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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell): Welcome, everyone.

Good morning. This is meeting number 8 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for the first session of the 42nd Parliament. This meeting is being held in public. Today we're going to have a briefing from the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, Mary Dawson.

Mary, you must be very popular, I haven't seen this room so full in a long while. I know Kady O'Malley is very excited that you're here. She'll have lots to tweet.

With Mary is Martine Richard, general counsel and acting director of investigations; Lyne Robinson-Dalpe, director of advisory and compliance; and Marie Danielle Vachon, director of policy, research, and communication.

Seeing as there is so much interest in the room, basically this committee is responsible for a mandatory five-year review of the conflict of interest code. We just did that a year ago, but we didn't do everything. We just picked the low-hanging fruit, so there may be other things that we may want to do. We're going to have that discussion next Tuesday after we hear this presentation. Next Tuesday we will discuss what the committee wants to do on this topic or amendments we want to make, if anything.

I would ask the committee members, before I forget, to come prepared to rubber-stamp the three forms that are already in place that we talked about before. Make sure you take a look at them so we don't have to have a long discussion because they're already being used and approved by Parliament, and we don't want to change our procedure of approving such forms.

With that, unless any of the committee members want to do anything else, you are all very welcome. Thank you for coming on short notice. We seem to ask everyone on short notice while we're getting organized. We appreciate your bringing your technical staff who will be able to answer some questions. The committee is always very creative in its questions, so it is great that we have a whole team here. You're on, and we'll be flexible with your presentation time because I know you have a lot of things that you could tell us.

Ms. Mary Dawson (Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner): Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, I am pleased to have this opportunity to appear before you, and I thank you for inviting me.

[English]

I was going to introduce my team here, but you've introduced them already. I'll mention that these are my senior management team members, and I'll mention the one who's not here today because she's just left on holidays, Denise Benoit, who's the head of corporate.

I will briefly explain my role and mandate as Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, review my past interactions with the committee, and outline my hopes and expectations for a productive relationship going forward.

As Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, I administer two conflict of interest regimes: the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons and the Conflict of Interest Act for public office holders. These two regimes seek to prevent conflicts from arising between the public duties of elected and appointed officials, and private interests.

The members' code and the act have similar but not identical provisions. This can be confusing, particularly in the case of members who are also ministers or parliamentary secretaries, and therefore subject to both regimes. I've recommended that Parliament consider ways in which the members' code and the act might be harmonized where possible in order to ensure consistency of language and processes.

The members' code is part of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, the permanent written rules under which the House regulates its proceedings. It includes rules on avoiding conflict of interest, processes for the confidential disclosure of information to the commissioner, procedures for making members' summary information and other statements public, an advisory role for the commissioner, and a process for investigating alleged contraventions of the rules by members.

My staff and I review confidential reports of assets, liabilities, and activities. We maintain a public registry of publicly declarable information and investigate and report on cases of alleged non-compliance. You're in the process or have finished that first phase of your initial reporting. Our primary goal is prevention, by assisting members and public office holders to comply with the conflict of interest regimes.

An explicit educational role for the commissioner is set out in section 32 of the members' code. My staff and I undertake a number of outreach activities to inform and educate members about their obligations under the members' code and how to comply. We maintain regular contact with members and provide confidential advice on specific matters. We review with them each year their confidential disclosures and public declarations. We make formal presentations to party caucuses, and we prepare written material, such as backgrounders, fact sheets, and advisory options.

In enforcing the members' code I'm empowered to conduct formal investigations called "inquiries". In my inquiry reports I can recommend sanctions, but it's up to the House of Commons to decide if any measures should be taken against a member for failure to comply with the members' code. Those reports are made public without any approvals by Parliament or the government.

The members' code has been amended a number of times since it was adopted by the House of Commons in April 2004. In 2007 an interpretation section was added, the reporting deadline for gifts was extended to 60 days, and there were several changes to the disclosure statement provisions. In 2008 an exemption was introduced as a result of an inquiry report of mine so that members would not be considered to be furthering their own private interests or those of another person if the matter in question consisted of being a party to any legal action relating to actions of the member as an MP. That was the issue of libel chill that some of you might remember. In 2009 the gift rules were amended in consultation with this committee and myself.

Most recently, in 2015, the code was amended in several areas. Among the changes the disclosure threshold for gifts was lowered from \$500 to \$200, consistent with the threshold for public office holders, the threshold for reporting sponsored travel costs paid by third parties was also set at \$200, and deadlines were introduced for members to sign their disclosure summary and complete the annual review process. All of these changes related to recommendations I had made during the last five-year review.

● (1110)

Section 33 of the members' code requires the committee to conduct a comprehensive review of its provisions and operation every five years. The amendments made to the members' code in 2007 resulted from the first of the five-year reviews.

The second review was launched in 2012 and I provided the committee with a written submission and appeared before it to discuss my recommendations in May of that year. The committee suspended its study soon afterwards and began a new review almost three years later, in February 2015. I provided a new written submission at the committee's request and again appeared before it.

In June of 2015, the committee presented a report to the House of Commons concluding that review. The House concurred in the report later that month, and the committee's recommended amendments came into effect on October 20, the day after the federal election. They reflect, in whole or in part, 10 of the recommendations that I made to the committee, and I was delighted to see this. I note that the code is generally working quite well, but I also note that I made 13 other recommendations and would be pleased to discuss them should the committee choose to proceed with a comprehensive

review of the members' code, which was expressly recommended in the June report.

The House also concurred in a new form entitled, "Request for an Inquiry", which I had submitted to the committee for approval in 2010. I had to do that because section 30 of the members' code requires that I obtain the committee's approval for all forms and guidelines, and I felt it was very important that we have a form for members to request an inquiry.

Generally, the approval requirement has hampered my efforts to help members comply with their obligations. I cannot issue any guidelines or forms under the members' code. A notable example is guidelines in relation to gifts, an area that appears to cause a lot of confusion and prompts many questions from members.

In contrast, no approval of guidelines or forms is required under the Conflict of Interest Act for public office holders. I have issued several guidelines under the act, quite a number, actually, and public office holders have told me they appreciate having these tools. I have raised this concern with the committee in the past and asked it to consider whether there is really a need for the committee to approve any guidelines and forms that I may develop under the members' code.

In the meantime, when the members' code was amended by the House of Commons last June, a number of consequential and editorial changes were required to reflect the amended language of the code in the existing forms. Normally, I would have sought the committee's approval of the revised forms, but there was no time. The House rose very soon after the amendments were made, and then Parliament was dissolved in early August for the election.

The committee is mandated under the Standing Orders of the House of Commons to review and report on all matters relating to the members' code, and it has sought my input in recommending amendments to the House of Commons. I have appeared before the committee since becoming commissioner, although not very often. In the early years of my mandate I was invited to discuss with the committee two of my annual reports, but I have not been given the opportunity to do so since 2010. The only other occasions on which I was invited to interact with the committee was in the context of the five-year review of the members' code initiated in 2012, and I appeared a second time in 2015.

I look forward to a productive working relationship with the committee. I must say I am encouraged by the fact that the committee wished to meet with me so early in the new Parliament, even if it was on short notice.

● (1115)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, in closing, I wish to assure the committee that I and my office are available to provide any information that it may require about any matters related to the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons.

I thank the committee again for inviting me to appear before you today. I will now be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Just before we go to questions, you mentioned that when we recently adopted 11 of your recommendations, there were 13 we didn't. Right?

Ms. Mary Dawson: Ten, it was 10 and 13.

The Chair: Thirteen that we didn't...?

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes.

The Chair: Would it be possible, before our Tuesday meeting, for you to send us those 13 recommendations in a priority list of what you think is most important?

Ms. Mary Dawson: Okay.

The Chair: That's just in case we address that, because that's what we're going to discuss on Tuesday.

Ms. Mary Dawson: I would be pleased to do that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Who's going first? Mr. Graham.

● (1120)

Mr. David Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Thank you, Ms. Dawson. I first wanted to say that my adviser is Karine McNeely from your office. She has been fantastic. I wanted to shout out to her. It's been great. When I send a question, I get a quick and clear answer. It's been helpful to have that guidance as I try to figure out what on earth my responsibilities are.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Thank you. We do encourage people to call.

Mr. David Graham: We do and I've had my staff call when I've had questions, such as, "I don't know if I should do this. Ask Karen. She'll figure it out." It's appreciated.

In your view, what obligations or processes under the code are the most complicated or potentially misunderstood by members?

Ms. Mary Dawson: It's gifts, constantly gifts. It is such a problematic area.

Mr. David Graham: That's fair.

Ms. Mary Dawson: For others, none spring to mind as being problematic like that. It's overwhelmingly at the forefront of problems and that's the one that springs to my mind.

Mr. David Graham: What kinds of problems have you had with non-compliance and what kinds of enforcement actions have been taken in the past?

Ms. Mary Dawson: I have no idea the extent to which gifts are being reported to me, so all I can use as my guidelines are the ones that are reported.

I issued a report under the act about a year ago. That brought many more questions to the fore. That report had to do with someone who left office and went and worked with.... It was the Bonner report. It was about taking a post-employment position with someone who had been a lobbyist. It drew attention to our rules. Where questions arose were with respect to receptions and the whole question of gifts.

I've always said if you receive a dinner, that is a gift. Of course, if you receive a bouquet of flowers, that's a gift. Everything's a gift. Then the question becomes, is it acceptable? There is a lot of confusion between acceptability and reportability to begin with. A

lot of people align the two and think if it's not reportable, it's acceptable. That message seems to get lost constantly.

