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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): Good morning.

This is meeting No. 11 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for the first session of the 42nd Parliament. This meeting is being held in public and is televised.

Before we start, I'd like to acknowledge our honourable veteran chair of the committee, Mr. Joe Preston. I begged him on hands and knees to take the chair, but he wouldn't. I think we should welcome him.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The first business today is the supplementary estimates (C) for 2015-16, followed by an examination of the last of the federal appointees to the Independent Advisory Board for Senate Appointments, and finally, some committee business.

I will now call vote 3c under parliamentary protective service of the supplementary estimates (C) for 2015-16.

Our witnesses are the Honourable Geoff Regan, Speaker of the House of Commons and chief superintendent Michael Duheme, director of parliamentary protective service.

So that Mr. Speaker and committee members know, we also have the main estimates later this spring, so you'll probably be back. This is only for the supplementary estimates (C) for one part of your department, Mr. Speaker.

The floor is yours.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Speaker of the House of Commons): Good morning, Mr. Chairman and colleagues.

It's been a long time since I've sat at this end of the table. I'm very pleased to be here this morning to discuss the parliamentary protective service's supplementary estimates (C), or the supp C's as we call them, for 2015-16.

I'm going to begin by asking Mr. Duheme to introduce the people who have come with him today.

Supt Michael Duheme (Director, Parliamentary Protective Service): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With me are Charlotte Hibbard, who is part of our communication team; Sloane Mask, our chief financial officer; Mr. Jean Fergues, who is responsible for all our components to do with HR for PPS; and Melissa Rusk, who's the executive assistant with regard to strategic planning and ethics and quality control and development.

[Translation]

Hon. Geoff Regan: For your benefit, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Michael Duheme is the Chief Superintendent and Director of the Parliamentary Protective Service.

Before continuing, I will give everyone time to access the simultaneous interpretation. As usual, the interpreters do an excellent job.

At times I will use the acronym, PPS, to refer to the Parliamentary Protective Service.

[English]

The supplementary (C)s for the PPS total just over \$17 million. I'll provide you with an overview of the items as follows: first, Parliament Hill security model enhancements; second, parliamentary protective service transition and establishment initiatives; and third, employee benefit plans.

Before I start, I must stress that for security purposes, of course, I'll be a bit limited in the level of operational detail that I can provide, or that we can provide, and I thank you in advance for your understanding.

As you know, the PPS is quite new, having been established by statute on June 23, 2015. The service is responsible for all matters relating to physical security throughout our parliamentary precinct and the grounds of Parliament Hill.

• (1105)

The Speaker of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Commons are responsible for administrative oversight and providing general policy direction to the service, which is under the operational control and management of its director, Mr. Duheme, a member of the RCMP. The governance was designed in this manner so that both Speakers could ensure that the powers, privileges, rights, and immunities of the Senate and House and their respective members remain paramount in the delivery of enhanced protective services.

The need for greater operational coordination among the security partners has long been identified as a priority. In fact, Mr. Chairman, in 2007, the Senate, the House of Commons, and RCMP created the master security planning office to achieve just that. Recommendations from the Auditor General and various parliamentary committees further reinforced the need for integration. Prompted by the events of October 22, 2014, members of the House of Commons adopted a motion calling upon the Speakers of both chambers to invite the RCMP to lead operational security throughout the precinct and the grounds of Parliament Hill, while respecting the privileges, immunities, and powers of the respective Houses and ensuring the continued employment of our existing and highly respected parliamentary security staff.

This culminated in the creation of the PPS seven months ago. With that, the RCMP's Parliament Hill security unit and the protective services of the Senate and House were formally integrated.

The establishment of the PPS was a significant step forward in removing silos among the three security partners. Each of course brings unique expertise to the partnership, and as the organization works to fully complete its transition to a single and fully unified entity, our ability to protect senators, members, staff, and visitors, who are all vitally important to all of us, is enhanced.

[Translation]

As of today, PPS is well prepared operationally to deliver on its protective mandate proactively, efficiently and effectively.

Since its inception, PPS has implemented a number of initiatives that are focused on enhancing and improving interoperability, security and integration within the Parliamentary Precinct and on the grounds of Parliament Hill.

The PPS focus is on deploying resources in a manner that effectively uses the range of expertise that already exists within the current complement of employees. This integration is further strengthened by the implementation of a single command oversight mechanism, the formalization of an intelligence unit and general improvements to information-sharing in threat detection and coordination.

[English]

As well, Defence Research and Development Canada is currently completing a review to inform the physical security infrastructure within the precinct. Their objective is to provide research-based advice for the PPS to consider as it moves forward.

At the same time, the PPS, along with the Senate corporate security directorate and the House of Commons corporate security office, is establishing security awareness initiatives aimed at ensuring parliamentarians, our employees, administrative staff, and all others who provide us support here on Parliament Hill know exactly what to do during an emergency, something we can all see the benefit of.

Finally, the PPS is currently establishing specific policies and procedures that will effectively support the service's work. While the former Senate and House of Commons protection services and the RCMP are now an integrated unit, the PPS is still very much an

organization in transition, which brings me to the content of the supplementary (C)s.

As the transition continues, the PPS remains committed to enhancing security awareness and exercising stewardship over all of its resources through operational efficiencies, capacity development, and enhancing interoperability. As noted earlier, the total amount in these estimates is just over \$17 million for security model enhancements, transition and establishment initiatives, and employee benefit plans.

I'll first discuss the Parliament Hill security model enhancements.

● (1110)

The amount required is \$14.4 million for the PPS to maintain an enhanced posture on Parliament Hill that is reflective of the current and evolving threat environment. As I understand it, essentially these funds are being transferred from the response money of the RCMP over to the House.

As of June 23, 2015, the responsibility for the RCMP Parliament Hill detachment was effectively transferred to the PPS. The \$14.4 million will stabilize the RCMP's human and financial resources dedicated to supporting the enhanced security model on Parliament Hill and throughout our parliamentary precinct.

[Translation]

Second is an amount of \$2.5 million for the Parliamentary Protective Service transition and establishment initiatives. This funding supports establishment initiatives required for PPS to become an independent Parliamentary entity. As well, the funding is used to manage the transition to a unified service and develop an organization structure that is aligned with the PPS mandate. This includes telecommunications, computers, software licences, project management fees as well as new full time equivalents to support operations and corporate functions such as information technology management, corporate finance and human resources.

[English]

The third item is an amount of \$275,532 needed for employee benefit plans, a statutory cost currently borne by the PPS.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank every member of the PPS for their service. I must say that this morning when I arrived at the back door of Centre Block, at about seven minutes to seven—normally the door is open at 7 o'clock—I was really pleased that there was actually someone there to open it a few minutes early. I really appreciated that, just as I always appreciate the work of our service.

[Translation]

I would also like to thank you once again for giving me the opportunity to provide you with an overview of the Parliamentary Protective Service supplementary estimates (C). Chief Superintendent Duheme will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We really appreciate the great work you're doing in the House.

Our first questioner will be Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Thank you Mr. Chair.

Mr. Regan, thank you very much for your presentation.

I would also like to thank you, Mr. Duheme. You can answer questions in English, if you so wish. However, with your permission, I will be asking my questions in French.

First of all, I would like to thank you for the services that you provide to the Parliamentary Precinct. Before becoming an MP, I worked for 24 years at the RCMP's Codiac regional detachment in Moncton. That is why I have a great appreciation for your work. I know the dangers that security personnel face. In Moncton, we experienced a great tragedy shortly before yours.

I am a new MP here in Ottawa, and I would like to know if you could give us an overview of the protection services before the events of October 2014 and explain what changes have been made in order to ensure that security is now adequate for everyone.

Supt Michael Duheme: Firstly, I'd like to thank you for your comments on RCMP services.

I assumed my new functions on June 23, after the changes to legislation. Before those changes, there were three separate entities. Everything that happened or that was located outside, up to Wellington Street, was the RCMP's responsibility.

Everything indoors, on the House of Commons side, was the responsibility of the House of Commons security service, directed by the Sergeant-at-Arms. Finally, everything on the Senate side was the responsibility of the Corporate Security Directorate. There were challenges, but as the Speaker mentioned, there were already talks going on with the aim of integrating these three entities.

That's an overview of how things were before. I will spare you the details of the difficulties that occur when three distinct organizations do not share a communications network. There are also challenges with regard to the culture of each separate entity.

The new legislation came into force and a single entity was created. The objective for the first year is to establish interoperability within the PPS. We are doing a lot of things that had never been done before. As was recommended after the tragic events of October 22, everyone can now use the same communication channels. That was not the case in the past. It's something more that we have now. This is part of everyday activities.

With regard to communication, I believe that awareness of situations has improved. There are weekly meetings with the people in charge about all operations that take place on a given day. This information is then provided to people working on the ground. We get a better sense of what's happening outside Parliament Hill and we share that information with people inside.

With this new unification initiative comes a new uniform. We hope that this new uniform will be available as of April 1.

Earlier, I spoke of the culture of the three entities. When three entities are brought together, a new culture does not immediately develop. That will take years. I expect that by the time this new

culture will have fully taken root, I will not be here anymore. Nonetheless, we are moving forward gradually.

In September 2018, we are going to move into a new workplace so that everyone can work together. I think that's when people will start to become closer. They will meet elsewhere than in their work stations, like in briefing rooms, for example.

All of this, as well as the new uniform, will help create this new culture that we want to develop.

