board of Internal Economy has dealt with. I refer to a memorandum that was sent out from the Board of Internal Economy on March 5 of this year, which in part states, under the subheading "Restricted Employees and Contractors", that effective immediately members, House officers, and research officers are not permitted to hire political party executives for employment in contracting services.

I'm assuming this is a result of a controversy that surfaced a number of months ago with respect to Gilles Duceppe, the former leader of the Bloc Québécois, in which he was accused of having a party executive on his House of Commons payroll. Since this memorandum has come out and it explicitly states that from now on, going forward, political members, House officers, leaders, etc., are not allowed to do what Mr. Duceppe did in the past, are there any plans from the Board of Internal Economy, or from Parliament for that matter, to try to recover funds paid out to a party executive from the Bloc Québécois' House of Commons budget?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: As you may be aware, the Board of Internal Economy reached a conclusion on this particular question and considers the matter closed.

I can tell you that on the subject of employees, the Board of Internal Economy has decided to change the guidelines around hiring practices to ensure that the integrity of funds being used to support members of Parliament in their parliamentary functions is maintained.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I take it from your answer, then, that because the current guidelines, as indicated in the March 5 memorandum from the board, were not in place previously, there's no ability, from the board's or Parliament's standpoint, to recover those funds from the Bloc Québécois.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: During its analysis of the situation you're referring to, the board came to the conclusion that was communicated to members and the media, and, as I said, it considers the matter closed. It was seen by the board as an appropriate measure going forward to bring these types of guidelines in, as I said, to strengthen the current regime of hiring practices.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'll leave it at that.

Let me just turn to your presentation. Number one, I applaud you for coming in with almost every line item being reduced somewhat significantly. The one item that shows a slight increase is the acquisition of machinery and equipment.

Could you comment briefly on what exactly you're acquiring by way of machinery and equipment that would increase your budget?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Could you mention what specific...?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: It's in table 2, under "Standard Object of Expenditure", "Acquisition of machinery and equipment". The 2012-13 main estimate was \$8,595,000. In the 2013-14 main estimates, there's \$9,254,000, showing a slight increase of about—

The Chair: [Inaudible—Editor]...where that information is.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'm sorry, Speaker. I thought you had that material in front of you.

• (1120)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: It's table 2....

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: It's "Acquisition of machinery and equipment".

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I'm sorry. I don't have the details for that specific line item, but I can certainly endeavour to get the rationale behind the increase.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Great. If you could supply it to our clerk, that would be helpful.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Absolutely.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: It's more of a curiosity to me than anything else.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Yes.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: It seems that for every other line item you've been successfully able to decrease expenditures, which is wonderful. That one seems to stand out a little bit, so I was curious.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Sure.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Maybe as an overall comment, then, being able to decrease operating expenditures in the light of fiscal restraint is laudable. Could you just generally comment on whether you think there is still more room for increased efficiencies? When does a point come at which, just by the sheer inflationary pressures, if no others, on your budget a rise in expenditures will start again?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Your last comment is absolutely accurate. House of Commons administrative employees are directly linked to Treasury Board guidelines for certain things such as benefits and collective bargaining agreement increases. There are some natural pressures that take effect as time goes on. That being said, the Board of Internal Economy undertook an at times very difficult process, notwithstanding those increases that were beyond our control, to come in with real year-over-year reductions. As you mentioned, there are many line items with significant reductions, and that's a result of this process.

You asked whether there is still room for efficiencies. I can tell you that the board always takes a look at things—on a periodic basis sometimes, and sometimes as things are brought to our attention—to ensure that we're getting the most bang for our buck in everything from travel services to new technologies to ways to rationalize printing.

I can tell you that as part of the ongoing SOR that the House of Commons participated in, a further reduction in next year's estimates of another \$13.5 million is anticipated. This is part of the full \$30 million that we had committed to on the front end.

So yes, going forward there will be further areas that we think we can find savings in, always realizing that members need a certain level of service to do their job and to function, ensuring that they have the tools they need to do their job.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

I believe I have Madame Latendresse next.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Yes, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being with us today. We always appreciate receiving a little more information on the main estimates.

Mr. Scheer, you say that the next annual session of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie will be held next July. Do you mean 2013 or 2014?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Are you talking about the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie?

[English]

Yes.

[Translation]

It will be held in 2014.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: The reductions for committees, parliamentary associations and parliamentary exchanges amount to \$3.4 million. That includes both years. So there are \$2.6 million and \$700,000 for this year.

Could you tell us in a little more detail where those cuts are being made?

As committees, parliamentary associations and exchanges cover a lot of things, I would like you to tell us what the reductions affect in particular.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: In terms of parliamentary associations, the overall envelope that's provided to the JIC, the Joint Interparliamentary Council, is being affected. Subsequent to that, the JIC will make decisions on the allocation of resources within its envelope. Subsequent to that, each parliamentary association will make decisions on how to manage its budget.

It would be difficult, from the Board of Internal Economy's perspective, to predict how those will affect each association, but no doubt each association and the JIC overall will have decisions to make based on the levels of funding they'll be receiving.

● (1125)

[Translation]

As for parliamentary committees, this is funding that the committees have not used in previous years. We are talking about eliminating funding underutilization here.

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): I have a supplementary question on this subject.

I know you administer the budget and that the Joint Inter-Parliamentary Council makes the decisions, but when special committees are added, which involve travel, for example, and that is not approved in the budget, does that automatically become a deficit for the House, or does it become an addition and a reduction is made elsewhere?

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: In the case of special committees, if the liaison committee doesn't have the existing funds in its existing envelopes, then it would require additional funds beyond what's provided to the liaison committee.

But I'm not sure if that's been required in the past or not, because some of the funds were underutilized.

[Translation]

Ms. Audrey O'Brien (Clerk of the House of Commons, House of Commons): Mr. Chair, what happens in the case of a special committee is that funding is provided to start the work. The committee then determines its budget and submits it to the Board of Internal Economy.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: I understand that, but I am talking about a special committee or a special trip that would not be included in current spending. Even if the budget is submitted to the Board of Internal Economy—

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Pardon me, but those are two different things. A special committee is one thing, but I believe you referred to a special trip that a standing committee might wish to take. The committee's budget is managed by the Liaison Committee, the committee of committee chairs, and that is where we would draw the funding for travel. The Deputy Clerk, Mr. Bosc, could confirm that and give you more details on the subject. I see that Mr. Bosc is giving me his consent.

If there was not enough funding and it was considered necessary, we could always include that in supplementary estimates.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: There are still two minutes left.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): I would join my colleague across the way in complimenting you, Mr. Speaker, and your team for what I think is sometimes a difficult job. You were given a directive to become an “austerity Speaker”, I suppose, in a way.

I'm just adding up some of the \$3.5 million from committees and the \$6.5 million from House administration. The \$600,000 that's been recouped back from MPs' pensions, the pension contribution from the House—that's every year those savings will be realized? That's a go-forward and not a one-time?

Is that right, Mr. Watters, through the Speaker? Everyone is agreeing.

I almost wonder if the Speaker's office would be interested in taking over the F-35 project to rein in some of the costs. But perhaps that's a little bit beyond your mandate, Speaker.

I have a small question on the pages program. I agree with you in your comments; they are some of the brightest and best young people I've interacted with. The \$22,000 is a very small part of the overall budget. You mention here it's in direct relation to tuition fees going up at the two local universities.