I'm pleased to see the reporting threshold has come down to \$200, because now we'll see the ones between \$200 and \$500.

I put forward a number of possibilities over the years as to how we could handle this. Just to give you a bit of history, when you guys made those amendments in 2010 or 2011 the rules were different. The rules said if you were given a gift that had anything to do with your job then you had to refuse it. Those rules were being totally ignored. It was like they didn't exist, and I was troubled by the hypocrisy of it all. I said we should at least look at putting out some realistic rule on gifts that people could then accept and not ignore. What happened was that we took the same rule that was in the act for the public officer holders and mirrored it in the code. It's much easier to receive a gift as a member than it is to receive a gift as a minister because there are a lot more potential conflict situations.

I'm giving you a diatribe on gifts. I hope this is okay.

One area where you can't receive gifts is if you are sitting on a committee voting on a particular matter and the person who is the stakeholder takes you to a big, fancy dinner or gives you tickets to something.

I'm just explaining the gifts, but the area that gets the most attention by people complaining about the gift rules are these receptions that seem to take place on the Hill.

Mr. David Graham: As I understand it, if I accept that piece of sushi then they can't lobby me, so it's immunity, right?

Ms. Mary Dawson: If you accept—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Mary Dawson: Well, I suppose you could look at it that way, except I wouldn't go so far as a little shrimp or something. I've been before committees where they said, "How many shrimp will it take to make an offence?"

I said, "Look, you are being silly." I've said that a normal courtesy cup of coffee is okay, unless it is drilled into the person every day.

You have to look at this with a little bit of common sense. It took me a couple of years to find out there were all these receptions on the Hill because nobody ever reports them. Generally speaking, for members, they are probably okay because if you're walking by and getting a glass of wine or something I'm not going to complain about that. But what I do have problems with is a significant spread being put out targeting the people who are the problem. I know there have been a number of misapprehensions about exactly what we're saying in my office. It gets a little complicated because the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying is putting out guidelines that interface to some extent with my rules.

I may as well beat my horse here. There is a problem between the Lobbying Act, the members' code, and the act, in that the same terminology is used to mean something different. In my act, a public office holder is a minister, a parliamentary secretary, a Governor in Council appointee, or ministerial staff. In the Lobbying Act, the term "public office holder" is used to mean a whole bunch more people, including members. When statements are being made under the Lobbying Act or under my act, they are talking about different people.

Anyway, that's one of my hobby horses.

• (1125)

Mr. David Graham: I appreciate that.

I think I am well past my time, so thanks for that.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Sorry, I went on.

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thank you.

I want to pursue the idea of gifts as well, specifically in relation to the idea of events, receptions, information sessions, meetings, galas, whatever, the whole list of things that we all attend in the course of our jobs. I'm sure everybody in this room sitting around the table on both sides would say that those are important aspects of our job, important duties as members of Parliament, to meet with people, to hear information, to gather feedback, to meet with constituents, to speak at events, and a variety of things like that.

I'm still struggling a bit with some of the testimony and answers we had last time you were at committee in trying to determine what we can attend and what we can't, what is considered a gift and what is considered part of our official duties. I have a few questions. I hope I'll have time to get to them all.

I wonder if you could you give us some kind of clarification. When you were here last time you indicated that you were recommending that we make the code explicitly exclude events where all members have been invited. That raises a few questions for me. The first one is: how do we, as members of Parliament, know or determine what the invitation list was for an event? Were all members of Parliament invited? How are we to know?

That works well if it's an event taking place here in Ottawa or in the national capital region but it doesn't work so well when it's an event in our own constituency or in our region. If it's an event in one's own constituency is it then acceptable to attend if, say, the local municipal councillors and the local provincial elected members have been invited?

More broadly than that—I'll use Mr. Christopherson's example—if all the politicians in the Hamilton area had been invited, or in my case, if all the politicians in the Calgary area had been invited, would that make it acceptable?

It's really difficult for us to know when, where, and how to determine that. Could you give me some clarification?

Ms. Mary Dawson: As far as I'm concerned, if it's constituency activities that's fine, unless it's some company that's looking for a particular bill from you that targets you specifically for that. But if you're invited to the Catholic brothers something or other, or the

Jehovah's Witnesses something or other, there is no problem going there at all.

There was a time when I first came into this office where some of the members thought they had to pay every time they went to one of these fairs, and so forth, and I said, "No, don't worry about that because you're representing your constituency and they're not looking for anything in particular from you." Those things are fine. That is your constituency.

Sometimes, for example—and it usually happens under the act rather than the code—the Prime Minister might be invited to this, that, and the other thing to represent Canada. There is a whole representational role that's carved out. I don't know if that helps.

• (1130)

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm sorry, let me stop you there.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes. Keep grilling; that's fine.

Mr. Blake Richards: I only have limited time, obviously. I apologize for it.

I still find it grey there.

What is the barrier? How do we, as members of Parliament, determine what kind of event is acceptable and, I guess, when it is considered a gift?

Often, for example, in our ridings we might be asked to attend a charity function. The organizers obviously want you as a member of Parliament to attend, because you're someone who has some recognition and is well thought of in the community, generally—or hopefully. We like to think we're well thought of in the community, anyway. So they'll ask you to come to bring greetings or speak at the event or maybe help with the auctioning of their—

Ms. Mary Dawson: That is not a problem unless that particular charity at that particular time is seeking support.

I sent an advisory out a couple of years ago in a case when the Falun Gong sent tickets to their performances at the NAC, which would be in the order of \$100 or something. At the same time, they were making representations for support.

That's the test. Is there something that they're looking for from you?

Mr. Blake Richards: So as long as there's nothing that they're asking of you as a member of Parliament...?

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes, because you are prominent members within a community—

Mr. Blake Richards: If the charity, for example, were to be seeking government funding for a new building or something, then that would be unacceptable?

Ms. Mary Dawson: It would be unacceptable for the minister who was involved in deciding on the funding. It might be unacceptable for the committee members, if there were a bill before the House or something.

Mr. Blake Richards: So the determination is really whether you specifically have a decision-making point in something that this organization is seeking.

Ms. Mary Dawson: That's right.

Mr. Blake Richards: What about reporting it as a gift? For example, you're attending that charity function and the ticket price is more than \$200. They provided you a ticket because they'd like you there as a prominent member in the community to provide support to their—

Ms. Mary Dawson: It's the same test, but then you need to report your ticket.

Mr. Blake Richards: You'd have to report the ticket, so it's considered a gift.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: It's acceptable, but you must report it.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes. But why are they giving you a gift worth more than \$200? It always troubles me when these charities blanket the Hill with these gifts. What the heck are they spending...?

Mr. Blake Richards: No. I'm not talking about a gift. I'm saying that if you're attending, as I outlined earlier, in your role as a member of Parliament....

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes, and they thank you for going....

Mr. Blake Richards: If they're asking you to be there and you're not paying for a ticket, but the tickets are more than \$200, then you must report that as a gift—

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes, you have to report it.

Mr. Blake Richards: —even though you're attending in an official...?

Ms. Mary Dawson: You report it, yes. That gives some transparency to what's going on.

Mr. Blake Richards: I guess I'm a little troubled that this would be considered a gift, because it's really part of our role as a member of Parliament. But if you're saying that's the case, I guess my question would be that if we felt as a committee that we wanted to recommend changes so that we would better clarify—

Ms. Mary Dawson: It would depend on whether it was in your constituency, probably. Each case....

Unfortunately, it is a grey area. There's no way of getting around it. You have to determine, first of all, whether it's a gift, and a gift is anything given to you that you don't pay for, basically.

Mr. Blake Richards: May I just...?

The Chair: Go ahead. Make it really short.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it. This is just a quick follow-up.

It almost sounds to me as though we're presented with the case that every time we were invited to an event, we'd have to come to check with your office to determine whether it's acceptable or not. Is there a way you could suggest that we could write the code so that this would be better clarified, which would then not require a member of Parliament to come to check with you every single time they're attending an event?

Can you suggest how we might write the code to be very clear about what's acceptable and what's not?

Ms. Mary Dawson: My guidelines under the act, I think, are quite good. I've never been able to get guidelines.... I sort of gave up because of the requirement for this committee to approve stuff. But I think if I had the power, I could put my mind to it and get a guideline out.

I've had letters coming in from lobbyists and I've promised them that I'm going to get an advisory out, which I consider that I can do on my own, around some of these gifts. But you know, there's a whole bunch of different, random questions that go in different directions.

I should just point out one thing, though. If you're there representing your community, I would consider that a protocol gift, and there is an exception for protocol gifts. But it's still a gift. There's a difference between reporting and acceptability.

I think it's not a bad thing, if you're getting value.... I mean, most of these things in your community would not require a ticket of \$200, I would think. It's not as though there's a plethora of these things. I agree that it's not 100% easy, but the reason it's not easy is that it depends on the individual receiving it and the relationship with the giver. You have to look at the specific cases.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Christopherson, you have seven minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Madam Dawson, and your staff for being here today. We have been around and around on this stuff all along. I arrived the year this all started and I have to say it's about as clear now as it was then.

Ms. Mary Dawson: The easy answer is you can receive no gifts, but I don't think you want to go there. There is a solution. Sorry.

Mr. David Christopherson: Not a problem. Just a macro and then I'll get into a couple of micros. You opened with—and I've heard it consistently and we've dealt with it here at this committee—where we have the act and the code and the fact that they're not the same, but then we also have the lobby commissioner, as you mentioned. Has there ever been any attempt or thought between you and the lobby commissioner, or anybody else on that side of it, to look at a joint report that makes recommendations that would help clarify that?