• (1115)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: As I understand it, you are responsible for all services.

Supt Michael Duheme: I am the director.

As I often say, within the Parliamentary Protective Service, the RCMP will always be the RCMP. RCMP officers will keep wearing their uniform. They will be subject to the RCMP's policies and code of ethics as well as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act. However, everyone will be working within a common operational system.

Ultimately, the goal is for all employees, whether they be with the RCMP or the PPS, to be trained and respond to incidents in the same manner. We are currently headed towards that.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: So that means the tasks will not be different.

Supt Michael Duheme: The tasks are different in certain respects. Some positions viewed as static are similar. However, other Parliamentary Hill positions are different. But I would venture to say that the differences are minor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I have another question about the communications networks. As I understand it, everyone can now communicate on the same channel.

Supt Michael Duheme: With respect to communications, our system has allowed us to connect everyone on the same frequencies. We have now tested the system on several occasions. We use it when we must advise everyone of an incident taking place on Parliament Hill. A good example is a fire alarm. We have been putting it to use and we know it works.

The ultimate goal, madam, is to use a single channel. You must remember that previously, the three entities had their own channels. Old habits are hard to change, but we are moving in the right direction. There used to be three channels. We now have two and eventually, there should only be one channel for communications.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Without mentioning the things you are not allowed to talk about, what are the biggest challenges with regard to integrating these three entities after one year of operation?

Supt Michael Duheme: The biggest challenge is changing the culture. When it comes to organisational change—especially when it's an integration like this—some people are for it, others will go along, and some are completely opposed.

You have to be careful about how you communicate and who does the communicating. Sometimes, those who are against the integration and who are still hanging on to the old ways will say certain things. But in reality, only a handful of people will be like this.

I go around Parliament Hill twice a week. I talk to people and morale is good. At our weekly 8 a.m. operational meetings, I always ask how things are going and I'm told that morale is good.

Of course, there are small challenges, which is normal for any organisation. We're not even a year old. We've been in existence for only eight months. It will take time for us to get to where we want to go.

The secret to integration is to change the culture. That's what has to happen.

• (1120)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. Sorry, we're at time.

We're going to Mr. Schmale now for questions or comments.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for all you do, and Mr. Duheme, for everything you and your brave women and men do on a daily basis for us.

I have a couple of questions.

You mentioned a new culture a few times, and I was wondering if you could quickly expand on that in a bit more detail.

Supt Michael Duheme: For starters, thank you for the kind comments.

When I'm referring to a new culture it's the PPS having its distinct culture.

I think that will come with time, and it will come with our integrated teams that are working together. We have several integrated teams and once the message gets out—I kid you not, some comments were made when the RCMP came in and there was a certain apprehension that the RCMP would be changing everything. That by far was the way we wanted to proceed. We have everybody involved from the bottom up in different committees, we look at the response on different servers, and it's fairly high so people are engaged.

It's developing that unique culture because even within Parliament right now there's a different culture on the Senate side and the House of Commons side. It shows in the security and the protection services that were there before. So it's putting aside the RCMP culture and the old Senate and House of Commons culture. PPS has its own culture.

It's a work in progress.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Absolutely.

I remember the incident of October 2014 and reading about the fact that everyone was on different frequencies and not able to speak with each other. I thought that was quite surprising and I'm glad it's being addressed because it's very important.

In continuing to evaluate security, a few weeks ago on a Wednesday we were having a caucus and the fire alarm went off twice. It seemed the same procedure—we did exactly the same thing twice—and it was mentioned that if anyone were watching and wanted to do bad things....

Are there plans to address that?

Supt Michael Duheme: There's probably one thing you didn't notice. Contingency plans are in place within PPS when something like that happens. Without going into details, some of our positions on the Hill will change slightly to ensure the protection of the people when they're gathered like that.

I would have to bring your point to the CSO, the corporate security office, that's responsible right now for everything to do with the fire evacuation plan. We worked jointly on several initiatives and it's something we could look at: if there are two alarms back to back, is there a willingness to have two separate sites when we evacuate?

I'll bring it up with Pat McDonell.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: That's perfect. As an observer, I'm curious. We were all standing out there, so I appreciate your doing that.

In terms of the public grounds, one of the biggest concerns I had after October 2014 is the reaction to that kind of thing is to shut things off and keep the public out. I'm glad it didn't happen. I'm glad to hear that tours resumed within a couple of weeks and precautions were taken to ensure this ground stays open to the public. It is a public building, and we are officials of the public.

Without your going into too many details I was wondering if you could comment on whatever measures are being taken to allow the public to have access to this place, to this building, and to the grounds.

Supt Michael Duheme: I'd say that other than the security posture on the Hill following the events, nothing much as far as access for the visitors, tourists, and the public to the grounds has changed. We don't prevent them from going anywhere. It's the same access as they had before. It's that challenge of balancing security measures and the freedom of people to roam around on the Hill.

Other than that the security posture has changed slightly, accessibility to the Hill hasn't changed whatsoever. We maintain the tours. They go across the street to get the tickets, and then they go through the screening process before they enter Parliament. There are certain days where we limit the tours. We do limit the tours and the number of people in the tours during the regular days also, but as far as accessibility, nothing has changed.

As the Speaker mentioned, we do a lot of work with DRDC. PPS, along with the corporate security office, the corporate security directorate of the Senate, and DRDC, have asked to have a review of the entire Hill itself, to look at everything you can think of security-wise. As you know, with the upcoming closure of the Hill, we want to see what can be brought forward to ensure—I'm not going to say a better security, but maybe an enhanced security.

An hon. member: Do you mean the closure of the Centre Block, or is it the Hill?

Supt Michael Duheme: I meant Centre Block, sorry. Thank you, sir.

• (1125)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Well, thank you for your ongoing efforts to make sure that the public still has access to the precinct.

Quickly just on another note, a lot of attention is paid to us here on the Hill, which is important, but I also think of our constituency staff. Will there be ongoing evaluations of how our offices are set up or any measures that we can put in place to help those people who are off site?

Supt Michael Duheme: That's the responsibility of the corporate security office, and that would be Mr. Pat McDonnell, who is the Sergeant-at-Arms. The constituency office falls under his responsibility.

You could ask him that, if you wish.

Mr. Patrick McDonnell (Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms and Corporate Security Officer, House of Commons): My name is Pat McDonnell, and I'm the deputy Sergeant-at-Arms in charge of the corporate security office.

We have a project team that looks after constituency office security. We have funds set aside for enhancements, if required, to constituency offices. We have contractors out there who will do an assessment of the constituency office, and my team will also from time to time do assessments of the constituency office security set-up.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

I think that's my time.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson.

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

First off, my apologies, especially to you, Speaker, for being late. I was at another committee buried in room 112-north. I wouldn't want you in any way to think I was being rude to your presence, sir, but it was unavoidable. I got here as quickly as I could.

I know there's already been a shout-out, but I just want to mention also how good it is to see Mr. Preston here. He and I have a great history together on this committee. I can only say to you, Chair, that you have big shoes to fill, not just size-wise.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: He did an excellent job. Again, I underscore that it was his own personal sense of humour that got us through a lot of very, very difficult moments.

It's great to see you, Joe. I understand you're having a great retirement. It is well earned.

I'll be supporting this because it's the right thing to do in the context of the framework that's here, but I just need to take this moment—because there aren't many left—to say right at the outset here how much I strongly and profoundly disagree with the whole concept of this parliamentary protective service. There is a reason we have the separation of powers in a democracy, a separation between the legislative, the judicial, and the executive. Nowhere does that

separation of power, in my opinion, manifest itself in a more obvious way than in Parliament and in the way we conduct ourselves in Parliament.

When Parliament has a crisis, we turn to you, Speaker, not to the Prime Minister. Parliament's issues are Parliament's. By way of background, I need to say that as a former solicitor general in Ontario, I was also the civilian head of the OPP, and I worked very closely with my RCMP counterparts. In fact, as a minister, I was invited to and I attended the training centre in Regina. I have the utmost respect for the RCMP. This is not about the RCMP in any way, shape, or form. This is about the structure of our democracy and whether or not this supports that or goes against it. In my view, it goes against it. If we take the example of the Auditor General, the Auditor General does not answer to the Prime Minister. The Auditor General does not answer to a minister. The Auditor General answers to Parliament, and only Parliament can hire and fire an agent of Parliament. That's a good example of that separation of powers.

I might also add that because of my background, I spent some time on the Speaker's security committee at Queen's Park. We actually visited here when we looked at beefing up security at Queen's Park because of some things that had happened. I understand the complexities we're dealing with, and how we have the city police involved to a certain degree, and then the RCMP involved, and then, as you said, at the front door of Parliament, it's the parliamentary security staff. Now we've taken two of those things and merged them together, and it's wrong. It's wrong, wrong, wrong.

Here's why, Speaker, in my opinion.

The RCMP are now responsible for determining what happens and for directing the only people in Parliament who are authorized to carry guns, who are now the security staff in the House of Commons. When I say that, I also mean the joint entity of the Senate. I have no problem with joining those two together. That makes all the sense in the world. It's this business now. I say this because I see this as a serious and potentially dangerous threat, not an imminent threat. As you know, everything went along, and on October 21, we had no idea that the next day the world was about to change from a security point of view. When you examine these things outside a crisis, it sounds as though you're just getting caught up in splitting hairs and semantics. I view this very differently.