Is that derived from government policy or is that something the House itself has adopted over the years, that if tuition goes up then we seek to compensate the pages accordingly?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: It was a board decision. The board, in overseeing the page program through the House administration, recognizes certain realities. Pages have to pay for tuition, and I would venture to say that's their single biggest cost in being in Ottawa for school.

In order to attract bright people willing to work here, we lessen the financial hardship and compensate them adequately for the work they do. When the tuition rates go up, it creates a natural pressure on the page, so from time to time the board takes a look at that and makes adjustments when it feels it is necessary.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. LeBlanc.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and my thanks to you, Mr. Speaker, Madame O'Brien, and Mr. Watters.

I agree with my colleague Mr. Cullen. I think the board and you, Mr. Speaker, with your senior officials, have found the right balance to respect the expenditure reductions that Parliament and the government asked of other departments or agencies of government.

I think the House of Commons had to be prepared to do its share. I think you've done it well. You've found the right balance of administrative costs, asking members also to see where we can reduce our expenses. At the same time, you've preserved the essential importance of being able to serve our constituents and fulfill our responsibilities.

When you're dealing with parliamentary budgets, you're dealing with some of the biggest egos in the government. You've found a very good way to do that, Mr. Speaker. You're an austerity Speaker, but you haven't become an austere Speaker.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Thank you.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I wanted to pick up on Nathan's comments.

I want to compliment you and the senior staff, Mr. Speaker. I think you've done this well and in a collegial way. I know that my colleague who sits on the Board of Internal Economy has found it very constructive.

I don't have any questions, but when I listened to your discussion of the page program, I realized it's a neat idea the board has come up with to try to assist these young women and men with the high cost of tuition. That's a great idea.

Let's also think about the parliamentary guide program, not necessarily in terms of their salaries, as many of them are summer jobs or part-time jobs. I think they're some of the best and brightest bilingual people around. They can show Canadians their Parliament, and make them appreciate the role of the House of Commons and the work we do, together with the Senate.

My question is not about their remuneration. This is anecdotal from my riding, but perhaps it extends to other colleagues as well. I'm finding I have schools that want to come. They all want to come in June, when the weather is nice and they can organize bus trips. A number of schools from New Brunswick want to come to visit Parliament—often grade 8 classes—and they're trying to book visits depending on the bus schedules. Six or seven months before they come, they're told that, unfortunately, there's no space available. It's not possible for them to get a guided tour at that time.

I recognize it's a function of the size of the hallways and the traffic that has to be managed when people come through the building. Is it a function of the physical space of the building and the sequence of the tours, or could the problem be alleviated? I just feel bad for these students who want to come and are told in November or December that it's not possible during a certain window of time. Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering if it's a function of not having enough tour guides.

The practical reality is that you're going to get members of Parliament showing groups through themselves. You're going to find members of Parliament, me included, who are going to be trying to shepherd around 40 kids. We are not trained to do this and lack the information the guides would have. Your security personnel won't like the chaos this will cause.

Recognizing the physical limitations of the buildings, is there a way we can increase the staff available or extend the hours of the tours? I just find it unfortunate: they come to Ottawa and they see Sparks Street, but they can't get into the building for a proper guided tour. They are stuck with somebody like me trying to drag them into the library and through the lobby, which isn't the ideal way for them to appreciate Parliament.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I certainly appreciate the point you're making, and I agree with you that the guides are a very professional group of people who are very well-versed in the history of the buildings. They offer a great service to visitors and help enhance their experience of visiting Ottawa and Parliament Hill.

As to the management of the tours, that is not something the Board of Internal Economy would oversee. That's done out of the library, which is its own entity. They have their own challenges in meeting certain strategic operating review targets.

I don't want to venture a guess on what would be causing the backlog you're describing. It could be a simple function of not enough hours in the day, or of having a certain limit on how many people can be physically accommodated in the hallways at the same time, or of the number of guides they have.

I can certainly bring that up with the parliamentary librarian.

• (1135)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I would be grateful if in some conversation with the librarian—

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Yes.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: —or perhaps Madame O'Brien.... I just hope that we've made every effort to accommodate the maximum number of people and haven't fallen into some bureaucratic thing where at 6 o'clock we close down some door.

I just want to try to maximize the chance people have to see Parliament.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Sure. I can absolutely agree.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: That to me is a worthy expenditure, if you're paying some student a few more hours a day or hiring a few more students.

Anyway, if somebody has a chance with the librarian or the appropriate authorities, I would be interested to know that we're doing everything we can to maximize that. That's all.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I can absolutely have a conversation with her about that.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you.

The Chair: I'd like to point out that Monsieur LeBlanc would like to handle the midnight tours.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: The only reason I say that, Mr. Chairman, is that the Sergeant-at-Arms is from Miramichi, New

Brunswick, and people in Miramichi, New Brunswick, are up way after midnight, so yes, I would be quite sure that the Sergeant-at-Arms would probably be awake at midnight and happy himself to conduct some tours. I see him nodding in the back of the room.

The Chair: I agree. Young folks visiting Ottawa certainly are up past midnight most times, so visiting Parliament...you have the 2:11 tour.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: And if we're lucky, maybe we could have an all-night voting again this spring.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: We're up half the night on the other side.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Armstrong, please, for four minutes.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And I want to thank all of our witnesses for being here.

I'm going to focus on table 2 in the Library of Parliament document. I'd first like to start with the "Transportation and communication" under the heading "Standard Object of Expenditure". There are significant reductions in that line item, to the tune of over \$9 million, reducing the overall budget from last year at \$56,485,000 to this coming year at \$47,017,227. That's a significant reduction in expenditures. Can you outline how that was achieved? I think that might be a model for other departments to use, because that's a significant reduction in that line item. Maybe we could discuss how that was done.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Sure. Of the two largest significant components of that particular line item, there are the flight passes, the switch. Members of Parliament are now required to book their trips back and forth from their constituencies with the flight pass, which brings in some bulk savings, which have been significant. And for those of us in this room who went through that exercise at the board, it's probably the largest contributor to the reduction in travel costs.

The other component of that is a renegotiation of the wireless plan that we, as the House of Commons, have with our main providers. When it came up for renegotiation, given the size of the contract and the number of devices the House of Commons uses, we were able to realize some significant savings there as well.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: So you were able to achieve significant savings in both the communications side of that line item and the transportation side.

Roughly how much was the reduction due to the flight passes? We couldn't have taken the airlines up on them because they didn't exist before, but when they did become available to consumers across the country, it provided a vehicle for us to actually save a lot of money.

Do you have any idea roughly how much of that savings is due to the switch of members of Parliament to flight passes?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: The forecast is for \$5.5 million, and as you mentioned, it's a relatively recent development that is offered. It took some doing on the House administrative side on how to manage it, because, as you recall, the old system was one at a time. The House administration would process those flights and so on, and a flight pass just was different. We had to change some of the models to be able to have the accounting side of it work.

So now that that's on stream, the answer to your specific question is \$5.5 million.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: There are some restrictions on those flight passes and the ability to travel. For members of Parliament like me and Mr. LeBlanc, we travel less than two hours. We have to get a flex pass, which limits some of the opportunities to upgrade tickets and move tickets around.

I totally support this change. I think it's great for the taxpayers in the country, but if it does limit the MPs' ability to do their job in certain situations, are we going to be able to take a look at that and review this large change? It's a massive reduction of taxpayer funds, which is a good thing, but are we going to be able to take a look at how that affects MPs doing their jobs and be flexible, if needed?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I would venture to say absolutely.