It would be for ease of use, rather than us dealing with the individual silos and trying to identify where they overlap, what language would be best, if there's a conflicting language, which one to recommend, or how to outline the arguments for and against each. It seems to me it would be a lot easier if you folks as agents of Parliament sat down—because you have the expertise. You know what you're talking about because you deal with it every day. We deal with all kinds of things all day.

Has there been any thought to that or is there a particular reason why we couldn't approach it that way?

Ms. Mary Dawson: We've both appeared at same meetings where we're on a panel and had a discussion about things.

Mr. David Christopherson: If I recall those meetings, it just helped to point out the problems. I was looking at in terms of the solution side. Could you come in with a joint report that makes recommendations, or can you not do that because you're silo-bound by your separate pieces of legislation?

Ms. Mary Dawson: One of the problems is that we're dealing with a different group. We're not dealing with the same group of people, and the rules can't be the same when you're not dealing with the same group of people. I understand your instinct. I don't think we have necessarily the same bottom line, and the trouble is we each have our own authority. I take your suggestion and it would be a good thing. The only people that the lobbying commissioner is concerned about are lobbyists. I'm concerned about a much broader group of people: stakeholders.

Mr. David Christopherson: In fairness you're the one who raised the fact that we have overlapping jurisdictions, and that it would be helpful if we could separate those out. We've tried it from our end, and you can see how effective we've been in 12 years. I'm trying to find a different approach.

Ms. Mary Dawson: I think it might help if the two offices were together, but that's for the future.

Mr. David Christopherson: You realize you have a whole bunch of people in the lobby commissioner's office all jumping up and down right now saying, "What the heck?"

Ms. Mary Dawson: It's one solution. It's not a final solution.

Mr. David Christopherson: In one way it makes a lot of sense. If there are problems with overlapping, let's get it into one document where the language and the references are meant to be constant.

• (1140)

Ms. Mary Dawson: Lobbying used to be covered under the previous administration of the Conflict of Interest Act, but it was only the registration. What's different now is that there's this guideline capacity for the lobbying commissioner to make, and that wasn't there before.

Mr. David Christopherson: Just to pursue this a little further, we're just kind of blue-skying right now, but would that be something the two commissioners would be prepared to look at? If there's an efficiency to be made.... Nobody wants to lose anything. We spent a lot of time on these things, and in many ways these are the defining differences of a modern mature democracy versus some of the emerging ones that many of us are involved in, and the struggles they face. They are nice problems to have.

Is there the capacity to make that recommendation? Is it something we should look at? We're always interested in efficiencies on all sides of the House.

Ms. Mary Dawson: You're members of Parliament. I think you can make whatever recommendations you want to make.

Mr. David Christopherson: I was looking for something that had some substance before we do it though.

Ms. Mary Dawson: The ethics committee made that recommendation at one point.

Mr. David Christopherson: They did...?

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes, and that's been in the wind off and on.

Mr. David Christopherson: Maybe we should pick up on that thread, Mr. Chair. I'll leave that with you for now, but maybe that's something we want to look at. We keep doing the same thing over and over. Einstein would be so disappointed because we keep getting the same outcome, and we look for different ones. Maybe we should reach out and find some of that. New Parliament, big change, maybe this is the opportunity to get our arms around this and seize the moment. How's my time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you. I'll leave that, I think, unless there was more to it you wanted to go to.

I'll come back to the gifts again, because it's the most confusing thing. I'm pleased to hear, and I've heard you say consistently, that on the constituency side it's not as big an issue. That doesn't mean it can't be, but in Hamilton I don't go to a lot of galas at which the price is more than \$200. It happens from time to time, but really not that often.

Even when I was on city council, in more than 30 years in elected office, I don't think I've ever had to report anything involving any serious money. There were one or two items that crossed the line and triggered the reporting, but for the most part in the ridings it doesn't....

Now, here you get into a different ball game. We've talked about some of the issues: the receptions that are unclear, what is a protocol gift versus what isn't, and acceptability versus reportability. But the thing we haven't talked about, just to confuse it even more.... My friend Mr. Reid and I spent a fair bit of time...and I'm looking forward to his seven minutes on this because he spent a lot of time and was involved, I believe, in the original legislation. I just happened to arrive but he was actually part of the homework, so I defer often to his corporate history on a lot of these things.

But the stuff that comes in.... I'll walk into my Hill office on a Monday, having been in my riding, and there will be something sitting on my chair. There will be a letter and there will be some little, I don't know, key chain or a fob of some sort, a baseball cap, and a letter saying, "Hi. How are you? We are the"...whoever.

Recently we had one from the insurance bureau. I think they sent a little winter kit. I don't know the price. I'm thinking 50 bucks maybe, give or take, if that. I sent it back, based on the last meetings we had with you, because I just fear the media is going to be coming around saying they're just curious as to who followed what she said. I shipped it all back.

But you're going to hear Mr. Reid talk about the fact that sometimes it costs us more money to find out who to send it to, spend the time of staff who spent time already unpacking it and getting it ready for me when I arrived, only to have me turn around and say ship it out. There's all that time.

Sometimes you're not sure. Mr. Reid was looking for permission just to throw it out, which is an answer here, but what a waste. Really, it's like throwing 50 bucks times 338 just completely out the window, and then there's no benefit gained by somebody who might use it.

Ms. Mary Dawson: No. You could accept those. As long as that insurance bureau or whoever the heck it was who gave you the gift wasn't looking for a decision from you.

Mr. David Christopherson: I appreciate that, but what happens

The Chair: David, we're way over your time.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm sorry. Okay.

The Chair: We can get back to it, though, unless you want to go really quickly to finish this up.

Mr. David Christopherson: With your permission, I'll just follow up on it and stop as soon as you tell me, obviously.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. David Christopherson: You're getting the benefit of those who have been around. The media are also here, so if there are any mistakes, let me make them, rather than any of you. Yeah, I know how this goes, "Go ahead, Dave. Sure, talk away about all these gifts." It's great subject fodder to be involved in.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: Here is the thing. What happens is that the insurance bureau will do a lobby day, or certainly, for instance, the firefighters—and we get both the firefighters themselves and the chiefs—will give a gift, as well as the insurance bureau. Here's the thing. When they arrive, the sophisticated ones usually have two or three points and they keep it to that. They keep it simple. They come year after year making the same arguments, trying to get their issues on the agenda of the opposition, who then become the government and put pressure on the government, etc.

When you say to me, as long as they're not lobbying you for anything, I know—

• (1145)

Ms. Mary Dawson: It's as long as they're not a stakeholder, not "lobbying". That's a much broader term.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, but they're a stakeholder. They're representing brokers.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Right, but there are many stakeholders who aren't under the Lobbying Act. There are those cut-offs.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay. Now we get to speak to simplicity. Do my staff have to have a card with which they vet all of this? We're looking for simplicity. We want to make sure nothing is wrong; that's a given. But there's waste right now and this is what throws me. Using the firefighters as an example, they always send along a key chain, a fob, a baseball cap. They do that kind of stuff.

Ms. Mary Dawson: That's fine.

Mr. David Christopherson: But they always come with their three asks—I think of the chiefs in particular—on public safety issues. They're not benefiting personally from what they're asking for, but they want certain legislation brought in that they believe

would improve the fire safety of Canadians in their homes and where we work and where we're in public.

How do I separate a constant...? I know the three points, because they've been meeting with me for over a decade. I know their points, so when I see something that comes from them I can make the connection, which probably eliminates 80% of what comes in the door.

Help me.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Is there any bill or any consideration by the government that is brought forward?

Mr. David Christopherson: There are budget bills. Budget bills can contain a lot of little goodies for anybody, so if they happen to say, "We like the budget and we hope you will support it", which of course as the opposition we're unlikely to, does that constitute it, because that's a big thing?

Ms. Mary Dawson: No. It has to be more obvious than that I think.

Lyne reminds me that there was a case where people came to us and asked us about some gifts the insurance people were giving at some point, and they had a matter before the House. That's why we said you couldn't do it.

Mr. David Christopherson: When you say a matter before the House, one of those three points would have to be in a bill or at a committee. What about a minister who says they are thinking of going that way, but they haven't yet?

Ms. Mary Dawson: Do you want to say a word or two?

Ms. Lyne Robinson-Dalpé (Director, Advisory and Compliance, Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner): Essentially, if there is a bill before the House or changes in legislation or if somebody is appearing in front of committee to make changes to legislation or a project bill, at that point in time we would determine that the organization could not provide you with a gift.

Mr. David Christopherson: The closer you are to that decision point, then the more acute this becomes.

Ms. Lyne Robinson-Dalpé: Exactly. Going back to the insurance brokers' association, a few years back members had come to us and asked, "Can we accept this gift?" because they all had received blankets or... Actually it wasn't that case, it was that they were doing promotions—

Mr. David Christopherson: They did the purple blankets and then they stopped.

Ms. Lyne Robinson-Dalpé: At that point we said they couldn't, the reason being that there was a piece of legislation they were pushing in the House in committee. We had said at that point that members sitting on that committee should not be accepting those gifts from the insurance brokers.

Mr. David Christopherson: Right. Now that's a high level of organization to the extent that there are a lot of moving parts to this place. Most of us focus on the things that we're...so you do run the risk that you wouldn't know there was a private member's bill.