To me, Speaker, it's a very serious matter that it's no longer you who directs this. You may at a certain level direct security within Parliament, but now the RCMP have a say. The RCMP will decide. The problem with that is that Parliament is independent of the government, yet the people who control the security folks around us and the only ones who have guns are the government.

To me, it's that crossing of the lines. We have crossed the line that separated the judicial, the legislative, and the executive. The legislative is now not responsible for its own security. Our security staff is now the responsibility of the executive. If you study your history, you'll appreciate the importance of understanding what has happened in history and what happens in other parliaments. Speaker, I saw your interview over Christmas, and I was really impressed, by the way, as I didn't know you that well.

• (1130)

There's a reason why we don't go past the bar in the Senate and why they have to knock on the door to come in here. It all goes back to people's heads being chopped off. It goes back to people being told that they're saying something that someone doesn't like to hear, so their heads get chopped off. We have had kings who have had their heads chopped off.

This is serious stuff, and really, I feel so bad and I think it's so wrong that we've now allowed that crossing of the lines, so that the control of anything that is actually the 100% purview of the legislative arm now is overlapped by the exercising of authority by the executive.

Again, it only manifests itself when you're in crisis. I hate to think that a crisis could ever happen, but the older I get, the more I realize that anything can happen in this old world. This business of how the Prime Minister now dictates what happens to the security in the House of Commons is to me the antithesis of the separation of powers. I know I'm not the only one. I know that Mr. Bélanger, a respected statesperson in our Parliament, feels exactly the same way.

I've left next to no time. I really wasn't looking for an answer. I just needed to get that off my chest.

Speaker, I don't know how far you can go in your thoughts, but I'd be interested in any you might have in the fraction of moments I have left.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I'm the servant of the House, so as the House directs, I will follow. Having said that, I think it's important to understand that what we're doing today, in fact, has to do with this. We are moving \$14.4 million from the budget of the RCMP into the budget of the House in these estimates, and basically bringing those employees fully under the House. Mr. Duheme, the superintendent of the PPS, reports to me and to the Speaker of the Senate.

That's how it works within the PPS, but as I say, I first of all want to make it very clear that I value and appreciate your perspective on this, and it's an important perspective. As I've said before, if the House decides to direct me differently in terms of how I, on behalf of the House, interact on this issue with the Senate, etc., then so be it. I will take that direction as I'm required to do, obviously, but I think there's an argument that we have. I would think you'd agree that it was important to have interoperability and that it was important to have better communication and better unification within the precinct and on Parliament Hill. To achieve that is what has been attempted. If there are better ways to achieve it, then I think it's important to have a debate, and this is one of the good places where this debate could be held.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the one time that I get to turn your microphone off.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Ms. Vandenbeld.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): We really appreciate the protective services and the fact that you are there not just in terms of the precinct and grounds, but also for us as

members of Parliament and for our staff. We very much appreciate the hard work.

I'm a local MP here in Ottawa, so I'm particularly interested. I know that a lot of the money in the supplementary estimates is for the integration of the three different services, but I'd like to know a little more about how that integration is working with the Ottawa police force. When there are security threats, either to us as members or in general, from people who wish to do harm, they don't stop at the boundaries of the parliamentary precinct.

You talked about the same frequencies. What have you done in terms of integrating with the Ottawa police?

Supt Michael Duheme: The October 22nd incident was particular in the sense that it started off the boundaries, or the parameters, if you will, of Parliament Hill. If the incident had been on Parliament Hill itself, I think it would have been much easier, in the sense that for any incident on Parliament Hill we treat it as a national security matter and we call the RCMP.

We're working through the recommendations that were put forth. I've met with the chief of the Ottawa Police Service through different committees. I met with my *équivalentin* Ottawa during a meeting. This further meeting is about how we integrate all that together, because the very first step that we wanted was to understand how PPS was going to function.

Integrating three units is not done overnight. You have to put in a command and control structure. You have to make sure that the policy and the way you're going to respond are okay. You need to have a couple of tabletop exercises to make sure you're heading down the right track before you invite other people to come and play in your sandbox.

We're not quite there yet, but it's like anything to do with partnerships. You need the meetings and you need the tabletop exercise to hash it out and work it out.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Following on that, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms, the security in the constituency offices obviously also has a lot of impact in terms of local police. In my case it's Ottawa police, but you have all the local police forces in every constituency across the country.

For instance, one individual may harass or follow a member of Parliament to here on the Hill, to their home, to their constituency. On the Hill it would be the protective services. The constituencies are under the Sergeant-at-Arms. If you're at your home, it would be under the local police.

How do these integrate? How do those different things speak to one another?

Mr. Patrick McDonnell: We have an outreach program. I write each chief of police personally and I give the constituency office address for them to flag, and they'll flag it. In this new Parliament, we haven't had a chance yet to go out to all the MPs and ask them to share their residence address with the local police, but that's also flagged if the MP allows us to flag it.

The co-operation with the police forces to date has been more than excellent. If a person is brought to our attention, we immediately share it with PPS, or the touch-point for PPS. Then PPS takes it from there, turns it over to a specialized section within the RCMP, and they liaise with the local police.

Would that be correct, Mike?

• (1140)

Supt Michael Duheme: Yes.

It's important to note that PPS doesn't have an investigative mandate. It's strictly protection of the grounds and the precinct. We don't get involved in an investigation. We'll act as a conduit, if you wish, with regard to whatever pops up, but we do not investigate.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: In terms of our residences, if something happens on the grounds, would the local police get that flag and see instantly if there's been an incident, through the constituency office, through the Hill office? Is there a way you can make sure that is communicated so that they don't go in blind and that instead, when they see a flag, they would know the background or whether there is a particular individual involved?

Supt Michael Duheme: I'll come back to what Pat mentioned, that a liaison is done with the local police. Let's say there's a threat on an individual, on a member of Parliament. We'll ensure, through the intelligence unit, that the information is shared. As Pat mentioned, with regard to the red flag, if there is a call at that address, a red flag should pop up saying what's going on.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: In terms of our own personal security, are there mechanisms for members of Parliament and their staff to learn about ways we can change our behaviour or protect ourselves or take precautionary measures to ensure that we don't make ourselves more vulnerable than we need to be? Is there any mechanism for that kind of awareness-raising or training?

Mr. Patrick McDonell: Yes, there is a security awareness program, and there will be information sessions coming up for the staff and for the members of Parliament if they choose to attend.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Would that apply to constituency staff as well?

Mr. Patrick McDonell: The constituency staff could attend. The sessions will be in Ottawa.

Hon. Geoff Regan: One of the recommendations should be that it's good to have some food in your office. My staff discovered that on the fateful day of the 22nd. I wasn't in the office that day, but they were there from 10 o'clock in the morning until 8:40 that night. Fortunately, they found a certain number of granola bars in my credenza.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: In terms of the constituency offices, are there best practices or things that we can implement? For instance, I'm having a counter put into my constituency office so that the front desk isn't just open, and people can't just run all the way to the back, for instance, to where my office is.

Is there somewhere these kinds of practices can be gathered and shared so that members of Parliament don't have to reinvent them each time?

Mr. Patrick McDonell: Yes. That's my security assessment team, and they'll share those best practices. I should add that even though

the sessions are in Ottawa, that team's available all the time to speak with the constituency offices and give them tips. We're also improving our web page on the House of Commons site. There are all sorts of little tips the staff can follow.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Would that apply for our residences as well?

Mr. Patrick McDonell: No. There's nothing developed for the residences yet.

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): I wanted to ask about the \$2.5 million for the PPS transition and establishment initiatives. It indicates there are some new full-time equivalents being put in place to support operations and corporate functions. It talks about the purchase of telecommunications, computers, software licences, project management fees.

It sounds to me as though those are obviously administrative functions that the new full-time equivalents would be doing. I'm wondering if you could confirm that, if I'm correct in that understanding.

Also, I'll just ask a couple of other questions. You can answer them all at once.

I would assume, therefore, that the telecommunications and computers, etc., would be to support the administrative staff who would be hired. How many new administrative staff is that talking about?

Obviously, the next question would be, transition and establishment initiatives would indicate that it would likely be temporary employment; is that what we're talking about here or are these permanent new full-time equivalents?

Supt Michael Duheme: I'll go through the \$2.4 million. Other than the \$14.4 million, operation-wise, with regard to our scanners, as you enter Centre Block downstairs all the visitors go through a scanning. During one of our reviews, it was determined that in certain areas, on the Senate side, we had constables doing the scanning. It is more cost efficient having someone who is not armed doing that type of work. It's in the vision of having the scanning done by one unit instead of having people doing two or three different jobs. A chunk of that money is in there.

We're looking at phase two with regard to the uniforms. It's also in that \$2.4 million. There's some equipment. There's a small contingency for overtime; parental leave and performance pay is in that too. As for temporary and permanent employment, right now everybody is temporary. As we're building the org chart, we're starting to create these positions and they're going to be submitted to both Speakers for approval. I'd say that what we looked at, as we were building the structure, is what do we want to maintain under PPS and what can be serviced out to either the House of Commons or Senate. That's the thought process I was going through as we were building the structure. There is nothing permanent yet, but you are right when you were saying with regard to bringing people in, they need computers, office space, a desk, and whatnot.

● (1145)

Mr. Blake Richards: I had misunderstood it a bit; it isn't completely administrative. What you're talking about is essentially some of those full-time equivalents are actually people who run the scanners, for example.