If I can, I'll speak for the board a little bit on this. I think the key from the House administrative side is that there's a desire to see how this goes. It's new. Members aren't perhaps used to using them, and there may be a period of transition. Some things that may be viewed as problems for the first couple of months may not actually be that problematic as members get used to the service. But absolutely, our hope is that we get a good year, if people can work through it, and then we have a tremendous amount of data to look at and see what the actual savings were and what problems a significant number of members or their employees or their designated travellers encountered. If we can make tweaks while still achieving the overall savings, then of course we would be able to do that. But I think we have to get that data first before we can look at those changes.

• (1140)

Mr. Scott Armstrong: On the communication side, really....

I'm done? Thank you very much.

The Chair: Madame Turmel, I understand you're sharing. We have a total of four.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Turmel: I would like to go back to the pages issue.

I understand that there has been no increase to date on the Quebec side. However, is the Université du Québec en Outaouais considered for the pages program?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Yes.

Ms. Nicole Turmel: Are there any?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: You want to know whether there are any from the Université du Québec en Outaouais? I would have to check. I do not know for the moment, but I will check. Let us say that I would be surprised if there were not.

Ms. Nicole Turmel: All right.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I wouldn't mind picking up on two fronts where Scott was going.

One is on the telecommunications side of things. I'm not sure if all MPs are aware of where the actual costs come in terms of excessive downloading and all of that. Have we ever considered more information sharing with MPs about where money can be saved within their budgets? For example, we talked about the flight passes, and they have become more of a mandatory program than an optional one. Is that correct, that MPs have to fly on these?

There may be other savings. Here's my observation or concern: we've hit some of the low-hanging fruit, I would suggest, in this particular process. If we were to go further, it would probably require more involvement from MPs and their staff directly. Has there been any contemplation about giving the information out to MPs as to ways they can save on their budgets, either through the way they travel, the way they communicate, or the devices they're using and how they're using them? Has that been contemplated from your office or from the board?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I think it's safe to say yes, in certain areas. One example that comes readily to mind on the telecommunications is that there are efforts made to remind members that when they are travelling, if they notify telecommunications, a roaming package can be put on their wireless device. Instead of paying à la carte roaming charges, they're paying a standardized rate that's been negotiated as part of the contract. That's just one example that comes to mind of our trying to proactively look at ways that members can save the House of Commons money. In the case of their device being paid for out of their own budget, there would be some actual savings there.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I will pick up on that, because it's been in the news somewhat recently that, particularly when travelling abroad, some of our telecommunications companies use a billing process that can run into the hundreds and thousands of dollars for downloads while travelling in other regions if you don't make these changes. Has there been any consideration of...not just making a suggestion to MPs; I think we need to change the laws, frankly.

That's another place for another topic in terms of how our telecommunications companies are governed and what they can charge, because we've seen bills of \$15,000 for someone's trip to Mexico because their kid downloaded some videos while there. Has the board considered, as we have with flight passes, making those types of switches and changes? They can seem small, but you can get a bill for \$1,000 on your phone just because you simply didn't realize that one or two button switches would have cost \$10. This is something I think the public might be interested in—and certainly I know a lot of MPs are—in terms of managing their own budgets and impacts on the public treasury.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I have to say that the House administration does look for patterns of where there have been spikes for things like what you're talking about, and we would remind the whips at the board to communicate to their caucuses that these are things to be avoided, these are things to look for, and these are easy ways to save yourself or the House administration some money. But it certainly is something that I can take back to the board, and we can have a conversation about which items could be the low-hanging fruit, a quick FYI, remember to do this and you'll save your budget money, you'll save taxpayers money, and you'll save the House administration money.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Menegakis.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Sorry, Madame O'Brien would like to come back to a previous question.

The Chair: Please.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: My apologies for breaking in here, Mr. Chair, but the deputy clerk has just handed me a note.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

To answer Ms. Turmel's question concerning the Université du Québec en Outaouais, I regret to say that there are no pages from that university this year.

Ms. Nicole Turmel: But it is nevertheless open to them.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Yes.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Menegakis.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I too want to thank our Speaker, Madam O'Brien, and Mr. Watters for being here with us today. I want to also commend you for the leadership role you're showing in doing the best you can to assist with cost reductions in pertinent areas, and also for your focus on the page program and the guide program, I might add, which are very important services to the public here.

My question is not going to speak to reductions. In light of the very horrific and tragic events that transpired on Monday in Boston—and I see our Sergeant-at-Arms is here with us today, and being very cognizant of the important role he has with his team to ensure the security of the facility and of course the security of not only parliamentarians and senators but the public here—I wonder if you're satisfied with the level of security here or if you are considering in any way a review of that process to ensure even tighter security for the premises and whether that would possibly include additional costs.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I certainly share your sentiments on the tragic events that happened in Boston. I can say—and it will come as no surprise—that the House of Commons, Parliament in general, has unique security challenges as well as threat assessments. Being a high-traffic area where members of the public are encouraged to

come and visit, we want to maintain that openness to Canadians while at the same time providing the security you would expect for a head of government and elected representatives.

It's something that is constantly monitored. Without, obviously, going into detail about security postures and things like that, I can say that all of the House administration, the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Board of Internal Economy, and I are often seized with security questions and with questions regarding how to enhance the protection of the buildings while at the same time making this a place that's welcoming to Canadians.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: I didn't want my question to be misconstrued in any way. I happen to think and believe that the security staff does an exemplary job here on the premises, but in light of what transpired on Monday, I thought I would ask that question.

Thank you.

The Chair: Madame Latendresse.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Mr. Menegakis' question reminds me of a topic we often discuss when you are here, which is where we stand on the idea of merging the various security services and the possibility of cutting certain expenses.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: You are correct. That was pointed out by the Auditor General. It was a recommendation. The Board of Internal Economy is considering working with the Senate to achieve that objective. As for setting a date, I cannot give you a specific answer, but I can tell you that regular meetings are being held and that both Houses are putting a great deal of effort into this matter.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: My next question concerns a memorandum that was recently sent, stating that second-language courses would no longer be paid for by the House of Commons but rather by the members' offices. In other words, those offices will have to pay the cost of all second-language courses offered to House of Commons' employees. We also learned that that change had not been applied to the Senate. Consequently, the Senate will continue to pay those expenses, whereas we in the House of Commons will now have to draw on our budgets to pay for second-language courses. However, our budgets are also used to pay the expenses associated with our riding offices and a host of other things.

Have any savings really been achieved in this way? This is somewhat unfortunate because we would like to encourage as many employees of the House of Commons as possible to take second-language courses. I believe this measure could have the effect of reducing the number of courses given. Budgets can be very tight at the end of the fiscal year. They are used to cover so many expenses. I would like to hear your comments on the subject.

● (1150)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Reductions are of course being made to the House administration. I cannot comment on the impact that will have on members because it is a recent decision. However, I can say that the process for identifying the reductions was very difficult. The Board of Internal Economy considered many factors. Decisions were made to reduce certain types of expenses and not others. A lot of factors are involved in this process. It is difficult to consider any one factor in isolation because many other aspects are affected by this decision.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Nathan, do you want to ask a question?