Ms. Lyne Robinson-Dalpé: Again, if you're not sitting around the table, if you're not in the committee, that would—

Mr. David Christopherson: But we would be in the House ultimately.

Ms. Lyne Robinson-Dalpé: The House is more general. It's all MPs, at which point we would say that it's more committee focused. Committee members cannot accept, but others can accept.

Mr. David Christopherson: Alright. I'll defer. I'll yield the floor now, but I would say to Mr. Reid that it sounds a little more definitive than we've had in the past. It makes me wish I hadn't sent back that winter kit now if I get stuck on the highway. Well, it has gone back. I wanted to be safe.

Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: We're going to carry on.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Can I make one more observation?

In the case where you have to send stuff back, there could be a system whereby you dumped it somewhere that was known and they could come and collect it or something.

I've heard this problem from a number of people who didn't know what to do with the stuff and they didn't want to spend the money to get it back. It seems to me that's a problem that could find a solution somehow.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you.

Just before we go on to the last seven-minute round, you mentioned hesitancy in doing your guidelines because we have to approve them. I think you would find goodwill in the committee here. As chair of the agenda committee, any guideline you gave us we would deal with fairly quickly. I wouldn't let that hold you up.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Okay. Around 2010 I put something in, and that's the thing that finally got approved in 2015 in June by that particular committee. I stopped drafting these things at that point. I thought, what's the point?

The Chair: I didn't hear any objections from the committee, so I think we would try to move quickly on your guidelines.

Ms. Vandenberg, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): I'm going to share my time with Ms. Sahota.

Before I get to my question, and following up on what Mr. Christopherson was saying, what about regifting? For instance I'm always approached by organizations asking, "Can you give something to our silent auction?" If I took the gifts we got and gave them to these charities, would that be me receiving the gift or just collecting them and giving them away?

Ms. Mary Dawson: That's you receiving the gift. I've been express on that. Yes. I mean you have received it and then you're deciding what to do with it. Sorry.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: That clarifies that.

The other question I have is about those 13 recommendations you mentioned at the outset. There were 23. There were 10 included in the report and 13 that were not included in the report. I've heard you also saying a number of things, and I think what I'm hearing is that you recommended some things along the way, for instance,

consistency with the Lobbying Act, and between the act and the code, and then the guidelines and things.

Was that included in those 13 recommendations that didn't get included?

Ms. Mary Dawson: I didn't make any reference to the Lobbying Act. Some of these issues have come up recently, actually. With respect to the act and the code, that was one of them.

It was a soft recommendation, because I said just do what you can. I understand that the members really don't want the code to be an act and they don't want to get the government involved in any way with the stuff that goes on in the House. There are all sorts of issues there. But certainly there's nothing wrong with making the words say the same thing. Making the same words with the same procedures would help.

You know, it's not too bad now. There have been a number of movements over the last five or six years, one way or another, to make them more similar, such as in the case of gifts.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Do you have any idea why those 13 recommendations were not accepted? Are they substantive? Are they things that we could potentially—

Ms. Mary Dawson: I'm astounded that they managed to do 10, to tell you the truth. I was just blown over, but delighted.

I think it was just because they only had so much time, but I don't know. I wasn't there. In fact, after I appeared, and I think there was one other person from B.C. who appeared, they all went in camera. I've no idea what the discussions were, but I think that probably they chose them because they thought they were either important or easy, low-hanging fruit.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: But there would be nothing precluding this committee from looking at those recommendations again, would there?

Ms. Mary Dawson: No. That was the recommendation of the last committee.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Are there others since then that you would put forward?

Ms. Mary Dawson: I would have to think about it, but I rather shot my bolt with the 23 that are there. I had something like 100 when I made my recommendations concerning the act.

Two of them were very complicated ones, and they're technical amendments. There are problems with the way that certain sections were drafted. Two of my recommendations are really a set of recommendations, and I've redrafted them. I've given you drafts to consider—I used to be a legislative drafter, as a matter of fact—to replace the way the sections are organized, because they're either organized in a confusing way or there are some inconsistencies that need to be fixed up. If you dove into those.... They are technical but they're really not terribly substantive.

There are a few that are more substantive, and there a couple of general ones. For example, I said, "For heaven's sake, why don't you think about doing a code about political behaviour?" But I also said that I'm probably not the appropriate person to monitor that particular code.

There are one or like that, too, but there are certainly enough of them to look at.

● (1155)

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): As my colleague Anita just mentioned, out of the 13.... I know we're going to be getting the list, but since we have you here today I'd like your opinion on the matter. What would be a priority from the ones that were missed?

Ms. Mary Dawson: For one thing, the act deals with furthering the private interests of relatives and friends. The code only deals with furthering your own private interests. There are about three or four sections in there that I think should.... I mean, why the heck should you be able to further the private interests of your relatives and friends? That's not covered in the code.

On the business about the receptions, I said you might want to make a special rule about the receptions and have that as a carve-out in the gifts, if indeed they're all going on. Basically, I don't find most receptions problematic anyway, the ones that are open to everybody, but if it were stated in the code, it might comfort some people.

Applying an acceptability test to sponsored travel is a bit of a delicate one. That was a big foofaraw about five or six years ago. CBC tried to make something of it and they had a big scandal. But it sort of fizzled because members observed that if you couldn't accept those gifts, then you would never get to travel anywhere—which is pretty feeble, but on the other hand, there it is.

The fact of the matter is that a lot of money is spent by people on the outside, and there's no acceptability test at all as to whether you can accept this travel or hospitality from people. Often it's given by countries.

Concerning prohibiting personal solicitation of funds by members, in the act there's a prohibition against personally going out and soliciting funds. I think that would be a good one.

Then there are the two sets that I mentioned. One is the disclosure provisions, which just need to be cleaned up and for which I've given you drafts.

I'd like you to stop having to make me come here to get my guidelines and forms approved, especially the forms. What happened last June was that there were three forms that had to be fixed, because you changed the level of gifts from \$500 to \$200 for the sponsored travel and they were wrong. There was no time to get them to this committee, because they came into force as soon as the election was over, the day after.

Nobody was sitting then, so there was no way I could bring it anywhere. I thought the only thing I could do was write a letter to the clerk and say that I had done it and see what you can do about it. But those three.... If you want to, you could get rid of that particular issue to approve those forms. I don't see why I have to come here to get my forms approved, frankly, nor my guidelines, for that matter. It's very unusual that I have to. I leave that with you as another one.

Do you want me to keep going? I'm just seeing these things on my list.

Sanctions for failing to meet reporting deadlines is a tough one, because I think the legal analysis would be that only Parliament can impose penalties on MPs. I think that's probably a no go, and I more or less mentioned that.

Inquiries is the other area that, unlike disclosure, has inconsistencies—between the English and French, to begin with—and other drafting issues.

I have probably skipped some here, but....

I don't expressly have the power to summon witnesses or compel documents, and I should. I've never had anybody not give them to me when I've asked for them, but there should be that power. I ran into trouble in one investigation when I looked for documents from the House of Commons and they said I couldn't have them unless they were sent first to the member who was under investigation. When I received the documents, they weren't the same. I had happened to get some of those documents from elsewhere as well, and there had been deletions. That's a problem.

I talked about producing a single annual report to Parliament. I don't care so much about that one anymore, because I have it organized so that I can do both of them. I have two reports due at exactly the same time, one under the act and one under the code. It would be somewhat convenient to put them together, but I don't care very much about that one now.

● (1200)

Then there's that little kicker there of a code of conduct to address partisan and personal conduct of members. You've done a bit of work on the harassment thing now, but it is pretty damning on the behaviour of parliamentarians when some of their behaviour gets media attention. What the heck? It's not good for the reputation of the institution.

I comment on that, but those are two that probably would be outside of my domain.

That's an example. Those are most of them.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we go to the five-minute round, maybe we'll suspend for five minutes so that anyone who wants to can get food.

Members, after the five minutes I'll throw it open to anyone in the room.

● (1200)

(Pause)

● (1205)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): We'll call the meeting back to order. I'll momentarily fill in for the chair here and allow him the chance to have a quick break.

We're now going to the next round of questioning. Mr. Reid has the floor, and I believe it's for five minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): To start, Mr. Vice-Chair, I'm hoping you will use the same timing device for my five minutes that the chair used for Mr. Christopherson's eight minutes. That would be most helpful.

Let me start by saying to the commissioner that having dealt with your office, now as a member of Parliament with my own reporting for a number of years and also as a member of this committee for a decade, I appreciate your professionalism. It's always nice to deal with an office that's as professional as the one you run. It's much appreciated.

• (1210)

Ms. Mary Dawson: Thank you.

Mr. Scott Reid: My impression has always been and continues to be that the problems that arise deal not with the way in which you've administered the code, but rather with the way in which the code was written. I think to some degree it was written in haste when it was designed. There are some problems that have gradually been ironed out, but in particular I think they still exist vis-à-vis section 14 of the code, which deals with gifts. That's the area you mentioned that's problematic. I was going to ask if you have your copy of the code because I'm going to suggest some ideas that might be helpful in resolving some of this.

I believe there's a problem because subsection 14(1) of the code is to some degree in contradiction to subsection 14(3) of the code. Subsection 14(3) states that gifts are reportable if they have a value of \$200 or more, but subsection 14(1) reads, and I'll quote:

Neither a Member nor any member of a Member's family shall accept, directly or indirectly, any gift or other benefit, except compensation authorized by law, that might reasonably be seen to have been given to influence the Member in the exercise of a duty or function of his or her office.