Supt Michael Duheme: Yes, exactly, in that \$2.4 million.

Mr. Blake Richards: You mentioned new uniforms and I think you said it was even part of this \$2.5 million. You mentioned it in your opening remarks as well. You mentioned briefing rooms being shared with the various services.

When do you expect that to actually take place?

Supt Michael Duheme: I'm not going to say when the uniforms are supposed to come in but we're hoping they are in by April. We're hoping that by September 2016 most of the PPS team, other than the executive and the officer cadre, will move in to our new location. And as I was mentioning earlier with regard to integration, everybody would be housed in the same building. The concept of operation I want to bring forward is that when people come in, they change to new uniforms, go up to their briefing room where they're given the daily briefing of activities that are going on on the Hill and what they need to know, and then off to their posts.

According to Public Works, we should have the building by September 2016.

Mr. Blake Richards: I know that sometimes it can be difficult to share a lot in terms of intelligence, but there was mention in the Speaker's opening remarks about the formalization of an intelligence unit and improvements to information sharing and threat detection.

What can you tell us about those? I understand that there are probably some things that you can't speak about.

Supt Michael Duheme: Basically, when PPS was created, the RCMP had their own little intelligence unit, the House of Commons protective security had their own, and the Senate had their own. What we did is we just brought all three people together and created an intelligence unit. It has more to do with the fact that they're not collecting intel on the Hill; they're collecting intel outside. And I think "collecting" is a big word. They're more part of daily meetings with the RCMP or OPS or if there are any demos, just to feed us so we can have a better situational awareness of what's going on on the Hill. From there, I inform the CSO's office, the CSD office, and the respective Speakers.

Mr. Blake Richards: How does that information get from there to the officers who are on the front line?

Supt Michael Duheme: If it's worthwhile sharing with everyone because it has an impact for the Hill itself, we'll make sure that everybody gets it. We've done it in the past through an email, in briefings that went on. That's normally how we share it.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Mr. McDonnell, and Michael Duheme. We feel like we're in safe hands, and we certainly appreciate that.

Thank you for coming this morning; I know you're all very busy. Now you can go back and protect us some more and we'll have our vote.

PARLIAMENTARY PROTECTIVE SERVICE

Vote 3c—Program expenditures.....\$16,887,833

(Vote 3c agreed to)

Shall I report the vote on the supplementary estimates to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Our next guest is available, but we'll suspend for a minute.

●

_____ (Pause) _____

●

● (1150)

The Chair: We'll continue now with our third and final examination of appointees to the Independent Advisory Board for Senate Appointments. I remind members that in accordance with Standing Orders 110 and 111, this committee is to examine the qualifications and competence of the appointee to perform the duties of the post to which he or she has been appointed.

Our witness this morning is Dr. Indira Samarasekera, who is appearing by video conference from Vancouver.

● (1155)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Chair, will we have time to discuss the motion I had on the floor regarding witnesses and bringing them back in order to question them on the actual work they're doing?

The Chair: We have committee business at the end of the meeting, so if that's what people want to discuss, yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: That is what I want to discuss.

Thank you.

The Chair: Doctor, you have up to ten minutes for an opening statement, and then we will get questions from each of the parties here.

Thank you for appearing before us today.

Dr. Indira Samarasekera (Federal Member, Independent Advisory Board for Senate Appointments): Thank you very much, and good morning, everyone. I'm delighted to be here.

I will make my comments very brief because I'm sure committee members will have questions. You have my CV in front of you. I'll mention my qualifications at a high level, and then I'll move on to some competencies and qualities that I might bring to this task.

I'm an engineer by training. I have been an academic all my career. I came to Canada in 1977 to pursue a Ph.D. in metallurgical engineering and I became a Canadian citizen in 1980. I was a professor for 20 years, and then I became vice-president, research, at the University of British Columbia. I then went on to serve two terms as president and vice-chancellor of the University of Alberta. I'm currently senior adviser in the policy group of Bennett Jones. I serve on a number of corporate boards, non-profit boards, and I do other volunteer activities.

In my career, I have also had extensive experience working with the Government of Canada in my capacity as president, and with the governments of Alberta and British Columbia.

In terms of qualities and competencies, let me start with competencies. As president and vice-chancellor, I have had to develop the ability to deal with a great deal of complexity. It broadened my expertise. I've had to develop an ability to function independently, have independence of thought and approach. I have not been involved in any political activities or been a member of any political party. I like to think that I have high integrity. Certainly I have a reputation of an individual with integrity. I've developed and proved my capability of good judgment.

Finally, in my position I have had to maintain a very high degree of confidentiality. As you can imagine, I'm exposed to the files of students, faculty, and staff. I'm privy to confidential information from governments around budgets and policies, and that's something I have executed in my job.

With that I'll stop and hand it back to you, Chair. Thank you again for the opportunity to be here this morning.

The Chair: Thank you very much for appearing.

We'll start the round with Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you so much, Dr. Samarasekera, for appearing before us. I know that it's still relatively early in the morning Vancouver time, so we appreciate your making yourself available.

I wanted to start with something that in some way obviously reflects a little about your background.

In looking at your curriculum vitae, clearly you have a very significant period of public service, particularly through your record with the universities. But I wanted to get a sense when you talked about issues around competency and knowledge.

Given that you've been appointed to an advisory board that deals with the appointment of future public officials, do you have any views or any experience in particular with respect to constitutional matters in your past dealings?

As a university president did you deal with elements of the division of powers? Do you have any particular thoughts on a bicameral parliament that operates between a combination of members who are elected, those of us in the House of Commons,

and those who are appointed, the ones you will be advising on, making recommendations to appoint future senators?

• (1200)

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: I'm obviously not an expert on any of this, but in my role as president and vice-chancellor I have had to develop a really good understanding of how the Government of Canada works.

I have spent a great deal of time in Ottawa interacting with members of Parliament, cabinet ministers, deputy ministers, and public service officials. I've also had the opportunity to interact with many senators.

Through that work I have developed a sophisticated understanding of bicameral governance and also a good understanding of the division of powers between the elected members of Parliament and the Senate.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I note that you've served in many distinguished academic and professional capacities in the past. Of course, in addition to earning a number of degrees, I note that you've been awarded a significant number of honorary distinctions and various public service distinction awards throughout your career.

From any of your boards and committee work perhaps, did that in any way help inform you with respect to the type of work you would be doing on behalf of this advisory body? I also want to get a sense of your relationship with the government. Was there any particular understanding that you had with respect to the kind of advice you would ultimately be providing to the minister or to the Prime Minister, in terms of the kinds of recommendations that would be going forward?

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: Let me begin by saying that in terms of competencies to undertake this task, as you know, I've spent all my life in the business of talent—management talent assessment—and I've served on a large number of committees that select people for various awards, from an academic standpoint.

But let me speak to two that are not academic, that perhaps have the greatest bearing on this particular task. One is that as president and vice-chancellor for 10 years, I served on the honorary degree committee for the University of Alberta. The chair of the committee is the chancellor, and I'm the vice-chancellor. As you know, honorary degrees are awarded to individuals from all walks of life.

In fact, the criteria that we apply to honorary degree selection mirrors, in some ways, the task at hand. We are seeking members who have made significant contributions to their community, who have made outstanding achievements in their chosen professions. Perhaps the only thing that was missing in terms of direct comparison is knowledge of the legislative process and their ability to function in the Senate. The honorary degree committee allowed me to look at Canadians from all walks of life. That's one experience.

The other one is that I also serve on the selection for the outstanding CEO of the year in Canada. I've been on that committee for about four or five years. That again is looking at very specific competencies—individuals who are running Canadian corporations. I think these diverse experiences have given me a context within which I will be able to assess and apply the very clear merit-based criteria that we have to adhere to.

In terms of my understanding, you asked a question with government in terms of our recommendations. Our terms of reference are very clear. The criteria are very clear. We, as a committee, have spent a lot of time discussing the criteria and developing an understanding of those criteria and their application to nominations that we receive.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I go back into your CV, and particularly I noted that you were appointed by the previous government to the Prime Minister's advisory committee on public service renewal.

Was there anything you found in that particular work that might be informative to the type of work you might be doing on behalf of this advisory body?

• (1205)

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: I would say not directly, other than developing a very good understanding of the role of the public service in Canada; a good understanding of the long-term trends that Canada is facing as a country; and the importance of modernizing, perhaps many of our systems in support of government—everything from how we assess merit and so on in terms of public servants.

I would say I got a broad-based understanding and an opportunity to perhaps delve more deeply into how the Government of Canada operates and the role of the public service.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now have Mr. Scott Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: First of all, welcome, Professor, or Doctor. I'm not sure what the right term to use is. If this was Germany, I'd call you "Herr Professor Doctor", and get both in the same title.

You have an impressive CV, to say the least. I've been saying to other people who've appeared before us that it must feel a bit odd having to trot out your credentials. I know that being accomplished is not the same thing as wanting to spend all your time talking about your credentials. I'll just say that from my point of view they're very impressive. In fact, my assistant was a student at the University of Alberta while you were the big kahuna there, the president.

Let me ask you a bit about some of what you've done and how it relates to the work you do now on the advisory panel. One of the things I'm trying to get my head around is whether you have been approaching individuals or organizations and asking them to make nominations. I see that Sylvie Bernier from Quebec indicated that about 100 organizations have been approached. Is that something that the national board has been involved in, or is that something done by the provincial members only?