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I don't know if it was in your statements earlier, but with the changes, particularly to the language programs, what kind of review process will there be in terms of the impacts if we're seeing a significant drop-off? We all seek to follow the government guidelines on reducing expenditures, but the ability of MPs to become better at their second language is an important one—a principle that we also hold—and we're seeking not to have unintended consequences, I suppose is the term I'm looking for.

How will the board or your administration seek to make sure the changes to the way we handle language training don't have a significant impact on the House's ability to communicate in both official languages?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: That's a very good question. I can tell you specifically for this one, because it has been raised before.... In every area that the House administration or the board has made significant changes in policy, there is a monitoring to see the impacts. Information can be provided back to the board after some time has passed and the data is available, to show the impact of that decision. Then it's up to the board to decide to tweak or not tweak, to determine if savings have been realized in other areas that can now alleviate the pressure that has accumulated.

As you well know, it's a complicated puzzle. There are a lot of pieces that need to shift from one area to the other. When the data is available, the board can look at everything holistically and consider whether to change it, stick with it, or try it another year. The House administration will endeavour to make every piece of information available to the board so they can make a well-informed decision.

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

Thank you to our witnesses today.

I think it was a fairly easy session. You see that as you cut expenditures it gets a lot easier around here.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I know how to win you over.

The Chair: If you don't mind, the chair is going to take the prerogative to ask you a question.

We've certainly reduced a lot of paper. I find that by using my iPad I'm also able to reduce a lot of paper.

But when will I have wireless on the House of Commons side of this place for my iPad?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: As you can imagine, there are security and network security issues.

The Chair: I understand all that.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Not being as adept with electronics as I used to be, I might ask my—

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: [Inaudible—Editor]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: If my son were here, he could probably do it.

The Chair: He'd be disappointed that you don't have wireless to use.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The plan this year is to start introducing some wireless functionality in some of the areas on the Hill. We're planning a pilot project for later in the fall. We're looking at using La Promenade as the first step, to minimize some of the risk and test some of the committee areas.

We're also looking at some specific areas within this building. Having said that, it's a partnership that we're moving forward on with Public Works. Public Works, as part of the long-term renovation projects, is investing in our facilities and we're using that program to introduce some of these changes this year.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madam O'Brien and Speaker Scheer, I honestly miss over the years that we didn't spend a great deal of time when we were looking at estimates...we used to spend most of the meeting talking about the restaurant. We no longer do that. I just wanted to point that out.

Thank you all for coming and sharing your great information with us today. It's always fun to have you.

We'll suspend for a couple of minutes while we move witnesses in and out.

● (1150)

(Pause)

● (1200)

The Chair: We will bring the meeting to order. We are now here talking about riding redistribution in the province of Quebec. We have three members with us today. You each have five minutes to make an opening statement.

Minister Bernier, would you like to go first?

● (1205)

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm very pleased to be with you today.

[Translation]

I want to thank the committee for agreeing to listen to me.

The reason for my objection is very simple. From the outset, however, I would like to say that the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for the Province of Quebec has done a very good job with regard to Beauce. We went to plead our case in Lévis and to say that we wanted to keep the electoral district of Beauce intact. At the time, they wanted to take eight municipalities from us. The commission very clearly understood the matter and made sure in its report to keep those eight municipalities in the riding of Beauce.

I am here today on behalf of two municipalities that were removed from Beauce following the report: Saint-Robert-Bellarmin and Saint-Ludger. We want those municipalities to be included in the electoral district of Beauce since the central town linking those two towns is Saint-Georges.

These municipalities never had the opportunity to be heard since they were not affected by the commission's proposal in the first version of its report. They issued resolutions when the second version of the Beauce electoral map was made public. They decided that they wanted to remain part of Beauce despite the fact that they are situated in the RCM of Le Granit.

It is important to note that the commission wanted to include those municipalities in my colleague Christian Paradis's riding because they were attached to the same RCM at the provincial level. It should be noted, however, that, historically, the two municipalities have always been considered as part of Beauce and have always negotiated with the Government of Quebec to be part of the RCM of Beauce-Sartigan, which is part of Beauce.

After the latest changes were proposed, the mayors of those two municipalities sent me their resolutions, reaffirming their sense of belonging to Beauce. These people are *Beaucerons* and proud to be so.

Moreover, the municipality of Saint-Lambert-de-Lauzon, which is included in Beauce in the latest report, has expressed the wish to be included in Lévis—Lotbinière. The mayor, with whom I spoke last week, sent me a resolution that he had passed last August stating that the municipality of Saint-Lambert-de-Lauzon would like to be included in Lévis—Lotbinière and that its residents were very pleased with the service MP Jacques Gourde was giving them. I hope they will be able to continue their productive relationship with their very good member, Jacques Gourde.

That said, I spoke with the two members concerned. First I spoke with Mr. Gourde about the wish of the municipality of Saint-Lambert-de-Lauzon to be included in the electoral district of Lévis—Lotbinière. I also spoke with MP Christian Paradis about the wish of the municipalities of Saint-Ludger and Saint-Robert-Bellarmin to be included in the electoral district of Beauce. Neither colleague is opposed to those proposals. They are entirely in favour of them.

It must be understood that Saint-Lambert-de-Lauzon is a small municipality, which has ties to the central city of Lévis, not to the town of Sainte-Marie. For example, the people of Sainte-Marie and the surrounding municipalities joined forces to create a health coop. Although the municipality of Saint-Lambert-de-Lauzon is in the same RCM, La Nouvelle-Beauce, it did not take part in the project because the people of Saint-Lambert-de-Lauzon use the hospital in Lévis. Their ties are therefore with Lévis.

Of course, these changes will have a number of demographic implications. I told you about those consequences. Beauce would lose 4,547 residents, for a total of 107,967. Lévis—Lotbinière would gain 6,545 residents, for a total of 107,870. Note that the commission's target population was 101,322. So these figures are within the 10% variance. Lastly, the electoral district of Mégantic—L'Érable, Christian Paradis's riding, would lose 1,907 residents.

My objection to the proposal is not recent, since they wanted to keep the electoral district of Beauce intact at the time. I am here today to ask that these two municipalities be returned to the riding of Beauce and that the municipality of Saint-Lambert-de-Lauzon return to Lévis—Lotbinière.

● (1210)

Thank you for taking the time to listen to me. I am prepared to answer any questions you may have.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will get to questions from members right after we hear from the other two members.

Minister Blaney, you are next.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, honourable colleagues, for allowing me to submit to you today a very clear request that the initial decision of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission be respected and that Les Etchemins remain part of the electoral district of Lévis—Bellechasse.

At 2:30 this morning, the citizens of Les Etchemins rose, boarded a bus and travelled six hours in order to be here. They have come to tell you that the Etchemins region wants to remain a part of the electoral district of Lévis—Bellechasse.

I am here today with Hector Provençal, warden of the RCM of Les Etchemins, and with four mayors: Suzanne Guenette, mayor of Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague, Marielle Lemieux, mayor of Saint-Magloire, Harold Gagnon, mayor of Les Etchemins, and Denis Beaulieu, mayor of Sainte-Justine.

The stakeholders of Les Etchemins unanimously request that the boundaries that have been in place since 1867 be respected. I have in my hand a petition bearing more than 1,400 names that was signed in record time, a few weeks, after the change was proposed. The commission wanted to respect that wish last fall.