It seems to me that part—might reasonably be understood to have been given in expectation—is saying that what is important if I receive a gift is not how I'll act, but how someone assumes that the person who gave the gift to me thought I would act. It's entirely conceivable that someone would give me a gift that's under \$200, which may have been intended to who knows how affect me but that is not realistically, plausibly going to have that effect.

I wonder if we could resolve part of the gift problem by adding something that says this. It would be a subsection that would go after subsection 14(3). It would have the number subsection 14(3.1) possibly, and it would say, "For greater certainty, a gift or other benefit that does not require disclosure under subsection 14(3) shall be deemed not to be capable of influencing the member in the exercise of a duty or function of his or her office."

Would that to some degree accomplish dealing with problems with that?

Ms. Mary Dawson: No. That's the old conflation of the reporting with the acceptability. That wouldn't help me at all. You could put that in and that's what the law would be, but then what you would have done is established a limit of \$200, under which we wouldn't be looking at the acceptability at all.

The other thing I should say is that it's not a question of whether it's in your eyes or the donor's eyes, it's in an independent third party's eyes as to whether it's reasonable.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'll just repeat it. It reads, "that might reasonably be seen to have been given to influence the Member". This is the difference. That might reasonably be seen to be capable of influencing the member is a different thing.

I would argue, Commissioner, that it is implausible, given how much we're paid, that a gift under \$200 could influence our behaviour.

Ms. Mary Dawson: That's the traditional argument, that nobody's going to buy me for \$200. I get that argument all the time.

These are your laws, your rules. You can make them whatever you want. I have suggested in the past that you make it so that you don't have to report, say, under \$35 or \$50, or something like that? I think that's a more reasonable level than \$200. That would be a bit better, from your point of view, than no gifts at all. Then you could conflate the two ideas of reportability and acceptability, which is what you're trying to do with your amendment, I think.

Mr. Scott Reid: I am trying to put them together. The word "conflate", to me, is value—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Mr. Reid, the time is up, but if you're going to wrap up your last question....

Ms. Mary Dawson: This is a very important point. It's constant, this point.

Mr. Scott Reid: Forgive me, I'm trying to merge the two. I'm saying that I think it is reportable, or else it is not conceivably something that should be regarded as potentially influencing our actions. I think the two should be the same and I would maintain the reason is that....

We can set the number low...\$200. I argued in favour at the committee of going from \$500 to \$200. I always said that \$500, in the eyes of the public, does seem like a level at which someone could possibly be influenced. I'm not sure that it's realistic, but it's something where I can see a reasonable person thinking that it could influence my actions.

But I repeat, it's whether someone thought they could influence my actions, and they may have been thinking that in a way that was not reasonable. The fact that a reasonable person thought that they'd thought it, in their unreasonableness—

• (1215)

Ms. Mary Dawson: You're getting to your bottom line in a much more complicated way than you need to. There's a much more direct way of getting to your bottom line than what you're suggesting. You don't need all of those subsections, you can just say that any gift under \$200 is acceptable and reportable. That's not the rule at the moment. You could maybe make some kind of an argument....

I don't agree with you that when you read subsection 14(1), it's in the eyes of the donor. It's that it's reasonable to be seen that way by the man on the Clapham omnibus. Legally, it's by the reasonable man. You could add those words if you wanted, to make it clear in that direction, but—

Mr. Scott Reid: Would you say then, "that might reasonably be seen to have the potential to influence the member"? That is different. That talks about what a reasonable person would think, as opposed to whether the donor, who may not be reasonable in their expectations, made that assumption.

Ms. Mary Dawson: An easier way of doing it is—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): I'll let you finish and answer the question, Ms. Dawson, but then I will cut it off there. I think I've been more than reasonable. We'll then move to the next questioner.

Ms. Mary Dawson: You could just add the words, "it can reasonably be seen by a reasonable person to have been", if that's where you want to go but that's not where you want to go. You want to raise the limit of acceptability. That's why I made that proposal a couple of years ago. It was just in desperation.

Why don't you conflate the two of them? I'm sorry if that's a negative word. If you put the two levels together, the reportability and acceptability, maybe you should take it down from \$200 to \$50, or \$35 or something, which I thought was reasonable, because below that, it's just a token.

It depends on what you want to do with it, but you can't hide what you're doing with a bunch of fancy words. You can do it quite directly.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Thank you. Now we'll move over to Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Thank you, Ms. Dawson. I want to echo some of the comments that your staff at the office have been tremendous. I know that our office has been calling a lot and asking a lot of questions, and they're very patient with us. Thank you for that, and please pass the message along to Karine.

I have one quick question. You talked earlier about an acceptability test for travel when it comes to countries, or being invited to travel in those countries. Could you speak to me a bit more about an acceptability test and what types of questions we should be asking? I'd like to get a bit more clarification there.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes. Say that somebody was a constant stakeholder of yours and gave you a trip to the States to some fancy resort. We had a case like that about five years ago. It was one of the caucuses. The members were offered a trip to some fancy resort for a week. That was sponsored travel. They were flown down there and given a meal. I would say that was not very acceptable. That's when I learned about caucuses. It took me a couple of years to discover that there were these caucuses doing these things. They used to call them all-party caucuses.

Quite often it's international countries. It's countries that are looking for support from Canada. The big ones are Israel and Taiwan. Just about every year you can see it in the list of sponsored travel. The question is why MPs are accepting gifts of travel from other countries. A decision has been taken and I think it's probably not going to change. MPs like to get these chances to go abroad to see these countries, so they're not going to put an acceptability test onto sponsored travel. But I'm suggesting that they think about it and that maybe they should have an acceptability test.

I've raised this before and I didn't get a very good reception. That's what I'm talking about. It just seems odd. For example, it's interesting because it's carved out that it's not a gift under the code. Where I see it is in the case of ministers and parliamentary secretaries, because it is a gift under the act. Then you get the whole question of whether it's an acceptable gift, but I can't apply that

acceptability test to members under the code, because it's carved out of the gift rules.

It just works in a different way. It's rather a question of whether parliamentarians really want to give up these goodies.

• (1220)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): The member still has about two minutes.

Mr. Chan?

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): I can jump in.

I want to echo my appreciation as well, along with that of all other committee members, for the professionalism of your staff. As a member who came in through a by-election I'm obviously familiar with the basic premise, but compliance becomes a real problem, especially when you're new and are not familiar with the rules.

I want to get back into your recommendation. One thing I read in your report was that it seemed you had some frustration with respect to your ability to appear before this committee and to have your annual report tabled and have an opportunity to present it.

Would it be helpful to you if we were to amend the Standing Orders or create some kind of mechanism to have you automatically appear?

Ms. Mary Dawson: It's up to you. What was noteworthy is the length of time that I was never invited to appear. It was three or four years that went by. Of course, I go to ETHI at least once or twice a year, because they do my estimates. You guys don't do my estimates. They also oversee, to some extent, though not the same way you do, the Conflict of Interest Act, so there's a different relationship.

It's just noteworthy that this committee has not invited me to come for a number of years.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Is there a particular time frame that you would look at? Your requirements are to report by March 31 of each year.

Ms. Mary Dawson: The logical time would be after my annual report.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Should it be within 90 days? Then perhaps there could be an automated clause such that, if we haven't called you, you would appear at the next meeting within a set time frame.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes. My report goes out in June, so it would probably be the following fall.

Mr. Arnold Chan: It might be 120 days from then, if you haven't been called, because we don't sit over the summer, or some reasonable period of time by which you would be called. It should certainly be before your next annual report is due. That's something for us to consider.

Ms. Mary Dawson: It's not my proposal, but it seems to me that it's sensible to invite me from time to time.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): All right, thank you. We certainly have always found your visits—this is the second one since I've been on the committee—informational. We appreciate them.

We're now going to go back to Mr. Reid, who has five minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again I'm on gifts. In subsection 14(1), it says, "Neither a Member nor any member of a Member's family shall accept"—that is not my wording, it's the wording in the rules—"any gift or other benefit". You've taken the position in the past that in the case of certain gifts that have been sent to all MPs, we should all send them back. When you were here before I raised the problem that I was not in a position to do it because I'd taken it and thrown it in the garbage, which I suppose would mean technical non-compliance with the code.

Does it seem reasonable to you that we could rewrite that part of the code to say there are a number of ways of getting rid of it? Sending it back is one option, sending it to you is another option, throwing it in the garbage is the third option, and, I don't know, crushing it with a hammer is the fourth option. It's basically not accepting it, but doing it in a way that doesn't involve us having to guess every time something comes in whether or not we are dealing with a certain number. As was the case with that particular gift of alternative health care supplements, most of us have no idea about their value. Its value to me was zero.

Ms. Mary Dawson: I was surprised that you would throw it in the garbage because it's not good to throw away pills into the garbage, but anyway it was interesting about that particular gift. We looked at the contents of that particular package and it was worth over \$100. There was a significant cost to that stuff. I agree, but usually a gift is not going to be unacceptable to an MP. That's the other thing about it. It's just when there's something going on. Like a pharmaceutical may well be unacceptable, I suppose, because maybe they're looking for a particular bill or something in a committee or something, but generally—

Yes, go ahead.

• (1225)

Ms. Lyne Robinson-Dalpé: It's important to review the documentation that comes with it. If there's a cover letter that asks for support on a bill or something like that, that is an indication the gift is most likely not acceptable.