Mr. Arnold Chan: I have a point of order.

We're getting back into issues of process as opposed to issues of competency and qualifications.

The Chair: Do you want to answer the question?

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: I'm happy to reinforce what our chair offered and to add to it. One of the things we were trying to do in phase one was to ensure that we got the word out very broadly. Hence, as a group—the three federal members and all of the provincial members, which are three provinces and two people each—we worked together to direct our input towards a significant list meant to ensure that the message and opportunity to nominate

individuals went out everywhere. That was our commitment, and I think we did the best job we could. In fact, I think when our report goes to the Prime Minister, we will attempt to provide some details and colour on that part of our activity.

Mr. Scott Reid: Do you mean the report you'll be making, the recommendations of five individuals per province, or do you mean the report you'll be making about how the process could be improved in the future?

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: I mean the report on the process.

Mr. Scott Reid: Did you then send out requests to organizations asking them to consider making nominations?

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: Yes, we sent out the same request to a large number of organizations.

Mr. Scott Reid: Will you be including a copy of that request in your report, so as to allow members of the public to see what its nature was? It would be helpful for all of us. I realize that you were reporting to the Prime Minister, but this is a process that involves all of us. These senators will be governing for all of us. Therefore, we all, as members of the public, have an interest in keeping track of the process.

• (1210)

Mr. Arnold Chan: I want to object again. We're delving into the issues of process, Mr. Reid.

I leave it up to the witness to decide whether she wishes to answer the question, but we have the Minister appearing before this committee on Thursday. Perhaps those are questions more appropriately addressed to the government, as opposed to this witness.

I want us to remember that we are directed under Standing Order 111(2) to simply look at the qualifications and competency of a particular witness without delving into issues of process.

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: I'll make two points. First of all, we are currently working on our report, so I can't speak to it, because it's by no means complete. But let me point to the website and the form that the organizations were asked to fill out. Perhaps that form will give you a better understanding. We've clearly said that the organizations have to present a rationale for why they are nominating the individual, a rationale that spells out the parameters we provided to the organizations.

Mr. Scott Reid: Would the number of organizations that got back to you be something you would be able to share with us at this point? If not—I'm anticipating Mr. Chan's objection—is an indication of the number of responses you actually got back the sort of thing you intend to include in your report to the Prime Minister?

Mr. Arnold Chan: I will simply repeat my objection again.

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: Our report is not complete so it's difficult for me to comment, because I don't know what we will collectively end up with, but let me say that our obligation according to the terms of reference is to provide statistics to the Prime Minister. Beyond that, I think it's too early for me to make any kind of commentary until we as a group have met and decided what we're going to do.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's fair enough. I don't expect you to anticipate the things you're going to write, particularly as you would want to discuss them with the other members of your panel before putting them to paper.

Might I make a suggestion? I'm offering you advice that I think is not out of order, even to Mr. Chan's mind. Providing that information on how many groups actually got back to you would be helpful. I think you can do that without violating the restrictions that are placed on those individual forms that become protected status B after they have been filled out and so on. That would be useful information that would indicate whether the system is working as one would wish it to work.

In his testimony before the Senate committee about a week and a half ago, Mr. LeBlanc indicated that you had indicated to him that you needed extra time to make your decisions and to pass on the names to the Prime Minister. Have you been able to pass those names on to the Prime Minister now? Is the matter in his hands, or is it still something you're reviewing?

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Once again, on a point of order, we're asking about process over and over again, and that does not go to the qualifications or competence of the witness.

The Chair: You have about 20 seconds left. Is there anything you want to say in relation to that question?

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: At this point I can say our process is well under way. Until the process is concluded, it might be best if I left that answer until we can finally give you some sense of timing.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. David Christopherson will be next on the list.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Doctor, for taking the time to be here and to answer our questions. I appreciate it.

There are no surprises for me. If you have talked to colleagues or looked at *Hansard*, you know exactly where I'm going, so it's all up front, and nobody's shocked here as to what's going to happen.

I do want to state very sincerely that I have no qualms or questions at all with your qualifications. They are outstanding. There's just no other way to describe them. You are an outstanding Canadian, and in terms of qualifications to do just about any task that might be asked of a citizen, I can't think of anyone who's more qualified than you are. I have no problems or questions at all about that, and I am in great awe of what you have achieved.

However, on the side of competency, you know it's my view that the five of you have replaced the 35 million people who otherwise would make this decision in an election. Since that's not going to happen, it seems to me competency speaks to you actually performing the job, and the job actually happens as you are doing interviews and making evaluations about citizens as to whether or not you believe they should go on the list as potential appointees whom the PM has the right to appoint.

When you have candidates in front of you, given the importance of accountability in our system, democracy is not one-way. It's two-

way. There's accountability on the part of those who hold and exercise power.

With that in mind, what qualities are you looking for in candidates, or what characteristics would you be seeking from those candidates to give yourself the assurance that they understand the importance of accountability in carrying out their functions as lawmakers? We're not just appointing committee people. These are lawmakers.

What qualities would you be looking for in order to feel satisfied that candidates were true democrats, and that they actually believed in the tenets of democracy including accountability?

• (1215)

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: First of all, let me thank you for your very kind words about my achievements. I'm truly humbled and grateful for your comments.

Let me make two points on this, first on accountability. I'd like to say that I've spent much of my career, particularly the last 10 or 15 years, honing my skills on accountability, such as how I held people accountable within the University of Alberta. I was the person who was ultimately answerable to the board of governors and, in fact, to the Government of Alberta on the issue of accountability as an institution, as an individual on behalf of my executive, on behalf of management, and on behalf of the academics and our staff. I'd like to think that I understand accountability reasonably well enough to be able to assess that.

When we are looking at candidates, our terms of reference were, I think, constructed to some degree with that in mind. One of the things that I think is evidence of an individual's being able to be accountable is really what they set out to do in their lives professionally and in their communities. Were they in positions that involved making laws or supporting individuals who were making laws? We use the evidence collectively that came from their CV, from references, and from the nomination by organizations in order to ask if these individuals are capable of being accountable for the task before them. I think that was the criteria they used, and we use our own experience about what it means to be accountable at those kinds of levels to come to that conclusion.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you very much.

I really appreciate your responding. It hasn't always been the case. All I asked for was a very simple opinion, and you gave it to me. I appreciate it.

Just to drill down a little deeper on this same road, one of the things that voters do on the doorstep when candidates come and knock... Again, you're a replacement for that. You're there instead of the voter, so someone is knocking on your door. One of the things that people are looking for is to ensure that someone has the right priorities for them. The difficulty is that what may be a priority will be health care for one person and will be democratic reform, let's say, when they go to the next door. Those two different values would perhaps be reflected in the ballot box where one candidate says that they didn't hear enough about health, so they are not voting for them. The other one then says that they didn't hear enough about democratic reform, so they are not voting for them. Again, you replace that door-to-door evaluation by the voters.

What mechanism will you use when you're looking to find candidates who are balanced in their view and that there's the right emphasis on things that matter and should be a priority, given the difficulty with that and given that Canadians themselves have subjective opinions about what this is, and it's reflected in the vote? That all kind of happens with just the five of you.

How do you see yourself evaluating candidates in terms of trying to determine whether they have a well-rounded interest in the values that matter? Or, is it your own values that will be the priority, for example, if you believe it's health care? What mechanisms will you use to find candidates that will reflect that Canadian will?

• (1220)

The Chair: Doctor, you have 30 seconds left in this time slot.

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: One of the criteria that we have been tasked with is to ensure that we have a balance of candidates. We have the issue of gender, ethnic, linguistic, minority, and indigenous peoples, but also breadth of expertise in order to have a well-functioning Senate. As long as we can ensure that there is a cross-section of people with significant differences amongst them in terms of their professional and personal qualities, I think we would hopefully be able to address that issue.

Mr. David Christopherson: To be fair, some people are looking for someone who has walked a mile in their shoes. That may or may not be reflected in folks who have umpteen letters after their name, myself included.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to David Graham for our last round.

Mr. David Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Dr. Samarasekera, I'm looking through your national boards and committees in Canada. You have so many, I don't know where to begin. I haven't heard of half of them.

By the way, I want to share my time with Ms. Sahota.

Could you talk a bit more about some of these roles, in particular the prime minister's advisory council on science and technology? What did you do there, and how does that tie back to what you do now?

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: I served on the Science, Technology and Innovation Council for a few years. Our role there was essentially responding to advice from the Minister of Industry Canada as well as creating a report called "State of the Nation" in which we attempted to comprehensively provide the minister and the Government of Canada with a picture of where Canada stood relative to other countries on a variety of measures. The advice to the minister was, again, on a large number of issues. The advice was confidential to the minister, and therefore, obviously not in the public domain. But I can tell you that we covered topics that would be of interest to enhancing Canada's competitiveness, not only in science and technology, but also in innovation and competitiveness as a country in terms of our economic growth.

Mr. David Graham: Did the last prime minister follow your advice?

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: I would say that much of our advice was indeed taken very seriously, and there were many occasions on which the advice was implemented.

Mr. David Graham: What is MaRS?

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: MaRS is a technology transfer incubator organization in Ontario. It's located in Toronto. It was started off by John Evans, who is a very distinguished Canadian and who passed away recently, sadly. MaRS stood for medical and related sciences district. Their role is to take discoveries that come out of universities and help transfer them into small companies; to take small companies that are in Ontario and help them grow; and to have access to talent in management and capital, and ideas that would help companies grow.

