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Board of Internal Economy

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TRANSCRIPT

Thursday, November 1, 2018

Board of Internal Economy

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● (1125)

[*English*]

Hon. Geoff Regan (Speaker of the House of Commons): This meeting of the Board of Internal Economy is called to order. Good morning, colleagues.

The first matter is the minutes for the previous meeting. Is anything of concern about the minutes? I'm seeing nothing.

Is there any business arising from the previous meeting? I'm seeing none.

We'll go on to number three, which is the 2017-2018 audited financial statements.

The presenters we have this morning are Dan Paquette, chief financial officer; José Fernandez, deputy chief financial officer; Charly Thivierge-Lortie, audit senior manager, KPMG; and Andrew Newman, audit partner, KPMG.

[*Translation*]

Hello, Mr. Paquette. Please go ahead.

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to be here today to present the audited financial statements of the House of Commons for the fiscal year that ended on March 31, 2018.

[*English*]

I've provided an overview of the various financial reports we bring to the board to help members of the board in their oversight role for the House of Commons' financial activities. During this cycle, we cover the various financial results from prior years, the in-year activities, and some of the future planning activities for which we need resources.

As part of this financial cycle, you will recall that last June, I provided you with the year-end financial report for the fiscal year ending 2017-18. The purpose of that report was to present the comparatives between the spending authorities of 2017-18 and those of 2016-17.

Today I'm here to present to you the 2017-18 audited financial statements. They represent one of the many formal records of the House of Commons' financial activities and financial position, as of March 31, 2018. They are prepared by the House administration and

present only one of the financial disclosures that we do for the public with regard to our House resources.

With respect to the financial resources, some of the disclosures we do are the Report to Canadians, which we'll be discussing later at this meeting; the Public Accounts of Canada; our quarterly financial reports; the members' expenditure reports; and the House officer expenditure reports.

The audited financial statements are prepared using the accrual basis of accounting rather than the expenditure basis of accounting. That means they reflect the activities of transactions and events in the period in which they occur, rather than in the period in which we've used the appropriations. The main difference to note is that the net cost of operations in these financial statements includes the services provided without charge, such as the operating costs for the various buildings we occupy.

We also have a statement of financial position, which includes our inventory, the capital asset less our amortization, the liabilities for employee benefits and sick leave, and the liabilities for vacation pay and compensatory leave.

These House of Commons financial statements were prepared in accordance with Canadian public sector accounting standards.

[*Translation*]

As you will hear in the following presentation, every year, these financial statements are audited by an independent external auditor. This year, it was KPMG, and some members of that firm are here today.

[*English*]

This year, and for as long as we've had audited financial statements, we have received an unqualified opinion. To me, this is a testament to the efforts made by my team to ensure that systems and practices are in place to ensure that reliable financial information is available for decision-making in all of our financial reports.

● (1130)

[*Translation*]

I would like to take a few minutes to present some highlights of the financial statements.

The financial statements provide an overview of the assets and liabilities of the House of Commons. As of March 31, 2018, the \$79 million in assets consisted primarily of funds provided to the House of Commons to support its activities. Receivables are mostly amounts to be collected from federal departments and agencies and other parliamentary institutions. Capital assets are assets with a purchase price over \$10,000.

[English]

On the other hand, as of March 31, 2018, the House of Commons' liabilities were in the amount of \$80 million. They are mainly composed of amounts payable to suppliers and employee benefits.

Our cost of operations for 2017-18 has increased by approximately \$60 million. Our net cost of operations fluctuates from year to year depending on various factors, such as the various initiatives presented in the House administration's strategic plan.

I'll mention a few that we had reported previously. They include the investments we've made into the renewal of our HR financial systems, our food service modernization, the digital strategy for modernizing the delivery of parliamentary information and our LTVP.

[Translation]

There are significant variances between the net cost of operations in fiscal years 2016-17 and 2017-18 for salaries and benefits, transportation, communications, publication, printing, repairs and maintenance. There was also variance in our revenues.

[English]

For the category of salaries and benefits, we have seen an increase of \$61 million, which can mostly be explained by the one-time actuarial adjustments, as directed in the actuarial report on the pension plan for members of Parliament. There were also the economic increases for the House administration employees and the annual increases for members' sessional allowances and additional salaries. There were also some increases in our capacity to deliver on the various initiatives that had been presented in the strategic plan for 2016 to 2019.