Ms. Mary Dawson: The marijuana that was sent to all the Liberals this Christmas was the classic one. That was bad on two fronts. First of all, they were considering making marijuana legal, and the letter that covered it said, "Here's some marijuana, make our bill legal", or whatever. The second thing that was wrong with it, was that it was illegal for heaven's sake. It had to be gotten rid of.

There are some solutions to that particular problem. I would suggest a central place in the building to dump them, as long as they're reported as being dumped. Then the donors can know that's where they can get them back if they want them. There are solutions. I certainly don't want you each to have to mail them back.

Mr. Scott Reid: I have one last thing. There had been a considerable amount of discussion in the committee in the last Parliament around the issue of going to events, and whether or not this triggers a violation of the code unless one pays. I gather it was a meaningful financial problem. This is not true for me. I'm in a rural constituency. There are no expensive events in rural constituencies of this sort, where you have to pay \$200 or \$300 to get in. This occurs in urban areas. It was raised by one of our colleagues, who

said, "Look, I go because I have to. I would prefer to stay home if I had a choice, and now I have to pay on top of this".

Keeping that thought in mind, I wonder whether we couldn't make it clear in subsection 14.(1.1) that we are trying to distinguish the admission to the event itself, and say, in that case, that's set aside as a...but food and drink are okay. What I'm trying to do here is to distinguish between events that are typically sporting events, where there's a high admission cost—and that's something where it's reasonable to expect the person should have to pay for it themselves—and other kinds of events, such as going to various cultural community annual fundraising dinners, where there's a high ticket price, as essentially a way of supporting this or that community.

Ms. Mary Dawson: The test is always whether it could reasonably be seen to have been given to influence you. Normally it's okay to attend these events, but when it's a gala or something you're invited to, then you have to figure out who is giving you the ticket to go, if it's an expensive event. Those kinds of things come up from time to time.

This subsection 14(1.1) is still underneath the rubric of whether it could reasonably be seen.... It's usually the case where some stakeholder gives somebody a ticket to go to some event. It's a charitable event, but it's the stakeholder giving them the ticket. It's not the charitable event that's giving them the ticket.

I've had discussions with the National Arts Centre, for example. The NAC has this system whereby they issue VIP invitations to certain prominent people. That's all right, because they are not looking for something from the government. As I say, these cases usually come up in the act, not the code, but occasionally they can come up in the code as well. Those invitations from the charitable event people themselves, or the non-stakeholder event.... It's when a stakeholder buys a ticket to the NAC and invites somebody that there's sometimes a problem.

But really, don't worry about your constituencies very much at all, because you're meant to be visible out there.

• (1230)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Thank you.

Next we have Mr. Chan for five minutes.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Thank you, Mr. Vice-Chair.

I want to follow up on Mr. Reid's point, because I do come from an urban environment where sometimes I'm probably at that threshold, where I attend.... I come from a particular community background where I really go to an endless array of.... I just came off Chinese New Year. I don't know how many events I did. It's not like I feel that there's some material benefit there. I literally am running from one event to another to deliver a speech, or in some cases I'm just sitting there, but I do that as part of the discharge of my function.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Right.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I don't necessarily see that as a problem at all.

Ms. Mary Dawson: That's not a problem at all. Unless—

Mr. Arnold Chan: The question is whether there's a disclosure requirement. That's my question.

I'll give you an example of one. The Prime Minister recently attended the Dragon Ball. That is not a cheap ticket. I was sitting at the table of, let's say, a large financial institution. Originally, they invited me, and I said, "I can't accept that." Subsequently, I was invited by the organizers of the event, and I ended up getting seated at the same table of that large financial institution. I didn't know whether they were lobbying the government or not. Do I have a disclosure requirement? That's where I'm scratching my head.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes, the value of the ticket.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I do have a disclosure requirement—

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes, you do.

Mr. Arnold Chan: —even though it's a charity and it's raising money for older people. This is the Yee Hong Community Wellness Foundation and there was a significant amount of monies to obviously—

Ms. Mary Dawson: But that's part of the transparency principle. Basically, it's so they can see who in the heck is inviting you where.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I know that I'm being invited because I'm a community member of this particular community.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes, but there's nothing wrong with it.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Right. I don't see that there's an issue of attendance.

Yet, I had another instance where your office was helpful. I was invited by, let me simply say, a large educational institution to attend a board of trade function in Toronto. The ticket was over the \$200 threshold. Your office advised me to decline the ticket, which I did and I did not attend, although the subject matter of that particular talk was of significant interest to me. Then I had to ask myself if I was prepared to shell out the \$500 to attend.

These are the environments for which, as a parliamentarian, I find it very helpful to be informed about the issues writ large, as opposed to being lobbied about a particular specific issue. That's what I struggle with as a member. What is appropriate? What is not appropriate? Your office is helpful, but I'm not sure that I'm appropriately discharging my function in regard to having a broader view of issues out there and a broader view of the world when it comes to the issue of sponsored travel.

Ms. Mary Dawson: I'd be interested to go back and see what that case is. We'll take a look.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I also think of specific instances of gifts. Again, I come from a Chinese community. Chinese New Year is about red packets. I get a lot of red packets.

Most of them are chocolates and so forth, but occasionally there's money in them. To refuse this, from my cultural perspective, is an insult, but then I actually take a look and see how much is actually in them. If I'm getting it from a family member, that's part of a normal cultural practice.

Ms. Mary Dawson: That's okay.

Mr. Arnold Chan: That's no problem. That's easy for me. Where it gets a little more interesting is that I wonder if maybe I got that

because I'm an MP. In which case, I do try to refuse, but I get into a really difficult situation—

Ms. Mary Dawson: You don't necessarily have to refuse. You just need to report if it's over \$200.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I see. Okay.

Ms. Mary Dawson: You don't need to refuse. Most of things... That's where there's that distinction between reporting and refusing. It is tempting to suggest that you collapse the two, but then it has to be quite a low level, I think, like in the order of \$35.

Mr. Arnold Chan: For example, I don't feel that if mom and dad send me a red packet over the \$200 figure, I need to report it. I think not, but maybe I do.

Ms. Mary Dawson: No. It's not related to your position.

Mr. Arnold Chan: It's not related to my position.

Ms. Mary Dawson: No.

Mr. Arnold Chan: It's just our practice as a family member, right?

Ms. Mary Dawson: That's right.

Mr. Arnold Chan: For me, that is not—

Ms. Mary Dawson: That's expressly excepted.

Mr. Arnold Chan: That's an express exclusion.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Okay. That's helpful. I'm just trying to clarify the circumstances.

I certainly get instances, for example, of... Again, I would view it under the protocol in regard to a provision where I'm meeting, let's say, with another order of government, or more importantly, with a different government that makes representations and brings a gift. Again, to refuse would be a breach of diplomatic protocol. I'd take it, but if I think it's a little too pricey, I tend to just regift it. But then do I have a disclosure requirement? I think I do.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes, you do.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Okay. That's helpful.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Also, if you have nothing to worry about, why not disclose it? What's wrong with disclosing it, basically?

● (1235)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Okay. Thank you.

We finally came in just a little smidge under time on one of the rounds of questioning today, which is great. Not by much, though—

Mr. David Graham: It's a gift to the chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Do I have to disclose it? That's the question. Mr. Graham says it's a gift to the chair, so now I wonder if I have to disclose it.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): We have one final person on our list today, and that's Mr. Masse.

Welcome to the committee. You're subbing in. You have three minutes for some questions.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I apologize for filling in at the last minute here. I might have questions that have already been answered, so I apologize in advance for that.

This is my 14th year in the House. Following this discretion and disclosure has been kind of like following a squirrel. It's been all over the map, and it's been very difficult.

I'm wondering about this. Have you ever shadowed an MP for a day in terms of what their day is like on the Hill here?

Ms. Mary Dawson: No.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay. I suggest that might be a good example, because one of the reasons is that I'm back as critic on industry, or innovation, science and technology, which is a very important file that gets a lot of lobbying activity. I was listening with interest to the comments with regard to receptions and the uncertainties related to them.

I hate receptions. I can't stand them. I have to go to so many rubber-chicken dinners when I'm at home, and I have a young family. They're now 15 and 11. But I have to do sometimes seven a night. Up on the Hill here, I'm equally busy, and the receptions are sometimes the only time between House duty, committee, speaking in the House of Commons, and meeting with people in my office, so that what it comes down to, if you actually want to meet on an issue, is that then you do it at a reception, because it's absolutely impossible to meet. Otherwise, you don't.

Can I get clarification on what can be discussed at a reception and what can be provided at a reception under the rules you're proposing?

Ms. Mary Dawson: It's not so much what can be discussed but.... I mean, you can go to these receptions because they're without charge, I guess, and the gift is the food, right?

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Normally there's not a problem there, unless they're putting on a banquet of some kind. Normally it would be finger food and stuff, right?

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Yes, so you can go in and graze, and we don't see that as a problem.

Mr. Brian Masse: I hate doing them, to be honest with you. It's just not part of my.... I shouldn't say I hate doing them, but I would rather meet with people and discuss an issue in private, but sometimes you don't.

By the way, there are sometimes small gifts provided on the way out. They probably have a value of \$10 or so.

Ms. Mary Dawson: We exclude tokens. We would have that in our guidelines, if we could have them. That would be excluded.

Mr. Brian Masse: Also, in terms of disclosure for the \$200 limit, I've forgotten this. I should know this, but I don't. When was that established?

Ms. Mary Dawson: The \$200? Just this June.

Mr. Brian Masse: Prior to that, there was nothing or...?

Ms. Mary Dawson: It was \$500.

Mr. Brian Masse: It was \$500. That's right.