So really it's a technology incubation, innovation, and commercialization entity. I was very fortunate to serve on that board for a few years.

Mr. David Graham: I understand. I have another quick question for you.

You taught at the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya. I had to look that up. It's in Sri Lanka. You went to UC Davis after that.

Could you speak a bit more about your experience outside of Canada?

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: Yes. I was very fortunate, because first of all, I grew up in Sri Lanka. I spent a couple of years in England as a child, and when my father was studying I was in California for two years, and of course, in Canada. I consulted for about a hundred companies around the world when I was a professor in engineering. When I was vice-president, research, and more particularly, president, I spent a lot of time promoting Canadian universities, the University of Alberta in particular, in many countries, particularly Asia, China, India, and South America.

I'm also a member of the board of the Bank of Nova Scotia and the board of Magna. These are two leading Canadian companies that have significant international operations.

I've been very fortunate in my life to really have had a chance to live and work and interact with people from many countries and cultures.

• (1225)

The Chair: Now we'll go to Ms. Ruby Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Hello, Dr. Samarasekera. Thank you so much for being here with us today.

My question follows up on what my colleague was just referring to, the places that you've lived in the world. From your resumé it seems you may have grown up in Sri Lanka, spent quite a lot of time in California, in various provinces in Canada, and as you were just stating, places around the world as well.

How do you think this experience of living in different places or having grown up in a different place may shape your qualifications when it comes to this appointment?

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: I think if you look at the criteria that I set out, one of the things that I think is important is the fact that we want to ensure, at least through this process, that there is representation of minorities: of linguistic minorities, ethnic minorities, first nations, indigenous people. I think that by having travelled and lived in many parts of the world, I have perhaps cultural sensitivity, the ability to understand people from different cultures, and also to assess and perhaps look for the contributions that people of diverse backgrounds make to Canada in particular. Perhaps that would inform my ability to look at the CVs, the resumés, the references that are provided in support of those individuals. I think I could bring that perspective to my task.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Through your work at the University of Alberta or UBC, what kinds of mechanisms did you try to put in place so that you could meet that type of objective there?

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: I think there were two things at the University of Alberta, certainly as president, that I focused on. At UBC, I was vice-president, research, so I had a very different portfolio. As president, there were a couple of things that we were working very hard on.

First of all, we worked to significantly increase the access for aboriginal students. As you know, they are very under-represented in many Canadian universities. I would say the University of Alberta was one of the most successful universities in enhancing the access of aboriginal students to not only undergraduate programs, but professional programs: law, medicine, and so on.

Secondly, we were very concerned with the business of access in general for low-income students and particularly students who came from families where their parents perhaps had not gone to university. We did a lot towards raising money for scholarships, bursaries, and also providing students with support so that they were successful in university. As you can imagine, the University of Alberta is a very large institution, so that's a challenge.

The other one was for students who come from small rural communities, where there were maybe no more than 3,000 or 4,000 students. These students were not accustomed to big-city life, and so again that was an example where we helped students coming from these minority backgrounds to succeed.

Finally, one of my roles at the University of Alberta was to increase the proportion of international students to the University of Alberta, because I believed that they brought with them the opportunity for Canadians to understand cultural diversity and also to enrich the lives of our Canadian students. It was also to provide international students from a range of backgrounds the opportunity to study at one of Canada's leading universities.

The Chair: Thank you.

Our last questioner will be Mr. Blake Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I appreciate your being here with us, virtually, and certainly, as many others have said, I am very impressed with your impressive set of academic credentials and experience, much as I was with the other two candidates we had before us.

I am sure you are very dedicated to the task you have before you—somewhat before you and already somewhat behind you.

I am very firmly of the belief that the only people who should be making assessments and selecting senators should be the Canadian electorate, in elections. Of course, recognizing the constitutional situation that we have now, Alberta does have a senatorial selection process that has been used. We've held a few election processes under the Senatorial Selection Act in Alberta.

Two different Prime Ministers have chosen to appoint senators chosen through that process. Of course, the Chrétien and Martin Liberals chose to ignore the choices made by Albertans in those processes, but we have seen them appointed.

I know you can't speak as to your opinion on whether that is the appropriate way, or on choices that have been made by the government. You are speaking to the process that you are a part of. I am obviously disappointed when, on more than one occasion, we've heard the Minister of Democratic Institutions and her parliamentary secretary, when I asked this question in the House of Commons, indicate that they didn't really see merit to an election process. They felt that it should be a merit-based process and therefore somehow an election wasn't merit-based, which I find really troubling, to say the least.

This question was asked at the Senate committee. The minister was asked about Mr. Mike Shaikh, who would be the next person to be appointed should the election process that has taken place in Alberta be followed. The minister said that he was more than welcome to apply, just like anyone else, and that there was really no merit to the fact that 300,000-plus Albertans had chosen to select him to be their senator.

I wonder what your sense is, should you have to make recommendations in a future appointment where there has been a senatorial selection process, whether it be the one in Alberta or whether there is another province that chooses to set up such a process, and therefore people are in place who have been selected and chosen by the electorate in their provinces. I know you are bound by the process you are a part of and you can't comment, but you certainly can give an indication as to what you would do in terms of looking at the merit of those individuals, based on their having been chosen by the provinces they would represent in the Senate. How would you assess that as part of the merit when considering a candidate, if that were to be the case in future appointments?

• (1230)

The Chair: Go ahead with that short question, Doctor.

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: Let me say that the criteria that have been laid out are very clear. We cannot deviate from that. That's our mandate.

We would look at every single individual based on his or her merits and contributions.

Clearly, if they have been considered worthy candidates by their communities, that would perhaps be reflected in their letters of reference, in their achievements, but we certainly would have to treat equally all individuals who apply in the second phase, purely on the basis of the criteria that are before us, which are very clearly set out in the terms of reference.

Mr. Blake Richards: It sounds as though, as in the comments that have been made by the minister and the parliamentary secretary, the process is built in such a way that no merit would be seen to someone being selected by fellow citizens in an election process. That's unfortunate.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Doctor. We really appreciate your being here today. Looking at your curriculum vitae, I know you have a lot of things and you are pretty busy. As all the committee members said, you are a great Canadian, so we appreciate your offering more service to the country, and we'll let you get back to work.

Dr. Indira Samarasekera: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for your kind words.

Let me say in conclusion that I am very honoured to serve Canada. I am very committed to this country. This is a great country with a great democracy, and I am very privileged to have a chance to meet with all of you.

I would like to thank you all for your very kind questions, for your comments, for your thoughtfulness, and for the opportunity to engage in this way.

•(1235)

The Chair: While they're transitioning the mike over to committee business I'll give a few updates to the committee.

Our research has been very busy. We have four more documents coming probably tomorrow, and I assume we will let these be public as we did the other research. The first one is a follow-up to questions that came up during our discussions that we asked the researcher to follow up on. The second one is a bit of a study on day care and on child care centres in other jurisdictions. A third one is on electronic voting. Then there's a fourth paper that was done for the House of Commons by the procedures clerks who offered their services to us. We asked them what might hypothetically go before an alternate chamber if we had two chambers. You will get a paper tomorrow on that.

Over the last week I was in Sweden for another reason. The Parliament there only sat three days most of the time, they had all their votes on Tuesday or Wednesday, and the voting was by electronics. They have the same number of MPs we do or a few more. They only gave them about five seconds, so everyone was glued to their seats. They did about four votes all within 60 seconds. They push their button, and then there's a whole board of green and red lights, and the totals come up. It took a lot less time than we take. When you get maternity leave, you get 80% of your pay and get a replacement to fill in for you. The ministers are not allowed to sit in the House because they're too busy, so they get a replacement. Only 50% of their ministers are elected, but of those who are elected they get someone to replace them to do their House duties and to do their MP duties. They're elected, but I don't know who the replacement is. That would be a good question, who they get for a replacement. Someone replaces them so they can do their ministerial work. They have to go to the House to answer questions, but they're not allowed to partake in the House. All of that was very interesting.

The Chief Electoral Officer was dumped because of our scheduled stuff. He suggested May 3 or May 5 because he's available. We

might want to pick one of those dates and suggest it to him just to give him some certainty.

There are two other things as I mentioned while the Speaker was here. One is that we have the main estimates sometime to do in the next couple of months for the House. The other thing is that I got a letter yesterday from the Speaker on a different topic, which you'll get shortly. He was asking in the last House when they were doing the standing orders...he had made the point, and I'm sure it's in some documentation we got earlier, that it's not clear enough what authority he has to set the times of the sitting, etc. after an emergency like we had in the House. He had suggested in our review of the upcoming standing orders that we make sure we address that. When you see that letter, and don't answer now, I'd like it if you'd come to the next meeting to answer two questions. One is whether you would like to do that separately and get it over with, or save it for the big review of standing orders. The second question is that he suggests in the letter they could propose some wording of the standing order that would work. For me that would be great, but once again it's up to the committee if you would like them to proceed that way. We could discuss all that at the next meeting once you've seen the letter from him.

Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Maybe this is something we might want to put to the subcommittee or to the steering committee. We're spending too much time here on that. If that's acceptable to the opposition.

The Chair: Good.

Now for the remainder of this meeting, the last 20 minutes or so, we have committee business.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Would it be possible to return to the motion that I had before this?