For the category of transportation and telecommunications, we have seen a decrease of \$2 million as a result of the one-time investment in 2016-17 for the Internet-based connectivity to deliver the constituency communication network for members.

There is also the category of advertising and printing, where we've had an increase of \$2.1 million, mainly due to the promotions of the 150th anniversary of Confederation by the members, and there was also the increase in the House administrative printing cost as a result of the productions of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* book.

The repairs and maintenance costs were also increased by \$3.7 million as a result of the security enhancements to the West Block and the activities related to our long-term vision and plan.

[Translation]

Our revenues increased by \$10 million owing to the increase in services provided to other parliamentary institutions and the increase

in revenues generated by our catering services, cafeteria and restaurant.

[English]

As of March 31, 2018, the total budget for the House of Commons, adjusted to conform to the basis of accounting for these financial statements, was \$598 million. When we subtract the House of Commons expenses and add our revenues, it provides us with a surplus last year of \$22.7 million, which was also indicated when I presented our year-end financial report for 2017-18 last June.

Finally, I want to inform you that we will be posting these financial statements to the House of Commons public website after this meeting.

I will now give the representatives from KPMG the opportunity to present their audit results of these financial statements, and we will be open for any questions that you may have after the auditor's presentation.

Mr. Andrew Newman (Audit Partner, KPMG): Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

I am Andrew Newman. I am your independent engagement audit partner for the audit of the financial statements of the House of Commons.

I am a partner in our audit practice here in Ottawa and I lead our public sector practice in Ottawa. I am also vice-chair of the Public Sector Accounting Board of Canada, which issues accounting standards used by governments across Canada. As well, I am a fellow of the Institute of the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario.

I am here to present the independent auditor's report, which is on pages 4 and 5 of the financial statements. I want to underline that this is an independent auditor's report. We are independent of the House of Commons and serve in that role as your external auditors.

The auditor's report is addressed to the Clerk of the House of Commons, which is entirely appropriate. As your CFO mentioned, the documents will be published on the website later today.

The development of financial statements happens in a partnership between management and your external auditor, and we each have unique responsibilities. Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of these financial statements in accordance with Canadian public sector accounting standards and for such internal controls as management determines are necessary to enable the preparation of these financial statements. That is why your CFO presented the financial statements today.

Our responsibility as independent auditors is to express an opinion on these financial statements based on your audit. This audit is performed in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards, which are issued by the Canadian auditing standards board and are used for financial statement audits of every entity in this country. Those standards require that we comply with all professional and ethical requirements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free from material misstatement.

In our auditor's report, in the last paragraph, you will see our independent auditor's opinion, and it is the clean, unmodified audit opinion that you should expect from your management team. It states that these financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the operations and the financial position of the House for the year ended March 31, 2018.

Let me speak a little bit about the audit process.

We start with an audit plan that we file with your CFO and Clerk. We then perform our audit and issue an audit findings report, which I believe was provided to the members of this committee. This states how the audit went.

I am very pleased to report that our audit went in accordance with that plan. We were on time and on budget and we issued our auditor's report on June 29, as expected.

I am also pleased to report that during our audit, we did not find any material weaknesses in internal controls at the House of Commons in your administrative centre. That is excellent news for this committee.

In addition, I must inform this committee that through an agreement between the House and the Office of the Auditor General and on behalf of the Auditor General, we performed the testing related to payroll with regard to their audit of the pay of the federal government using the Phoenix system.

In their sample, they selected eight employees. We performed the testing on their behalf and informed them confidentially of the results of our testing. For our own purposes, to support our financial statement audit we increased that sample to 20 employees of the House of Commons.

Again, I am very pleased to report that all 20 whom we sampled were, for the year ended March 31, 2018, paid the appropriate amount. However, during the year, three of those employees had issues with respect to pay. These were resolved by the end of the year, by March 31, 2018. That is a result of work, quite frankly, by your pay and HR administrators within the House, working with the Phoenix pay centre to get them corrected.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my report.

• (1135)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much.

Are there questions or comments, colleagues?