There are 84 citizens of Lévis here, 200 from Bellechasse and several individuals from each of the municipalities of Les Etchemins. We have Sylvain Talbot, who is a councillor in Armagh, Josie Vermette, from Saint-Gervais, in Bellechasse, and Frédéric Aubin, from Saint-Lazare in Bellechasse, who says he thinks it is important that Bellechasse and Les Etchemins be reunited. Why? Because many institutions and organizations, such as the SADC of Bellechasse-Etchemins, are common entities.

I have in my hand a letter signed separately by 67 businesses from Bellechasse and Les Etchemins. For example, we have François Genest, president of SADC of Bellechasse, Ms. Royer, from the Carrefour jeunesse-emploi organization, and Mélanie Giguère, from Groupe Action Tandem. There are also the people from the Manoir Lac Etchemin, some of whom you no doubt know, Mr. Jacques and Mr. Provençal, from Précisions Provençal in Sainte-Rose, and Mario Provençal, "Super Mario".

If you buy waffles or molasses cakes at Le Jardin Mobile stores, you know they come from Sainte-Rose. Mario says he works with the SADC, with the people of Bellechasse and Les Etchemins. We have a common community radio station and chamber of commerce and three main roads, highways 277, 279 and 281. You have to go through Bellechasse to get to Les Etchemins. The two places are closely interlinked.

People sometimes wonder whether Saint-Léon is part of Les Etchemins or Bellechasse. The same is true of Saint-Magloire and Saint-Philémon. These communities are very close to each other and are in the same situation. The RCM of Les Etchemins has major attractions but also faces significant challenges. To do so, we believe these communities must remain part of a coherent geographic whole.

I am also very proud to have the support not only of the citizens of Lévis, Bellechasse and Les Etchemins, but also of my colleague Maxime Bernier, who was the first person who signed my notice form so that I could appear before you, and of Mr. Lapointe, who clearly said it was logical for Les Etchemins to remain in the electoral district of Lévis—Bellechasse. I want to thank Mr. Lapointe for those remarks. This is an important fact. The district is already very large, and this area in fact represents one-third of it.

Mr. Chair, I want to mention that my colleague Jacques Gourde has also supported my efforts. The parliamentarians from the Chaudières-Appalaches area as a whole support our efforts to ensure that the electoral district remains of a reasonable size. The variances are still entirely comparable. My colleague Mr. Lapointe's riding is very big and there are a lot of municipalities to cover. There, too, the variances are still comparable to those observed in the Bas-du-Fleuve region.

In closing, I ask you to abide by the commission's initial decision based on the community of interest. It is supported by the Etchemins community as a whole.

• (1215)

I must tell you that it is not awkward to be here today with the people from Les Etchemins who are present. Our representatives from the local press are here as well. I remind you that the people of Bellechasse and Les Etchemins have always been bound together since 1867.

I invite you to ensure that trend continues. We have a big country, but we take into account specific regional characteristics. Les Etchemins and Bellechasse are made to be together.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[English]

Monsieur Lapointe, for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This will be the first time I have spoken about Les Etchemins, but that is not because we were not interested in the west side of the riding. In the first version that was presented, a number of municipalities were added to the eastern portion of the electoral district of Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. That was in Témiscouata, not on the other side. That is why I did not run in Lévis at the time, but rather in Rivière-du-Loup to solve another problem that was going on elsewhere in the region.

I would also like to thank the commission. It divided Témiscouata right down the middle, but it was sensitive to our arguments, and one change was made that suited everyone. I would also like to emphasize that we appreciate the sensitivity the commission showed with regard to our regional realities.

I would briefly like to talk about two points: the second version of the redistribution and the name. That is the second name suggested for a possible change to the name of the electoral district of Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

This morning, we are defending a consensus view that the municipality of Les Etchemins should remain in Bellechasse. I believe we have the same copies as Mr. Blaney. We have received a lot of resolutions from municipalities and RCMs, all saying the same thing. In addition, the document from the provincial member, Ms. Vien, essentially tells the commission that the RCM of Bellechasse is intimately linked to the RCM of Les Etchemins through its economy, culture, institutions and lines of communication.

That is virtually word for word what appears in all the resolutions that were sent to us from across the region. I have no resolutions from Montmagny, our closest neighbour, but I consulted everyone at the office of the warden, including the warden himself. They are in favour of maintaining the connection between Les Etchemins and Bellechasse. They will publicly support the decision if it ever goes that way.

I think that the major argument is that there is this regional consensus on everything that might be called the eastern portion of Chaudière-Appalaches. Everyone is in agreement, but I will nevertheless take the liberty of citing a few arguments.

Do I still have two minutes?

[English]

The Chair: Yes, you do.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: All right.

I would like to emphasize briefly that, if we were to add a large part of Les Etchemins to my riding, it would contain 67 municipalities. A lot of elected members around the table know that the mayors start telephoning the day after a federal program is announced. In my riding, sometimes 33, 34 or 35 mayors phone the same day, and unfortunately no kind of budget is allocated to me so that I can hire someone else to ensure the quality of services rendered to the mayors. We work very hard, but if we have 170 municipalities in a large electoral district in eastern Quebec, services will ultimately suffer. I also think that what is being requested today would help strike a balance. My riding would still have 58 municipalities, and I believe there would be some 30 in Mr. Blaney's. We would not find ourselves in a situation in which we would have to respond to nearly 70 mayors the day after a federal program was announced.

We are going to talk about the name of the riding in the short period of time I have left. The first name suggested was Bernier, in honour of Captain Bernier, who is one of the great discoverers of the north. There was no consensus in my—

A voice: No?

Mr. François Lapointe: I do not even know whether he was related to my colleague, but it was not to be named for Mr. Bernier who is here today, but for Captain Bernier, who came from L'Islet. And there was a little support for the proposal there, but none elsewhere in the constituency.

In the second version, the commission suggested Montmagny—Rivière-du-Loup. Kamouraska, whose name has just been dropped at the provincial level, had the impression it was being erased from the map. They reacted very strongly to the proposal, and rightly so. We have just received the resolutions and debate was quite animated. Potential solutions were suggested, but the consensus that emerged in the four RCMs, based on the commission's regulations, is that the name should be kept if the boundaries are maintained. So there is a consensus that the name Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup should be retained. We are asking you, please, not to erase our two beautiful RCMs in central Quebec, L'Islet and Kamouraska. The name is long, but we can function with it. Moreover, the Chair can say it without even looking at his paper. I believe we have some experience and we can keep that name. There is also a consensus across the riding.

• (1220)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. We'll have questions from members.

Mr. Lukiwski, your first five minutes, please.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you, and thank you all for appearing here. I apologize, I will be asking you my questions in English

[Translation]

since I do not speak French.

[English]

One of the things that I think is important for all of you to know—I hope you know that now—is that this committee cannot change any final recommendations made by your boundaries commission in Quebec. They have the final authority to set the boundaries after

hearing testimony from interested individuals, communities, members of Parliament, and the like.

What we are to do here is to draft a report based on the accurate assessment of testimony we hear from witnesses like yourself. So with the help of primarily Monsieur Dion, we have established a series of questions that we will ask all members of Parliament who appear before the committee to try to get an accurate reflection if your recommendations are supported by others.

Monsieur Blaney, I notice with great interest the support from your riding that you brought with you to Ottawa today. I must applaud you. That's the first time we've had this before our committee, where a member has brought in a number of their own constituents to support their point of view, so I must congratulate you for doing that.