•(1240)

The Chair: Yes, if that's the will of the committee.

Go ahead.

Mr. David Graham: I had the floor at the end of the last meeting on that one.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I'm looking at the speakers list on that motion. I think Mr. Graham had the floor.

Is there anyone else who wants to speak? I think you wanted to speak, Mr. Reid.

Mr. David Christopherson: On a point of order, just refresh my memory, Chair, I just want to be clear in my own mind, but I believe the reason we're doing this motion instead of mine is that this flowed from our actual discussions and from the hearing, correct?

The Chair: Correct.

Mr. David Christopherson: We're cleaning that up before we get back to mine. My motion's been around forever. At some point we have to wrap that sucker up. I just want to be clear that it hasn't been thrown away. We're just doing this one in order of precedence, and then mine we'll still tuck in behind.

The Chair: Yours hasn't been thrown away. I wasn't doing any precedence, just what the committee wants to do, whatever the committee would like to do.

Mr. David Christopherson: No, actually, I wanted to be clear that we're all on the same page. I think I had actually acquiesced to that recognition. I just want to reaffirm. It's always better to reaffirm these things now than later on.

The Chair: Okay. We'll continue discussion on this. Maybe I should read the motion: That the federal members of the Independent Advisory Board for Senate Appointments be invited to appear before the Committee before the end of March 2016, to answer all questions relating to their mandate and responsibilities.

When the committee left off at the last meeting in the middle of the discussion, Mr. Graham had the floor.

Mr. David Graham: When we left off last meeting we had not yet voted on the motion to recall the witnesses we had called under Standing Order 111 to address the scope of their mandate rather than their competence to carry it out.

David Christopherson referred to this lack of a vote as a big mistake as we walked out of the room, a comment which I found regrettable as I do in fact have a good deal to say on the topic and appreciate having the time to say it. It's about the longest you'll ever hear me.

It is my understanding that the minister's imminent appearance here in two days is specifically to handle the very questions my colleagues want answered. I am looking forward to that meeting.

However, there is a very important element of politics being played here by the members opposite. Before I get to the Conservative motion, I want to take a moment to refer to the New Democratic Party's position—the big mistake, if you will.

The NDP has never made any secret of their disdain for the Senate as an institution, and it is thus not in Mr. Christopherson's political interest to do anything whatsoever that would facilitate the process of replacing senators, Constitution be damned.

The Constitution Act is unambiguous. There shall be one Parliament for Canada, consisting of the Queen; an upper house style, the Senate; and the House of Commons. The NDP's position that the Senate must not exist is a purely political one not based on any form of reality. I'll get to that a little later.

Bringing back these three appointees, who we all agree are extraordinarily well-qualified people for the roles to which they have been assigned, to address their mandate serves, then, only to politicize the issue for the NDP. It creates a forum to go after the Senate rather than after those the government has charged with improving a system we are fundamentally obligated to have under the Constitution, whether we like it or not.

As it happens, I do like the Senate in principle, and believe it has a fundamental and inherent value to our process so long as it is neither time- nor term-limited, nor is it elected. While it's something I look forward to discussing at another time, that is not the subject of this particular intervention.

For Mr. Reid, he is frustrated, and frankly understandably, that the Standing Order under which we called Madame Labelle and Dean

Jutras is very limited in scope. These are order in council appointments and the Standing Orders permit us to call these appointments for the purpose of evaluating their qualifications and competence to perform the duties of the post to which he or she has been appointed. The rule is there, logic suggests, to ensure that we ensure the government is making good hires. The policy decisions are not those of the appointees, but rather of the government itself. Standing Order 111 is not intended to turn appointments into pawns in larger political games.

It is worth noting, though, that in reviewing the records of this committee in the last Parliament, I can find only two motions to call anyone under Standing Order 111. One is for Richard Fужarczuk, the parliamentary law clerk, on May 28, 2013. Being called outside of the hours of a regular meeting for just 30 minutes, this is the one motion the Conservatives agreed to. While nobody on this side of the room knows how many motions were introduced and defeated, under the Conservatives' draconian use of in camera meetings, I would be hard pressed to believe no attempts were ever made.

The second reference was in June of last year, in the dying days of the 41st Parliament when Mr. Christopherson moved a motion to call the new Speaker of the Senate to test the qualifications. While I can't imagine the conversation would have been very interesting under the Standing Orders, presumably it was to make another political anti-Senate pitch rather than addressing the qualifications of the individual named. It could have only gone something like this:

“Senator, are you a senator?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Well, then, by gosh, you meet the qualification standard.”

Regardless, the government of the day voted down the motion without any public debate and without the record of the Standing Order at this committee. The most recent Parliament was frankly abysmal.

I don't personally believe in killing motions without considering them. Indeed, having 10 days off the Hill in the real world to think about it has given me plenty of opportunity to ponder it and put my thoughts down in writing. We have shocked our friends across this room on several occasions already by doing things like listening and accepting, or at least evading motions and ideas. We agreed to call the minister, something that our predecessor government would never have done based on an opposition motion. It had to be their own idea to be a good idea.

Members on this side will certainly not always agree with our friends on the other side of this small room, nor will we always disagree. For many of us, our instinct is to try to agree more than we disagree. I, at least, believe that a small part of making this place more family-friendly is treating our colleagues and their ideas with respect, and debating them on their merits, not their colours.

I believe in co-operation and coming to the best results based on the best ideas with the best information. Sometimes, though, we will simply not agree. On Mr. Reid's motion, this is unfortunately one of those times. It does not mean that sunny ways have clouded in. It simply means I don't agree with the motion, and so I want to debate the motion on its merits. I listened carefully to Mr. Reid's 1,200-odd second commentary on why he felt this motion was important. My point is not to suggest that he does not believe what he said, I believe he truly does, notwithstanding anything that happened in the 41st Parliament.

• (1245)

The Chair: Sorry, the translators are having a problem. Would you just talk a little slower?

Mr. David Graham: The Conservatives' position on the Senate has not always been crystal clear. It was not to appoint any senators until the Senate withers and dies by pure attrition. Or, it was to have what they call a triple-E Senate, for equal, elected, and effective. Or it was to appoint elected senators, at least until they stopped liking the results of the elections. Or it really was to not have senators or a Senate. Or, it was to appoint partisan hacks in a hurry when the government was suddenly in danger of falling, and then deal with the consequences, of which there have been many, and not all of them have made the news.

I am sure that all of my hon. colleagues in this room are careful to only claim per diems when they are eligible to do so, for example, and that nobody here claims for lunch on sitting Tuesdays or Thursdays in recognition of the wide and delicious assortment of sandwiches we have here.

As a staffer attending the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament's first meeting of the second session of the 41st Parliament, I was surprised to hear one of these highly qualified Conservative senators from the class of 2008 state on the routine motion to order lunch, much like ours is moved, and I will quote directly from *Hansard*:

Please don't move it yet.

With the AG moving in on us, if you and I had lunch, we could not claim a per diem for today.

The reason not to claim a per diem was because there was a looming audit by the Auditor General, not because it is the right thing to do.

Forgive me for thinking that the Conservatives do not have a great deal of credibility on any question relating to Senate appointments. Liberals, too, have not batted a thousand on Senate appointments. There is no perfection in the system as it has existed.

The system before us, the reason that Monsieur Jutras and Madame Labelle are here, is intended to begin the difficult task of fixing several problems that have cropped up in the Senate's past within the confines of the Constitution, a structure for which I have the utmost respect.

These boundaries were explained to us in black and white only a year ago by the Supreme Court, in a reference that we are no doubt all familiar with. This reads, in part:

The Senate is one of Canada's foundational political institutions. It lies at the heart of the agreements that gave birth to the Canadian federation.

The problems are simple. The system of the prime minister picking a senator out of the clear blue sky, or red sky, depending on the flavour of the government of the day—orange skies never seem to be in the forecast—is not a particularly good system. We get some phenomenal senators, and we get some special cases. The terror of having any more senators claiming expenses to which they were not entitled or otherwise causing embarrassment to the last prime minister meant that senators simply stopped being appointed, so back to the attrition plan they went.

The Prime Minister that we have, seeing that the Senate's value exists only as an independent and non-partisan body, ejected Liberal senators from the Liberal caucus, telling them to get on with the independence on which the relevance of their jobs depends. I can attest to the effectiveness of this on a personal level. In spite of my years on the Hill, I barely know the names of the senators, have met few of them, and couldn't tell you what province or party most of them are from without doing a bit of research. It is a separation that I value.

However, this leads us to several structural problems. The Senate is a legislative body much like this one. I serve for the moment on two committees, as do most of my colleagues here, as well as on the executive of two sub-caucuses and an interparliamentary group.

The Senate is much the same. The sheer volume of work to do requires senators. The last senator standing would be a very busy person indeed, serving on every standing committee, having impressive monologues on every bill brought forward, getting deep into philosophical discussions with the bathroom mirror and so forth, except for the lack of any quorum, the lack of anyone to second bills, and a Speaker to even recognize them.

It is simply a matter of necessity to have senators within the confines of the Constitution as it exists. While the NDP wants to abolish the Senate, the Supreme Court was clear that the abolition of the Senate requires the unanimous consent of the Senate, the House of Commons, and the legislative assemblies of all Canadian provinces. The Conservatives' occasional wish for an elected Senate too requires constitutional amendments. Again, I cite the Supreme Court reference, which reads:

The implementation of consultative elections and senatorial term limits requires consent of the Senate, the House of Commons, and the legislative assemblies of at least seven provinces representing, in the aggregate, half of the population of all the provinces.