Seeing none, I thank you very much, Monsieur Paquette, and Mr. Newman, Mr. Fernandez, and Ms. Thivierge-Lortie.

I understand that it is normal and good governance practice for independent auditors to have a discussion in camera with board members, without management present, regarding the preparation of the year-end audited financial statements.

I would therefore like to propose to board members that we hold a short in camera session without the House administration officials to allow board members to have this discussion.

Do I have the acceptance of members to proceed in camera?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Geoff Regan: We will pause for a few minutes to go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

• (1135) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1145)

[Public proceedings resume]

Hon. Geoff Regan: Colleagues, the meeting is called back to order. We're in public again.

[Translation]

Let us now move on to the fourth point, the Report to Canadians.

I will ask the Clerk of the House of Commons, Mr. Charles Robert, to give his presentation.

Mr. Charles Robert (Clerk of the House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to present the Report to Canadians 2018 to the Board of Internal Economy.

The report provides an overview of the work of members during fiscal year 2017-18 and of the House of Commons Administration. More specifically, it focuses on our performance and achievements and includes relevant financial information drawn from the Public Accounts of Canada. In short, it is our annual report.

[English]

As some of you reminded us when we met to talk about last year's publication, the "Report to Canadians" is much more than that; it's an important document by which we tell our story to Canadians.

The "Report to Canadians" 2018 packs a lot of information into 48 pages. In the members' snapshot section, for example, Canadians will find data on the composition of Parliament and on the nature of the work performed by members. There is statistical information about the House of Commons covering the past year, including the number of sitting days, the bills introduced by government and by private members, the volume of documents tabled and committee work.

• (1150)

[Translation]

This section also describes members' extraparlimentary activities through their participation in international associations. In addition, the reports presents a snapshot of the House Administration: the work done behind the scenes to prepare food and drive buses; to provide legal, financial and human resources services; to ensure that the Chamber and committees function as they should, and that parliamentary procedures and traditions are respected.

[English]

As you may recall, one of my first decisions as Clerk was to restructure the House administration to better coordinate our efforts and provide more seamless and enhanced services to members. I believe that this new arrangement has in part facilitated some of the administration's accomplishments this past year, including preparations for the move from Centre Block to West Block. It's been a pretty big year.

[Translation]

Among the highlights, we celebrated Canada's sesquicentennial in parliamentary style by commemorating the first meeting of the first Parliament. We also carried out a host of legacy projects, such as the decorative window that will be a permanent reminder of this significant milestone, to be enjoyed by generations to come.

[English]

In 2017 the board opened its meetings to the public for the first time, our page program turned 40, and we published the third edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, the most comprehensive source of procedural information for members, their staff and others who, like me, have a passion for the procedures and practices that form our parliamentary system.

The House administration was also honoured when it was recognized as a top employer in the national capital region and at the national level for young people for the second consecutive year.

[Translation]

With this overview, I think you have a good idea of the latest edition of the Report to Canadians. With your approval, the report will be tabled in the House and made available on ourcommons.ca. The Speaker will also encourage members to share the report with their constituents.

[English]

My team will work to ensure that it reaches Canadians by sharing the report with our parliamentary partners and counterparts in provincial and territorial legislatures, by distributing electronic copies to the media, by leveraging our traditional and social media channels to promote it, and by amplifying the message about the work that happens on the Hill by teaming up with the Library of Parliament to engage the public.

We know we have a good story to tell.

If you have any comments or questions, I would be happy to respond.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Go ahead, Mr. Holland.

Hon. Mark Holland (Chief Government Whip): Thank you very much. It's an excellent overview. I think the document is fantastic. It does justice to this place in telling our story.

Can you give me a sense, because I'm not aware of its circulation, of its distribution? I presume it's available electronically, and there will be hard copies present as well. Do we have a sense of how many Canadians see this, how widely viewed it is? Just expand upon the channels where it's available.

Mr. Charles Robert: As you wouldn't be surprised to know, it attracts more attention the moment it's released, and then there's a declining slope.

This is an online document. From the reports we've had, we've had 2,290 hits to see the English document and almost 600 to see it on the French side. We're looking at a total of about 3,400 over the course of the last—

Hon. Geoff Regan: It's not quite 36 million, but—

Hon. Mark Holland: I wasn't expecting 36 million.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade): You have that many on your Facebook, don't you?