The question I would have, and it's indicated in Monsieur Bernier's presentation, but just so that I am clear, are you all stating that this is the first time the commission would have heard your objections because after the first draft of the map, you didn't realize they were planning to make the change that you saw in the second draft? In other words, is this the first and perhaps only opportunity that you all, as members of Parliament and members from your individual ridings, have had to communicate your displeasure or objections to the commission? Is that correct?

I'll start with you, Monsieur Bernier.

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

The people of Beauce have argued that this region should remain intact and that it should not be touched.

In the paragraph entitled "History and Belonging" on page 10 of the 2012 Report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for the province of Quebec, the commission itself writes: "For example, we witnessed some heartfelt expressions by citizens convinced of the inviolable nature of their identity." The commission states that it also heard the cry: "Beaucerons we were born, Beaucerons we shall die!" Expressed elsewhere with greater restraint—"

There appears to be a very significant sense of belonging, as a result of which the commission partly considered our request that we be given back the eight municipalities that it took away from us in its first report.

The commission retained those eight municipalities in its second report. However, there was never any question that the two municipalities in southern Beauce would disappear from the electoral district of Beauce. Consequently, my argument today is the same as the one I advanced before the commission. I asked it to keep the electoral district of Beauce intact and to add those two municipalities.

The commission of course based its work on the RCMs. It thought that the two municipalities in southern Beauce, Saint-Robert and Saint-Ludger, would be transferred to Mr. Paradis's riding, since they are part of the RCM of Le Granit, and that Saint-Lambert would remain in Beauce since it is part of the RCM of La Nouvelle-Beauce.

We believe the people of Saint-Lambert want to go back to where they were. The people of Saint-Ludger have made regular efforts to join the RCM of Beauce-Sartigan, but that has not worked because the matter was the responsibility of the Quebec government. However, we would like the commission to take note of that fact and to consider Beaucerons' wish to keep Beauce intact.

[English]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski. You're right, it is the first time that Les Etchemins as a whole would be separated from Bellechasse.

In September there was an issue with four municipalities from Les Etchemins that asked to stay with my colleague, Mr. Bernier, and they stayed. The commission agreed that those four municipalities wouldn't be part of Lévis—Bellechasse. So at this point, there were no indications at all that Les Etchemins as a whole would be put apart.

I think you have a map that is self-explanatory. Lévis—Bellechasse and Les Etchemins is a corridor between the St. Lawrence River and the United States. That's the corridor, the three-road access, as I've explained, so it's quite logical. You can see it really breaks the harmony of the riding.

There's a saying: if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

[Translation]

That is the question. Lévis, Bellechasse and Les Etchemins have always been together. The plan in September was not to change that. I understand that this is an independent electoral boundaries commission and that you have a power of recommendation, but the warden and the people of Bellechasse and Les Etchemins contacted me the moment that map was made public. This was something I had to do.

You see, this is not just one member speaking to you; the community has also mobilized. I am their ambassador, as it were. I want to tell you that Bellechasse and Les Etchemins are naturally, historically, culturally, socially and economically complementary. The last version was the first time a proposal was made to change that. That is why the mobilization was so strong but also why it had not previously happened.

•(1225)

Mr. François Lapointe: I can still give you a lot of arguments against the trend toward increasing the size of electoral districts in the rural regions. For example, if we were to go with this plan, I would have to cover 258 km. In addition, there are two municipalities in my electoral district with the name Saint-Cyprien. And they are so far apart they do not even have modifiers. They are not Saint-Cyprien de Bellechasse, for example. These are two municipalities called Saint-Cyprien and they are approximately 245 km apart.

I could advance a lot of arguments against expanding these electoral districts, but I want to go back to the basic principle we are defending this morning. There is a consensus. The first thing I did when I saw the second version proposed by the commission was to call Mr. Provençal, the warden of Les Etchemins. I told him that he should conduct his consultation, that I was going to defend his positions and that, if a consensus emerged on the idea of keeping

Les Etchemins with Bellechasse, I would be there to defend that view. We are dealing with a regional consensus.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

Madame Latendresse.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am pleased to see colleagues whose electoral district is near my own. I am very pleased to see that everyone has the same opinion. Matters are much simpler for the committee when members are in agreement.

I imagine you will be asked some quite simple questions. They may briefly explain to you why the commission came to these conclusions. Mr. Bernier very clearly explained how they wanted to do things that way, probably because of the RCMs. However, that does not prevent us from recommending what you propose.

I am going to speak to Mr. Bernier.

Let us talk about the electoral quota. There is a small difference in the figures contained in the Library of Parliament documents, but I believe that is due to the fact that the town of Saint-Lambert was not included. We saw that your riding, the electoral district of Beauce, would change from an electoral quota variance of 11% to 12%, whereas that of Mégantic—L'Érable would change from -12% to -14%.

However, I did a quick calculation based on the figures you gave us and the result was slightly different. We were closer to the electoral quota. You are aware that Beauce is still a developing region and that more people may still be settling there in the next few years. Are you afraid that you will increasingly move away from the electoral quota at some point?

Hon. Maxime Bernier: That is a good question because Beauce was to have 112,514 residents under the commission's second and final proposal. The commission is aiming for a quota of 101,000. So we are at approximately 12% or 13%. The usual variance is 10%. However, that would be reduced under the proposal we submitted today. The population of Beauce would be 107,967 residents. So that is slightly lower.

At 112,514 residents under the commission's proposal, Beauce is the most highly populated electrical district in Quebec. The member for Beauce would thus have more legitimacy because he would represent more people. I do not necessarily want that title, and I would like to get back down to a variance of 10%. So with the proposal you have before you, we would drop to 107,967 residents and we would be within acceptable limits, which are plus or minus 10% of the quota.

•(1230)

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: That is perfect.

This is not to correct you, but the 10% figure is in fact a goal that the commission set for itself, but that is not in the act.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: You are right.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: In fact, the act provides for a variance of 25%.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Indeed.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: So going to 12% would represent a variance of nearly 6.5%, based on what I calculated.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: It would.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: So that would be quite all right. Furthermore, you have the support of the people in the community as well as that of your colleagues. I do not believe Mr. Paradis will be coming to testify before the committee.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: No, but Mr. Paradis agrees with my proposal.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: He approves of it?

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Do you want him to send you a letter on the subject?

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Yes, perhaps. I would just like to be certain.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Yes.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Because one of the things that we consider and that is very important for the committee is to ensure that the proposed changes have been approved by all those involved.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Mr. Gourde, who is here, will be able to confirm it orally, but I will get Mr. Paradis to write a brief letter to the committee to confirm what I have just said.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: That would be perfect.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: All right.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: I really have very few questions to ask my colleagues from Les Etchemins. Here we have the figures showing us that you have a very reasonable quota variance. I think you made an excellent presentation explaining why Bellechasse and Les Etchemins have a community of interest and that those communities are really merged together.

Hon. Steven Blaney: They are together.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Once again, with the support of all the members and all the people concerned, I think this is very clear. In fact, I do not really have any supplementary questions to ask you.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): My question is for my colleague François Lapointe.

I would like to know something about the name change. A name change was indeed provided for in the first proposal, but did the commission go back on that?

Mr. François Lapointe: It changed the suggestion, but it is still a new suggestion.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: So it is a new suggestion related to the new boundaries, as it were.

Mr. François Lapointe: Yes and no.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: What do you mean by yes and no?

Mr. François Lapointe: I am going to refer to the sequence of events, if that is fine with you.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: No, my question—

Mr. François Lapointe: I will be brief.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: All right.