What's the time frame in which you do actually have to disclose that?

Ms. Mary Dawson: It's 60 days.

Mr. Brian Masse: See, some of the stuff I haven't even gotten to at that time....

What's going to happen next year with the \$200? Is it to be reviewed? Is it to be evaluated? Does it go with the rate of inflation?

Ms. Mary Dawson: No, it's sitting there unless you change it, until Parliament changes it.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay. So it comes back—

Ms. Mary Dawson: That's one of the issues you may look at, because it looks like you'll probably be looking at gifts.

A decision was just taken to put the limit at \$200. This is for reporting, not for acceptability. The more difficult issues revolve around reporting and acceptability and the different levels, different thresholds.

Mr. Brian Masse: Is this legislation to be reviewed in three years?

Ms. Mary Dawson: It's not legislation; it's a code.

Mr. Brian Masse: Oh, it's a code. Sorry.

Ms. Mary Dawson: It's reviewed every five years.

Mr. Brian Masse: The \$200 limit would be put in place for five years.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Unless you decide to change it.

You missed the front end of this, when I said that there have been changes made over the years that weren't connected with the five-year review. You can make a change any time you want, if you can get it through Parliament.

Mr. Brian Masse: All right.

Those are all my questions. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That's all for the round of formal questioning.

I do have a little committee business at the end, but if any of your helpers or senior managers would like to say anything, they can.

You probably don't get this kind of chance to speak to Parliament. Do you have any issues? No.

Mary, did you want to make some closing remarks? We'll be looking to you for a list before Tuesday of, minimally, your 13 things we didn't cover and anything else you want to add. If they could be in order of priority, that would be very helpful.

• (1240)

Ms. Mary Dawson: Okay. What I'll do is get them out of the computer and put them in some kind of order. I don't have a huge amount of time, but I'll do something and get you a document.

So that's by Monday...?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Mary Dawson: I'll get that to the clerk.

Thank you very much. I appreciate the time and I appreciate the attentive listening and the questions.

The Chair: Does anyone have one last burning question they wanted to ask? No.

Thank you very much. Perhaps you could just stay outside the room for a minute, because I'm sure committee members have individual issues they'd like to talk to you about.

Ms. Mary Dawson: Sure. I'll hang around for a bit.

Thank you.

The Chair: We'll take a short break.

• (1240)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1245)

The Chair: Members, we have some committee business.

The good news is that last meeting we did a great schedule for the next six weeks or so. The bad news is that I think we have to make some adjustments to it.

Before we do that, for the members who don't know, the clerk has given me some feedback on Mr. Christopherson's motion, that it may be more complicated than we think. Not today, but sometime when we're doing his motion, we will ask for her advice on the procedural ramifications of that motion. The wording may not be clear. Mr. Christopherson is quite aware of that and is quite happy with that.

I'd now like the clerk to report on the response from the minister about coming next Thursday.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Joann Garbig): Thank you, Chair.

The committee at its last meeting had set aside time next Thursday, February 25, for the appearance of the Minister of Democratic Institutions. Earlier this morning I heard from the minister's office that although she had planned to attend, she now has notice of cabinet meetings that conflict with the scheduling of the committee's meeting. They have deferred and have said they would be in touch at a later date.

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm highly disappointed. That's really completely unacceptable.

Fine, if she legitimately has something that's conflicting with that date, then propose another date. I think it's been two weeks since the request was made. I think it's highly unreasonable that the minister can't give us a date.

It seems to me as though we have a minister here who's trying to avoid coming before this committee and being accountable for decisions she's making. That's really problematic and really troublesome, and I certainly expect that she will get us a date as ASAP.

Mr. Scott Reid: We could apply for Tuesday of next week.

The Chair: On Tuesday we're going to do conflict of interest. Now that we've heard from the commissioner and now that we know that the last committee recommended we do something, we're going to decide on Tuesday whether or not we do anything and what that's going to be.

Mr. Scott Reid: Here's my suggestion, Mr. Chair. We now know that Thursday's available, so let's move the conflict of interest code to Thursday and invite the minister to come here on Tuesday, and we'll just hold that spot open for her. In the event she can make it, we'll have our meeting. If not or if she's unable to make it for some other reason, then we'll just get a free day or have a chance to discuss the future agenda or something like that.

The Chair: I agree with half of your suggestion, that we'll invite her for Tuesday. But I was thinking for Thursday, because it's vacant now, we would invite the Senate appointees on the Senate selection committee to come Thursday, because that would give them a week's notice.

While we're on that topic, because neither of them is in Ottawa, maybe one of them couldn't quite make it personally and would prefer to do a video conference. Personally, I am fine with that technically, but that would require us to go to one of the other buildings that has that technology.

I know some committees say they aren't overly interested in those people, but we might as well decide in advance. If the person cannot make it in person, do you want to move the committee to another room for that particular meeting? There's no problem moving, but it's up to the committee.

Mr. Scott Reid: If we can, we should try to do it. It doesn't make sense to not have them simply because we can't go over to a building.

The Chair: Is that okay with everyone?

Okay.

Mr. David Graham: Let's go for Promenade over 1 Wellington.

The Chair: Your choice is the Promenade or Valour Building over Sussex or whatever that place is by the Chateau Laurier.

Mr. David Graham: Yes, over in Siberia.

Mr. Scott Reid: The advantage is that it's almost in your riding.

The Chair: On these two points, is it okay that we invite them for next Thursday? We will also invite the minister for Tuesday. If the minister declines, we'll go ahead with our discussion on conflict of interest. Is that okay with everyone? We'll move the committee meeting if they need a video conference.

• (1250)

Mr. Blake Richards: The only thing I would add to that is that if the minister is not available to come on Tuesday we should demand that she choose a day when she will come, and have none of this playing around. It seems to me as though she's just trying to stall and delay here. Let's get her to give us a date that she is available on if she isn't available on Tuesday.

Frankly, she should do everything she can to make herself available Tuesday. As I think I mentioned in the subcommittee meeting, I'm aware that after we requested that she appear, there was a Senate committee that requested that she appear, and she is appearing there on the 24th. That proves she is able to actually set a date. It really seems to me that we have a minister here who's trying to avoid being accountable before a House committee, and we cannot let that be acceptable. We must press to make sure that the minister is here. This is a process taking place as we speak, and it needs to be dealt with. We can't let this drag on and on.

The Chair: We'll tell the clerk, when she's inviting the minister, that we would be highly displeased if the minister did not appear soon.

Mr. Blake Richards: We also need to receive some alternate dates. We can't have this "we'll let you know at a later date" kind of stuff. Let's have a date.

The Chair: We can't direct a minister, but we can say we'd be pretty displeased if she didn't appear.

Mr. Blake Richards: And she should provide us a date.

The Chair: Just to summarize, we're going to invite the minister for Tuesday; if she cannot come, we're going to go on with the conflict of interest code. Thursday, we will have the two other federal appointments on the Senate recommendation committee. We will be in the Promenade building if we need to do a video conference.

Before you get to that, Arnold, I have one other thing to say.

I would suggest, if we all agree, that if we do conflict of interest on Tuesday that it be in camera since we will be having a lot of discussion on the lengthy report, and in the last committee, all of that was done in camera. That's why the conflict commissioner didn't know what it was we were discussing and so the committee felt that there were those things.

If we are discussing something that was in camera before, we're not at liberty to reveal it publicly anyway, so to allow us to discuss that, I think we should probably suggest that meeting at least start in camera.

Mr. Reid and Mr. Masse.

Mr. Scott Reid: The obvious problem is that Mr. Christopherson has very strong feelings, but he's not here right now. So I'd just.... I don't know.

I'll let Mr. Masse try to deal with that one.

Mr. Brian Masse: My understanding is that we're not bound by previous parliamentary action. This is a new Parliament.

It sounds to me like you've proven the case for why it shouldn't be in camera, because you had interested parties that were not aware of this. I would hesitate on that. You've brought up a point where obviously the testimony today—I'm sorry I wasn't here for all of it—was influenced by a lack of knowledge because of going in camera.

I would suggest caution to that.

The Chair: To the clerk, when they went in camera for whatever it was, those members who were at that meeting could not say what happened because it was in camera. As this is a new Parliament, can we now say publicly what happened?

A voice: No. It's 30 years.

The Chair: Okay, so it's 30 years.

Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: You don't have to discuss what previously took place, and you can't under those rules. But you're not bound by those rules anymore, what they did. This committee is a creature of its own and is not bound by the previous Parliament's committee, by any means. That includes studies and a whole series of things.

I would just suggest that it would compound the injury that took place today by following those practices that obviously caused some problems.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

It just means that we might be reinventing the wheel with some things they discussed, but the stuff we brought up today, that's already public.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I actually think it makes sense to be in camera for the purpose of reviewing evidence that was discussed, or discussions that took place, and proposals that were made in the last Parliament. Once we're in camera, we can figure out whether any of that stuff can be dealt with publicly.

Having said that, I suggest we start the meeting in public and then go in camera if there is consent to do so. I suspect a reasonable argument can be made for going in camera, and then we'll get there, but I just think it would be politically smoother.

This is not my own agenda. This is Mr. Christopherson's agenda. I just think that would be the best way of getting there.

• (1255)

The Chair: Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I was going to echo that. I was going to suggest that's the way we proceed, as was suggested by Mr. Reid.

If you recall the amendments I proposed to Mr. Christopherson's motion, one of the additional items was members' privileges. Technically, changes to the conflict of interest code directly affect members' privileges. I think we should have those discussions in camera, but in fairness to Mr. Christopherson, we should give him the opportunity to put his position on the record first. Is that fair?