Hon. Mark Holland: Yes. Geoff will work harder to ensure more people see it, Mr. Speaker.

I would imagine other parliaments produce similar documents.

Mr. Charles Robert: I'm not sure that everyone does, but I'm sure some do.

Hon. Mark Holland: I'm curious to see those. It's something I can do offline.

Thank you very much. It's an excellent report.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Is there anyone else?

Go ahead, Madam Chagger.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): I would build off some innovative ways of how we get it to more classes across the country, because we really do want to see more people being connected to this place. It does belong to Canadians and it is an attractive document, so I think that now that we are online, perhaps we would be able to find ways to share more broadly. Social media definitely is one way.

Another thing I would perhaps recommend for future editions is having some personal stories that could be shared with people. I had a family this week come to visit me. She was a grandparent who was bringing her grandson for his birthday trip, and they wanted to have a moment together. It was neat to see the interactions and being able to have some conversation, so I just figured we could make it more relatable so that more people would see themselves in this place and would thereby want to perhaps expose themselves to such a document.

• (1155)

Mr. Charles Robert: One thing I think we should do to help in promoting the document is make greater use of the Forum for Young Canadians and also the Teachers Institute. I think the Teachers Institute is expected to meet sometime before we rise for the winter adjournment.

This is an annual event in which up to 80 teachers come from across the country. They are energized by the exercise of red carpet treatment here for a week. They come here to learn about Parliament to make them better teachers, more informed, and I think you're quite right: using this document and other documents, which are easily absorbable, would be one way to pass the message on.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I should point out, as members probably know, that we have material specifically designed for use by teachers in classrooms. Those are available to teachers across the country. Whether they use them or not, of course, is up to them.

Some might feel this is something they want to use, but certainly having the Teachers Institute and teachers coming here helps that, because over the years we've had quite a few teachers. As they spread out across the country, they of course, one would think, talk to their colleagues about what they learned here and share it, and hopefully there is more adoption and use of these kinds of documents.

Go ahead, Mr. LeBlanc.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Congratulations, Mr. Robert. I agree with my colleagues. It is a very interesting and very well prepared report that gives people an understanding of the work done by all members of the House of Commons.

I would like to offer some words of encouragement.

As the Speaker just pointed out, the Teachers Institute and the Forum for Young Canadians are places where this report could be distributed, either in its current form or a modified version. The communications services team could give that some thought.

The schools in my riding really appreciate the material they receive to encourage young people to participate in the Page Program, and I see the Speaker agrees. This is a time of year when many MPs try informally to get school principals to encourage their best students to register for this program. In the material sent to francophone high school students in New Brunswick, perhaps attention could be drawn to this report or it could be included in some way in grade 12 classes that pertain to law or political, economic or legal institutions, in short, subjects related to the work of Parliament. There are all kinds of programs across the country that address the civic responsibility of youth. Such programs could be used to encourage young people to sign up for the Page Program, which we know is a success. That is just a suggestion.

Mr. Charles Robert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you, Mr. Leblanc.

Would anyone else like to say something?

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Holland.

Hon. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about members' activities, I'm just wondering, through you to the Clerk, about there being no discussion about the activities that occur in the riding, an extension of the House into all parts of Canada. I think I understand the reason it's not present—it's because it would be very difficult to quantify—but obviously the roots of this place extend far beyond the activities that occur in this building. I recognize it would be very difficult to quantify because you would have to have members report on activities in the riding, which would be extremely onerous, but was that omission considered, and is it for that reason that it's not present?

● (1200)

Mr. Charles Robert: I can't answer with certainty about the reasons it's not covered, but I suspect you're right in saying it's because it is difficult to quantify.

We could perhaps present a report about the variety of activities that members undertake when they're in their ridings meeting their electors, their fellow citizens. We could probably add that. It goes to the point that Madam Chagger raised about having a human interest element in the report that speaks to the nature of the work you do on behalf of your constituents when you are in your constituency.