Mr. François Lapointe: The present name is Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: All right.

Mr. François Lapointe: The commission was given a mandate to try to shorten the name. A kind of search was conducted for names of historical figures, and Captain Bernier came up among the commission members, but they were absolutely not unanimously in favour of it. All the briefs submitted in Rivière-du-Loup recommended that that name not be used. Montmagny—Rivière-du-Loup was suggested to us in the second version.

We are here today to argue in favour of two things. If the existing situation is ever maintained, Les Etchemins will stay with Bellechasse. The current boundaries of Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup will be maintained. The commission even has a regulation providing that, in the event all boundaries are maintained, the name will be maintained as well. That is what we propose. We are also arguing in favour of this because, in a process in which the names of the RCMs are being kept, we do not see why those of two RCMs in the community should disappear. We note as well that Kamouraska has just experienced that at the provincial level. These regions have been inhabited for 450 years. There is a regional identity there. Consequently, every time they are erased from the map in this way, it obviously leaves a kind of mark.

For all these reasons, I believe we should simply stick to the idea of maintaining the name Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: If the boundaries were maintained, keeping the name would be consistent.

Mr. François Lapointe: Yes.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: That is very good.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dion, you have the floor.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, Mr. Blaney, you must be very proud of the people from your riding who got up at 2:30 in the morning to come and show their attachment to their community. I do not know whether they are doing it for their member, but it is definitely for their community.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Stéphane Dion: It shows motivation. And we should think of all our Canadian friends who live far away in western Canada. They had to get up at 2:30 in the morning and to take a plane and so on. So that shows how attached Canadians are to their communities.

Thank you for that fine presentation. We do not really feel like countering such a fine presentation, especially since the figures make sense.

I would just like to ask you to repeat the demographic consequences for the electoral districts affected if Les Etchemins is put with Bellechasse, as it would be logical to do.

•(1235)

Hon. Steven Blaney: It is simple. Lévis-Bellechasse and Les Etchemins together have a population of 112,000 inhabitants. So that is a variance of 10.9% from the electoral quota. That is somewhat consistent with Ms. Latendresse's comment about flexibility in respecting the community of interest.

My colleague's riding has a variance of 5% from the electoral quota. Remember that we are headed down toward the lower St. Lawrence. So there is some fairness.

I would take this opportunity, sir—

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Less than 5%, is that now or under the proposed change?

Hon. Steven Blaney: That is under the proposed change.

Mr. François Lapointe: That is virtually 4%. In view of the fact that Les Etchemins would be with Bellechasse, there would be a variance of less than 4% or so, which I believe is less than the traditional tolerance of 10%.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Then my hypothesis is that the commission has really set itself the objective of not exceeding a variance of 10%, as far as that is possible. If Les Etchemins is added to you in this way, you will be at 10.92%, nearly 11%.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Exactly.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I cannot speak on behalf of the committee, but I would be very much in favour of having the committee tell the commission to show some flexibility in view of people's deep attachment to their community, as well as historical continuity, which are the other two criteria under the act.

Hon. Steven Blaney: As you mentioned this morning, we have here a demonstration of our people's attachment to their electoral district and to their roots.

Furthermore, with respect to local elected representatives, as Mr. Lapointe mentioned, if there are 70 municipalities, there are 70 mayors. That also means 70 farm women's circles and 70 Knights of Columbus clubs. So it becomes a challenge.

I think there is a reality behind those figures that must be distinguished.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Absolutely.

You also mentioned the problem of travel, which is very complicated.

Mr. François Lapointe: Allow me to welcome that remark by my colleague. It is consistent with the defence of our interests. Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup and potentially Les Etchemins will wind up with nearly 70 municipalities. His comment is ultimately very much appreciated and very justified.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: With regard to Beauce, if the people of Saint-Lambert do not feel they are "Beaucerons", I think we can understand why they want to go to Lévis.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Similarly, if the other two communities do feel they are Beaucerons, we should understand why they want to join Beauce.

There would obviously have been quite a large demographic variance if the change involving Saint-Lambert had not been made. However, that is not the case. On the contrary, a balance has been established. I agree that all Beaucerons should be together.

Mr. François Lapointe: Thank you. They will appreciate that.

A voice: Beauce for the Beaucerons.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Beauce for the Beaucerons, absolutely.

On the other hand, what is the situation regarding Mégantic—L'Érable? There were 88,745 inhabitants before the change you propose.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: There is a decline of approximately 1,200 residents, from 88,000 to 86,000.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: That is probably what will force matters somewhat for the commission.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: According to its proposal, the number of electors would be 112,000. That is a variance of much more than 10% above the quota, the goal being less than 10%. At 88,000 electors, we are slightly below that. Under the proposal, however, my riding would reduce the variance to less than 10% of the quota, to 107,000 electors.

So with 86,000 electors, Mégantic—L'Érable has a negative variance from the quota.

One riding had a variance that was greater than the quota, but now we have a district with a variance below the quota.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: There is no increase in the number of electoral districts that exceed the goal of a maximum variance of 10%.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Precisely.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Thank you very much, colleagues.

Thanks to all those who have come to meet us. We will see how matters turn out. The request seems very logical to me, Mr. Chair.

•(1240)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Gourde, five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank my colleagues for testifying here this morning. I also thank the people from Les Etchemins for travelling to Ottawa. I think that shows how great the sense of belonging to a region and to its history really is.

You colleagues who have been working with these people since 2006 are in a very good position to know that the sense of belonging to a region abides over several generations. Your two regions have been marked by that and have shown this attachment since Confederation. That feeling is also very strong among the people from Beauce.

You can tell us again about that sense of belonging. I noted earlier that Mr. Blaney wanted to do that.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Gourde. I find it strange to call you Mr. Gourde or sir. I will call you Jacques and that can be stricken later.

Last September, the electoral boundaries commission said it wanted to take steps to have the electoral district named Louis-Fr chette. We said no at the time. The people of Bellechasse mobilized, and the people of Les Etchemins said they wanted to keep the name Bellechasse. That is why I have been using the name L vis—Bellechasse—Les Etchemins for six years. That helps people understand that Les Etchemins represents nearly one-third of the district. It is a forest environment, which is different from that of the urban portion of the city of L vis, which we share as members. That is one way of acknowledging it.

To have a name is to exist. When you take away a name or, even worse, shift a region from one electoral district to another, that becomes a problem. What particularly irritated the warden of the RCM, and what caused general indignation, was the wish to separate Les Etchemins from Bellechasse. If we go back a little way in history, we see that there have been movements of this kind. There was the electoral district of Dorchester, for example, but Les Etchemins and Bellechasse have always been together, even though they migrated. They were at times attached to Montmagny, but they have always been together. It has to be said that separating Bellechasse from Les Etchemins is a historical error. We as members want to correct that. It is important to emphasize that fact.

I believe you have the opportunity as a committee to correct this mistake of breaking up a whole whose elements to date have been integrated. Les Etchemins is facing major economic challenges. Bellechasse's great dynamic and solidarity offset them. That is why I recommend not only that the commission's initial decision be upheld and respected, but also that L vis, Bellechasse and Les Etchemins be included in the name of the electoral district. I believe that the message is strong. The name indicates at the outset that they go together and that they are made to be together.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: As regards the sense of belonging, the municipalities of Saint-Ludger and Saint-Robert-Bellarmin have never accepted or gotten over the Quebec government's decision to include those municipalities in the RCM of Le Granit. That is not their reality. Their hometown is more Saint-Georges than M gantic. Proof of that is that, according to the town's resolutions, they want to return to Beauce. They do not want to see a repeat at the federal level of what they have experienced at the provincial level, that is being included in an RCM to which they feel no sense of belonging. The people of L vis love you so much they want to stay with you.