An hon. member: That's fair.

The Chair: Okay. We'll start out in public and then if the committee feels so, we'll go in camera.

Is that what we've decided? Is that what we're agreeing on?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

I have one more item, but on all those things we've just discussed, is there anything more? No.

We have set aside the two meetings after the March working constituency week to bring forward witnesses on "family friendly". Just to give people enough warning, if anyone has already thought of witnesses they want, it would be helpful to let us know now.

Mr. Masse, I know the NDP has one.

If you could let the clerk know this, we can start inviting people for those weeks.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Mr. Chair, can we just clarify which weeks? Are you referring to March 8 and 10, or are you talking about March 22 and 24?

The Chair: It's March 22 and 24.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Right now, from a scheduling perspective—I can just clarify with Blake—we still have a blank for March 8, right?

Mr. Blake Richards: You know, I recall us having set something that would fit in there. I know that one portion of it was committee business. I do not recall what the other part was, off the top of my head. I don't have my binder with me.

Mr. Arnold Chan: As I recall, March 10 was the Chief Electoral Officer's report.

The Chair: March 8 was going to be the Senate people, but now....

Mr. Arnold Chan: Okay, so if we're moving them up, March 8 would now be blank.

The Chair: Yes. We could move that to family friendly witnesses.

I think that's also the week we're doing the caucus reports. Or when are we doing that...?

Mr. Arnold Chan: May I suggest that caucus reports be either next Thursday or the following Tuesday, with at least the opportunity for all of the caucuses to have their feedback from next Wednesday?

The Chair: Is the Tuesday you're talking about March 8?

Mr. Arnold Chan: No. Originally I had it down for February 25, but we had Minister Monsef, the Minister of Democratic Institutions, available for next Thursday. Now that she's not available—

The Chair: We have the Senate appointees coming.

Mr. Arnold Chan: —we have the Senate appointees coming. I might suggest one hour for the Senate appointees.

Or is there a particular feeling with respect to that?

An hon. member: One hour, I think, at this point....

The Chair: Yes, and we have then one hour for caucus reports.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Then one hour caucus reports....

The Chair: That would be great.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Is that fair?

An. hon member: It seems reasonable.

The Chair: Okay. That's good.

These witnesses, whose names you're giving me right now, we will ask for March 22.

Mr. Arnold Chan: No, for March 8.

The Chair: On March 8 we're doing caucus reports.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I thought we were doing caucus reports on February 25. One hour for the Senate witnesses and one hour for the caucus reports.

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Arnold Chan: If we have to spill over, we can just—

Mr. Blake Richards: Sorry, I'll throw a monkey wrench into this.

I thought you were referring to March 8 as well when you talked about caucus reports. I would suggest that probably February 25 might be a little too soon for the caucus reports.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Okay.

The Chair: Right. Okay.

Yes, we do only need one hour there. Maybe we'll be getting back into Mr. Christopherson's motion at that time.

An hon. member: Okay.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I had a motion on the table too, about Madam Labelle.

The Chair: Okay.

On Tuesday, we have the minister or conflict of interest; and then on Thursday, Senate appointees for one hour, Mr. Christopherson's motion, and Mr. Chan's motion. Then there's a working week in the ridings.

The week after that, we are at Tuesday, March 8. We will do caucus reports, reporting back to this committee. I don't think that will take two hours. We could invite a couple of witnesses for the second hour. I know the NDP has one. We could maybe set a deadline for people to provide us with a witness list for that meeting and for the other two later in March.

Why don't we say that by the end of that meeting on March 8 there be a deadline for proposing witnesses for March 22 and 24?

• (1300)

Mr. Scott Reid: I do not have a specific suggestion for witnesses. I have a suggestion that our long-suffering analyst look into someone for us.

One of the issues that has come up is the issue of child care facilities. To me, as we're changing buildings and then changing back, the issue of where architecturally you would put some of the stuff to make the environment more friendly for new parents, moms in particular, could be relevant. Perhaps it would be helpful to find someone who could comment on whether we'll be dealing with this as we go over to the West Block and whether we can deal with it in the plans for when we come back.

The Chair: Along that line, I think someone would like the day care manager as a witness, because we had so many questions about day care.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*] and a few more.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Yes, there are a few. Some are fairly obvious.

The Chair: Okay.

Yes, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Chair, there's another natural thing to do in terms of witnesses. Obviously our analyst provided us with a great report, where he indicated a number of other jurisdictions that have made some changes specifically to their House schedules. Even just generally he's shown us good examples that are good cross-references with ours. I know that the provincial ones specifically were Ontario and B.C., and I believe Quebec was the third one.

Our analyst also provided us with some information on a number of other Commonwealth countries. Particularly where they've made changes to their sitting hours or sitting days, their officials would be obvious witnesses for us, I would think. I would also suggest that we maybe ask our analyst to suggest some other witnesses that he feels would be beneficial for us.

The Chair: Hold on a minute. We'll brainstorm two things.

First of all, we'll definitely direct the analysts to do that and come up with some names. For the ones we have today, I'll get a list right now and then we'll see how many of those we could accommodate on March 8 and which ones we will punt to March 22.

Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: I have a quick suggestion. Pierre Parent from human resources is involved in this and would understand some of the logistics that are necessary.

The Chair: House of Commons human resources? What's his last name?

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes, House of Commons, it's Pierre Parent.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Blake Richards: Just for clarity, Mr. Chair, you were indicating that any suggestions for witnesses that we as members have would be brought for March 8?

The Chair: The number.... It looks like we have more than we need—

Mr. Blake Richards: What I'm saying is that you're saying additional suggestions for future witnesses should be brought by March 8.

The Chair: By March 8, yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Is that what you were suggesting?

The Chair: Yes.

Anita, and then David.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: If we are looking for witnesses quickly, there's Equal Voice, a multipartisan organization about women in politics. I think that's one. Nancy Peckford is the executive director.

For international witnesses, certainly, there's Julie Ballington, who did all the work on family-friendly parliaments with the IPU, the Inter-Parliamentary Union. She's now with UN Women and based in New York.

I'll suggest and put forward a number of names, but these are just in case we're looking at some people quickly.

The Chair: David.

Mr. David Graham: I was just going to note that we're discussing witness lists on the record, and I think it's something that we agreed we would want to discuss in camera.

The Chair: Okay, but we have enough here so that we can make a decision for March 8. I'm not going to go in camera for a couple of minutes here, because I don't think these are controversial.

We have five potentials. I don't think we can handle all of these on March 8, so we'll put some of them off. I'll give you the five, and then you suggest to me which we would use in the second hour on March 8: Pierre, from human resources; Public Works, as Mr. Reid said, on the design of the buildings, like where a day care, etc., would be; Equal Voice, and IPU in New York; and the day care. I think a high priority would be whoever can make decisions on the day care management.

Mr. Richards.

• (1305)

Mr. Blake Richards: I would suggest that where you're going accurately fits with what I saw in committee. There were a lot of questions about that, so obviously if we were to talk to a couple of people, one would be the day care manager, the person who runs the day care. The other one would be, as Mr. Reid suggested, someone who could give us a little information about how we could make sure that we're structuring the changes being made to the buildings to suit that kind of thing, since that seemed to be a topic that gathered a lot of interest from the members of the committee at the first meeting.

We've had suggestions from other parties, so probably until all the parties have had a chance to put witnesses in, we would probably hold off on those witnesses, right? Then all parties have the opportunity to suggest their witnesses. In the meantime, the analysts could come forward with some suggestions as well, including some of those other jurisdictions. I think that would probably be a good way to proceed on March 8. I think that makes sense.

The Chair: Okay, so how's this for a plan? On March 8, if we can get them, the second hour would be someone from Public Works, someone who has authority over the design of the buildings, and the day care, someone who has authority over the day care.

Then we would punt these to the end-of-March meetings: Pierre Parent, Equal Voice, Julie Ballington, the ones the clerk comes up with from other jurisdictions, plus the witnesses from any of the committee members as presented to us before March 8. Is that understandable for everyone?

Mr. Blake Richards: The only qualification I would make, Mr. Chair, is that obviously we as a committee will want to determine how many meetings we want and how many witnesses we want to hear.

Once we've done that and all parties have put forward their witnesses, we'll have to determine which ones we'll include, to be able to fit into the scope and time frame that we're putting on it.

Rather than indicate that we're hearing from those witnesses.... It's not that I'm voicing objections to them, necessarily, it's just that obviously we wouldn't want to make a determination as to, once we've decided how many we'll see, which ones are a priority.

The Chair: I didn't mean to suggest we would hear them. I meant to suggest we'll add them all to the list. They may come. It's a very good point. We have to winnow down that list. We can't go on forever.

We'll get a big list for March 8. Then we'll decide the number of meetings, as you've said. Then we'll figure out how many of those witnesses we can bring.

Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: I would like to add a name to the front end of the list, not the forefront, but during the process of transition, Christine Moore might be appropriate. That's up to the committee but I just thought that name should be put somewhere in the placement.

The Chair: To be on that March 8 list.

Mr. Chan, was there anyone else?

Mr. Arnold Chan: I was simply going to make a suggestion on the total number, but we could discuss that at the next meeting.

The Chair: It's probably easier once we—

Mr. Arnold Chan: Would it be 15 to 20? When we see the whole list we'll have a chance.

The Chair: Once we have the list it will be easier to decide.

Anything else?

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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