Hon. Geoff Regan: What would you think of the idea of indicating the total number of offices members have across the country? Of course it's going to be more than 338, because there are some enormous ridings. The full-time equivalents who work in those—does that sort of stuff seem like the kind of thing that fits into this? Are you looking for the kind of thing the Clerk has talked about, information about what members do in their constituency offices?

Hon. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I think both.

Part of what occurred to me when I was reading through the document was that often people see Parliament as a distant place that is conducting its business at a great length from their individual lives, and of course the truth is that the process of making legislation, the process of how this place works, is intricately interwoven into every constituency across the country.

I think for people to understand how they interact with this place as individuals and the different ways in which members engage constituents and how they're linked into this process is an important part of the story of this place. It may help remove some of that sense of distance. I recognize that huge masses are not reading this document at this time, but that could be pretty foundational to people who are reading this and to their understanding of this place and how it works.

In my view, that component is currently missing.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chief Opposition Whip): I appreciate the interventions so far. As the Speaker alluded to earlier, I think we need an awareness of the products that are currently available through the Library of Parliament that perhaps are better designed to speak to some of the things that have been raised.

The report is designed to be more user-friendly, to be more attractive to look at, to be easy to digest, but before we get too prescriptive, I would think we would want to deal with how Canadians govern themselves. The package that members get from the library includes a PowerPoint presentation that we can take to schools and use to talk about both our work in Ottawa and in our constituencies. I think that work has largely been done, whether every member is aware of it or whether... If that work has been done and it's available, we can perhaps get a full understanding of every tool that's available. I don't think you're going to get all those tools into the annual report to Canadians. We would like to make the report as exciting as possible, but other tools are available.

Perhaps at a future meeting we could have the library to talk about that.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Undoubtedly you find all the other annual reports you read from various organizations to be very fascinating, I'm sure.

Is there anyone else?

Go ahead, Madam Chagger.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: The annual report changes every year, based on what's occurred. You've been able to highlight that the BOIE is now an open body. A lot of the documents the Speaker was referring to are documents that stay the same over a long period of time. People can relate to this document by being able to highlight other things that took place on the Hill that year, versus what won't change.

Yes, the way government and Parliament work is very similar over time, but in the annual report you're able to highlight different things. Most people don't come here every year. I think that's where we could have a connection.

• (1205)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

I just want to highlight, for the benefit of anyone watching who is not familiar with the terminology used around here, that when we say “BOIE”, we're referring to the Board of Internal Economy.

Is there anyone else on this?

Thank you very much.

In that case we'll go on to number 5 on the agenda, the Joint Interparliamentary Council and the parliamentary associations' activities and expenditures. The presenters are Bruce Stanton, MP and Deputy Speaker—our superb Deputy Speaker, by the way—and co-chair of the Joint Interparliamentary Council, and Colette Labrecque-Riel, clerk assistant and director general, international and interparliamentary affairs.

[Translation]

Mr. Deputy Speaker...

[English]

Oh, just a minute; sorry. Go ahead, Madame Brosseau.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (House Leader of the New Democratic Party): I'm sorry. We adopted the report, right?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Okay. I should clarify that.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: You should ask the question.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Yes, thank you very much.

Is it agreed to adopt the “Report to Canadians” and that I should table it?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I appreciate that. It's very helpful.

Now, we go on to the next matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have the floor.

[Translation]

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Co-Chair, Joint Interparliamentary Council): Thank you, Mr. Speaker and members of the Board of Internal Economy.

I am pleased to present to you today a report on the activities and expenditures of the interparliamentary associations for fiscal year 2017-18. As you know, this report pertains to the activities of the 13 associations.

I am joined by Ms. Colette Labrecque-Riel, principal clerk of the Joint Interparliamentary Council.

[English]

I have with me a deck, essentially just a couple of pages, that effectively highlights some of the points of our report for the last fiscal year. It is divided into three sections: the first part, which is around the structure and governance for the associations and JIC; then an overview of all of the association activities for that fiscal year; and finally the bulk of the report, which is essentially a summary on each of the 13 associations' activities.

On the next slide, it's essentially the key highlights. You may recall that this would be the first fiscal year that the interparliamentary associations had a higher budget. We had this discussion some time ago about an increase in the overall spending envelope, and that resulted in an increase in the number of travel activities, to 50 different countries, and 53 inbound delegations. We did see an uptick in the number of travel activities—pardon me; in the number of participants for each trip, if I can call them that, from about four to five, and back to somewhat of a historical average for most of these travel activities.