Hon. Steven Blaney: The people of Les Etchemins perceived the situation as an insult by their institutions. However, respect is the basis of our sense of belonging, and I think it is important to respect this regional characteristic in order to maintain Les Etchemins' sense of belonging, but also so that it can belong to a pan-Canadian whole.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I want to say that those regions deserve a high level of attention and that they are currently very well represented by their federal members.

• (1245)

[English]

The Chair: Madame Hughes.

I'm sorry, I'm trying to figure out who is next on my list.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I very much appreciate my colleagues' speeches.

I believe that the time and tools necessary for the commission to make its decisions have been a challenge.

I come from Ontario and I represent one of the largest electoral districts in Canada. Apart from the organizations, you mentioned more than 70 communities. I can tell you that I have more. You also mentioned 458 km—

Mr. Fran ois Lapointe: No, it is not as bad as it is in your district; we are talking about 258 km.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Yes, my district extends over approximately 120,000 km.

Mr. Fran ois Lapointe: Is it that much?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Pardon me, it is 103,000 km.

Mr. Fran ois Lapointe: How many municipalities are there in your riding?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I have not counted them all, but I am sure there are more than 100.

Mr. Fran ois Lapointe: More than 100!

Mrs. Carol Hughes: There are also 17 first nations communities.

It is a constant challenge. When it takes two days to cross a community during a break week or a weekend, that does not leave a lot of time to serve people, especially when there is no public transit.

I really appreciate your comments on this point. I believe that someone will have to reform the Constitution at some point to define the rules more clearly. It is easier to serve people if the population limit is 100,000 inhabitants. In Toronto, people have access to public transit and can easily travel to places that provide services that have not yet been cancelled, as they have in some communities like those located in northern Ontario and Quebec.

I believe these are the challenges we have to face. These people do not have the same representation as those living in urban areas. We have to be aware of that. That is why I think that the commission or the commissions that have been established should have had more flexibility to maintain the status quo in certain regions without having to say that it was because of numbers.

Mr. Fran ois Lapointe: Ms. Hughes, I would like to make a similar comment.

Some federal ridings are becoming so big that they stretch over several administrative regions. If we were to uphold the decision on Les Etchemins, there would be five RCMs, each with its own SADC and CLD. These are important partners. Every time we add a region, there has to be more follow-up.

I compare this situation to that of a colleague whom I adore. His riding is located south of Montreal, and two municipal councillors generally come and sit down with him for coffee the day after the federal government makes a major announcement. They do a review of the district and wonder what they will do with all that. In some cases, as in Est-du-Québec, it is quite different. Yours is quite disturbing. This represents days of work, and it has to be done if you want to have the same quality of information. When I do a tour because of something important such as a budget, I have to spend an entire week there before I can say that the people who asked me questions have received an answer.

[English]

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I'm very sensitive to that because I have that many municipalities in my area. I think the fact that you have actually come together and agreed to the decision that is before us here today speaks volumes. That's exactly what we need to do. We need to work together. When you have a community that says they want to remain in a certain area, as in my case, Pic Moberg wanted to stay with White River because that's where they do their business, but now they have been thrown into the Thunder Bay area....

When you think of the fact that the accessibility to the MP will basically be the same, that the MP will have to displace himself no matter what, the impact there doesn't quite make sense to me.

I appreciate the fact that so many people have come out here to support the decisions you are putting forward. It is all about representation, not only on their behalf, but it's the ability for the MP to be able to represent them according to what an MP in an urban area can do as far as accessibility is concerned.

Thank you.

•(1250)

The Chair: Madam Hughes, I would bet we're going to hear that again at some point further on in our study.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I'm not sure yet.

The Chair: Mr. Menegakis will finish us off, please, for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our colleagues for their testimony today.

Mr. Blaney, I also want to congratulate your electors for travelling so far to be here with you. I see that this is a very important decision that affects them directly. It is definitely easier for us when members agree and when we have broad support from the communities concerned.

My only question is this: can you think of a convincing reason why the commission should not be in favour of your proposals?

Mr. François Lapointe: You have to hope.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Menegakis, I believe the point that Ms. Hughes raises is very important. There is the number of people that a member represents, and there is the number of communities. Those are two different realities in terms of territories and administrative entities that must be represented. I would dare say that is certainly an additional argument.

Consider my situation, for example, which I hope to preserve and that my successor will preserve. There are 30 municipalities plus a central city, Lévis, which I share with another member, Mr. Gourde. That is great.

It is possible for one person to cover that area. I am coming back to the reality of Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. Of course, if I talk to the people from Les Etchemins and Rivière-du-Loup, they will tell me that has nothing to do with it. The situation simply tears a member apart. Montmagny and Rivière-du-Loup are two different realities. It gets a little abstract. There is really a disconnect between the citizen, the member and the government he or she represents. I very much appreciate your comments and I thank you for them. I encourage the commission members to uphold the decision they made in September.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Thank you.

Mr. Bernier, Mr. Lapointe, do either of you wish to add something?

Mr. François Lapointe: I would like to cite a very specific example.

The two most highly populated towns are Rivière-du-Loup and Montmagny, and they are situated virtually at opposite ends of the riding. The one is in Chaudière-Appalaches and the other in Bas-Saint-Laurent. So they are not in the same administrative regions. I have never been able to attend Canada Day festivities in both places because they do not coordinate their activities and the celebrations take place at the same time.

Consequently, I cannot require two remote regions to raise the flag at different times simply because I would like to be in one of them and then have enough time to travel so that I can raise the flag in the other. I cannot even suggest such a thing because they are two completely different worlds.

We work hard and we ultimately manage the files that present problems across the district. We do it, but sometimes three municipalities celebrate a 100th anniversary on the same weekend. So, unless we can be everywhere at once, it is not possible to be in three places at the same time. The more you increase this burden, the more you create these kinds of situations, in which an elected member, even with the greatest good will in the world, cannot always get to all the places he or she considers legitimately important.

Sometimes I tell people that I am so happy to be with them on a particular evening, but I know that there is another very important event in the district where I have to ensure I am represented. So we do not have a choice because, unfortunately, the last time anybody tried to clone someone, it turned out badly.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: I will take 30 seconds to say that I believe that, if this committee decides to approve the proposal it has before it regarding Beauce, I am virtually certain that the electoral boundaries commission will move forward with our proposal because it referred to it on page 10 of its report. It specifically cited Beauce to show that people wanted to stay together because they had a profound sense of belonging. We are only continuing in the same perspective, making very minor adjustments, particularly to the quota.

I believe there was a very high variance in Beauce. Now it would return to nearly 10%. It was less than 10% in Mégantic—L'Érable, and it will stay lower than that with one minor variation. I believe the commission would approve your recommendations.

• (1255)

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll conclude. I'd like to thank our members for coming and being as prepared as they were, some with more backup than others. Thank you for being here and for sharing that constituents can make a difference and members of Parliament can make a difference when they work together. Now let's see if this committee can help you make that difference. We'll do our best.

Thank you very much.

We are adjourned.

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

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 Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

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

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

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.

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 du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>