Even term limits crash into the constitutional amendment brick wall. A change in the duration of senatorial terms would amend the Constitution of Canada by requiring modifications to the text of section 29 of the Constitution Act, 1867.

In the face of all of these constitutional requirements, the Conservative government was faced with total paralysis, choosing instead to leave seats vacant, close their eyes, stick out their collective tongues, and block their ears, shouting "nah, nah, nah", rather than looking for plausible, realistic, and constitutional solutions.

I got my first start in politics at a rather young age, when the previous federal and provincial leaders thought that reopening the Constitution was a good idea. I don't think it is a great stretch to say that the constitutional wrangling of the 1990s did our national unity a whole lot of good. I don't wish for the reopening of the Constitution on anyone. It is a particularly heinous kind of curse, and is not something that should ever be taken lightly.

• (1250)

We must therefore work within the confines of the Constitution. It requires us to have a Senate. It requires senators to be appointed by Her Majesty's representative here in Canada on the advice of our Prime Minister. It is, however, silent on where the Prime Minister takes his advice on the matter. That is an issue the Independent Advisory Board for Senate Appointments, struck by order in council and subject to Standing Order 111, seeks to resolve.

The Prime Minister is still responsible for the final choice, much as with Supreme Court justices. But having a highly qualified advisory panel offer educated suggestions without a partisan lens can only serve to improve the quality of our sober second thinkers. This is different from electing senators, as this Supreme Court ruling makes clear:

Introducing a process of consultative elections for the nomination of Senators would change our Constitution's architecture, by endowing Senators with a popular mandate which is inconsistent with the Senate's fundamental nature and role as a complementary legislative chamber of sober second thought.

Sober second thought, in my mind, does not refer to the lack of imbibed alcohol. If that was a qualification, we would have our second debating chamber made up of me and a handful of other MPs who prefer not to drink. No, sober second thought refers to the lack of private or personal interest for the legislator. A senator who needs to please a political party or think about his re-election or what he will do in a post-Senate career loses that independence from personal interest. An elected or term-limited senator cannot meet the intent of sober second thought.

Other reforms, such as exploring whether senators should be allowed to continue working as anything other than senators, potentially clouding the sobriety of their independence, are plausible but outside of the scope of this particular debate.

If we get into the weeds with the members of the advisory board about who they do or do not consider an acceptable senator, we prejudice the very process they are charged with following. If we tell senator applicants what to do in their CVs to appeal to particular board members, we compromise the very independence of the advice.

They have their own mandate, given to them by the government, which gives clear instructions. Beyond that, it is their judgment, and we should not invite subjective judgment into their debates, or air their internal deliberations for the public to see. As with any hiring process, those not selected deserve the respect of not having their rejection on the public record.

All advisory board members will have to draw their own conclusions and do their own thinking as they consider who to suggest as our next senators to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister will then have to fulfill his constitutionally mandated role of making the final decision.

Standing Order 111 exists for a reason. When we call an order in council appointment here, it is to discuss whether the person is qualified and competent to exercise the duties to which he or she has been named. If we wish to inquire more deeply into those issues, we can call a minister. And we have done exactly that. She will be here in just two days. I, for one, will be voting no on Mr. Reid's motion to recall these members.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: My intervention last time, so I'm told by Mr. Graham, was 1,200 seconds long; I had to look that up. That's 20 minutes. But for those who are interested it's also 1.2 million milliseconds and 1.2 billion nanoseconds. So I'll just respond briefly to this. I am hoping we'll have a chance to have a vote today.

A couple of things are factually wrong in what Mr. Graham said, and I thought I'd draw his attention to a bit of that. Elections are not forbidden in the reference ruling the Supreme Court made two years ago. I invite him to reread it. He'll see that federal enabling legislation is ruled as being ultra vires, outside the federal government's powers.

There was nothing indicating that Alberta's Senatorial Selection Act, for example, is unconstitutional. Nor are the choices made under that act such as that of Mike Shaikh, to whom my colleague was referring, a senator-in-waiting from Alberta, who will, unless Prime Minister Trudeau doesn't care about democracy, be appointed to the post to which he was elected in an advisory election. There's nothing unconstitutional about that.

The Alberta government still has on its website the fact that Mike Shaikh is a senator-in-waiting. We have several senators sitting in the Senate right now who were elected through that process. Senate elections are entirely constitutional as long as they're done the right way. The right way has been indicated through the process adopted by Alberta and I hope will be adopted by the provinces in time, one that could indeed be the system by which Canada's Senate becomes democratized in every province and ceases to be a 19th century institution.

I should mention as well that if one rereads the Confederation debates... I invite Mr. Graham and anybody else to do so. They are available on a website to which I've contributed called PrimaryDocuments.ca. You can take a look at the Confederation debates and you'll discover that many of the Fathers of Confederation were advocates of an elected Senate. The reason the Senate became an appointed body, historically speaking, is that it was a way of providing jobs to the people who were in the legislative council of the Province of Canada who otherwise would have opposed.... In other words they were bribed by Senate seats. That's a matter of historical record that was brought up several times in the course of the first Parliament in the new Dominion of Canada. To get the record straight the members debated as to whether or not Sir John A. had handed out the bribes to the former legislative councillors as per his secret agreement with the members of the other party in the pre-Confederation Parliament of the Province of Canada.

Mr. Graham is suggesting here that if we're going to get the minister in on Thursday every question we have will be resolved, therefore we don't need to bring back the members of the advisory committee to answer substantive questions about what they're doing and how they're conducting their affairs. I'll just say several things.

One is that these are people who have demonstrated discretion. I think we've all agreed that they are all very discreet people. They know when they have to stop answering a question. Just as when we bring ministers here they have to know this is the point at which it's a cabinet confidentiality and they can't go beyond that. We trust in their competence. I don't think Mr. Graham would dispute their competence, their ability to know when they need to refrain from answering some aspect of a question that would involve a violation of one of the secrets they are entrusted with. I have no fear there and I don't think he needs to have any fear either.

The other problem we've got is that the minister is going to come here and there's every chance that she's going to say she's not privy to some of this information. For example, the question I asked today about how many organizations have you been in touch with and was it the three permanent national members of the committee or was it the provincial members who contacted these individuals. I think this is quite germane to the issue of whether or not these are individuals or organizations that represent—what kind of interests do they represent? I don't think the minister would know that. Maybe she will but there's a great chance she won't, after all this is supposedly an independent advisory board.

• (1255)

If we take the process as actually working the way that it's said to work, then presumably she wouldn't. We have questions like this that she can't answer. A series of questions will simply go unanswered, and look, it becomes hard to believe after we've seen that every time I try to raise a substantial question, it gets shut down.

I do thank you, by the way, Mr. Chair. I thought you handled it right this time. You gave the witness the choice of answering, as opposed to saying that she couldn't do so. I've never approved of that technique whenever a chair does it.

But on the constant points of order—you can't ask this question, you can't ask that question—if we accept that the standing order is the reason why, then the solution is to bring them back under a different standing order, where we can seek answers to these questions and actually get substantive responses.

My expectation is that on Thursday we will be disappointed, simply because either time will run out... The minister, after all, has to answer questions on this issue and on a number of other issues. She has one hour to do so. We'll be dealing with, for example, the issue of legislative reform in regard to electoral reform and whether we change our voting system, how, and what her system is. There won't be much time to deal with this, unless we bring her back.

I'll just say now that in the event that it turns out she can't deal with these questions and this is defeated today, I'll be bringing back a

version of this same motion to accomplish the goal in light of the new facts of having not received full answers from the minister, not because of ill will but because of time constraints and a lack of knowledge of things to which she is simply not privy. Likewise, if we find that we're unable to probe deeply enough into the Senate and that process with the minister because we're dealing with the other issue that's on her plate, then I'll be asking for her to come back as well.

Having said that, I'll stop now. We could go either to a vote or to a different person, depending on what the speakers list looks like.

• (1300)

The Chair: Mr. Chan, you're on the list. We have about one minute left.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I had a simple question about how many more are currently on the list.

The Chair: Now there's Mr. Christopherson, who was just added to the list after you, and Ms. Sahota.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm glad to see that we have that filled up again so we can make sure that no vote will occur.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We have about 30 seconds left.

An hon. member: I don't know how you did that, Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I didn't choose to talk out the last eight minutes, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Oh, that's the reason you asked Ms. Sahota to join the speakers list, then.

Mr. Arnold Chan: There's actually a substantive reason. I won't be available on Thursday, unfortunately, so if we come back to the motion, I simply want our side to have the opportunity to respond.

Look, I will simply wrap up. I actually thought that both theses from Mr. Graham and Mr. Reid were particularly educational. For a lot of the substantive points that I had originally wanted to address, I thought Mr. Graham did an excellent job in covering them.

I know that at the last meeting, David, you had a lot of commentary about competency. I think David Graham did a great job in terms of highlighting that at the end of the day we are bound by a particular set of constitutional rules that require us to ultimately deal with the matter we are ultimately trying to deal with.

The Chair: Could you wrap up?

Mr. Arnold Chan: You already know our position. I know that we're at the one o'clock point, so I will simply cede the floor to I believe Mr. Christopherson and then Ms. Sahota when the matter comes back.

The Chair: Okay. We'll see you on Thursday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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