In the actual budgetary envelope, the parliamentary associations' total spending was around \$4.5 million. As I mentioned, that's with that extra \$1 million in total for all these activities. Of that, contributions, or membership fees, were just shy of \$1.4 million, and activity expenditures were \$2.75 million.

You'll see, as is usual, that a certain amount of the budget for activities is unspent. This happens due to planning and the time periods around which these activities are planned and agreed to. Each of the associations determines its own travel activities in that regard. Ultimately, we've seen over the years that they never really need or require the full envelope, and this year is no exception, with roughly 91% of the budget being used, leaving 9% on the table, an amount of about \$425,000 that was underspent for this past year.

That's it, essentially. It's a snapshot of what occurred in the last fiscal year. We'd be happy to take any questions.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

Are there any questions?

Go ahead, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the overview, and I do recall being seized with the issue of funding earlier this year.

I want to talk about the activities and expenditures of parliamentary associations. It's been my understanding for a number of years that these are essentially non-partisan associations in which members with interests in particular countries or particular causes get together and represent Canada on the world stage and often host people and other delegations in Canada as well.

As a result of activities that occurred this very week—your visit is timely—we find ourselves in what I would consider a very grave situation relating particularly to the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association—

•(1210)

Hon. Geoff Regan: The representatives of the Joint Interparliamentary Council are here today in relation to their report regarding activities and expenditures from April 1, 2017, to March 31, 2018—events of last year, not this year—and in relation to general activities, not particular activities.

Second, the matter you're raising is one on which I have rulings pending, so I'm not prepared to have to entertain this topic today.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Do you have any indication of when you would expect to deliver those rulings, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Geoff Regan: It will be in the fullness of time, in due course.

Mr. Mark Strahl: In the fullness of time.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Obviously I'm anxious to do so as soon as possible.

Go ahead, Ms. Bergen.

Hon. Candice Bergen (House Leader of the Official Opposition): Very respectfully, BOIE does not operate as we operate in the chamber. This is an open and public meeting. If this now becomes a place where we can't... If Bruce and Colette don't have answers, they can tell us that and I think we would accept it, but I think, Geoff, it's going to make things even worse if you now do not allow Mark to ask about this when literally it is what we're seized with and it is the elephant in the room and this is our job.

Why don't we talk about it and let the folks who are at the head of the table here give their answer? I think for you to shut it down right now is going to be very concerning on a lot of levels.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Go ahead, Mr. Holland.

Hon. Mark Holland: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think your ruling is most appropriate. The reality is that this matter is before you and is being considered. You are deliberating on it. Obviously once your ruling has been given, we can discuss the matter further.

I would say secondly that the BOIE is a body that operates on the basis of consensus, on the basis of non-partisanship. There are many

different venues through which we could have conversations on matters being discussed here that are quite partisan in nature. Therefore, I would submit that this is not the appropriate venue for this conversation.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

Mr. Stanton, is there anything you wish to add to this comment?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: I don't really want to render an opinion on the proceedings of this committee. I think certainly members will be cognizant of the points of order that were raised in the House yesterday, and that covered much of that ground. I think members are well aware that this has become a matter of some dispute, and it ultimately has been taken before the House to you, Mr. Speaker, for some kind of guidance or resolution.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I look forward to providing a ruling in the near future.

Go ahead, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Would you permit me to ask Mr. Stanton if the dispute over who is the current chair of the NATO Parliamentary Association is a matter with which the Joint Interparliamentary Council is currently seized?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Go ahead, Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: We had a meeting of the Joint Interparliamentary Council yesterday. This meeting was in camera, so I can't speak in terms of some of the activities—or, shall I say, the brief debate that took place on this matter—without going into details. I will say that there is another meeting, an urgent meeting, scheduled for next week.

•(1215)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much. I think that deals with this issue for the moment.

Are there any other matters related to the Joint Interparliamentary Council's report? Seeing none, we're going to go on to the next matter, which requires us to go back in camera.

The meeting will adjourn for a moment while we go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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