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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger





## Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Thursday, October 6, 2022

• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 32 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee is meeting today to continue our review on the House of Commons virtual hybrid proceedings, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022.

Our first panel consists of academic witnesses and will be followed by a second panel focusing on the issue of language interpretation in virtual House and committee proceedings.

Before we start, I'll remind you that all comments made by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

I welcome Dr. Kathy Brock, professor and senior fellow at the School of Policy Studies, department of political studies, Queen's University; Dr. Jonathan Malloy, professor and Bell chair in Canadian parliamentary democracy, department of political science, Carleton University; Dr. Erica Rayment, assistant professor, department of political science, University of Calgary; and Dr. Melanee Thomas, associate professor, department of political science, University of Calgary.

Opening comments will start with Dr. Brock.

Welcome to PROC.

**Professor Kathy L. Brock (Professor and Senior Fellow, School of Policy Studies and Department of Political Studies, Queen's University, As an Individual):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's wonderful to be speaking before you today. I decided to walk my talk, and that's why I'm appearing in person.

Parliament is the beating heart of democracy. You know that. It is tremendously demanding of you, but it also gives tremendously to you. While you have to be commended for how Parliament functioned during the pandemic, those measures must now come to a conclusion. I'm going to explain why that is my belief in terms of the functions Parliament performs in our democratic system.

The policy-making function consists of two roles: a support role to get the government's legislative agenda through, and an accountability role. Both were affected during the pandemic. One study of 80 parliamentary democracies has shown that consultations with the public and public engagement generally were not at their maximum, and in fact suffered greatly.

For the support function, there's importance in being there in person and building those relations across the parties and within parties, and having an in-person caucus allows for more frank feedback than being online does, particularly if people are worried about being recorded.

Accountability also suffered. When you aren't face to face—when the Prime Minister and members of cabinet are not forced to stand up and face the opposition—you lose something. When they must stand up in Parliament and speak to the opposition, they're probably going to have given policies a bit more thought, because they're going to have to justify them. There are subtle checks built into Parliament that we lose when people are not in face-to-face meetings.

The representational function of the House of Commons is very important for, first of all, electoral conversion. It is the House of Commons that converts the results of votes into government and opposition parties, and it's important to have that visual image for Canadians. That is somewhat diminished when you go into a hybrid format.

Politicians come to Ottawa to represent their constituencies and do the national business. However, by understanding constituent interests within the national interests, I believe, they learn to moderate and temper views, and to build better, more inclusive policy across the country. When you stay in your constituency, there's a tendency for what we call “policy capture” to set in, such that you may be influenced by local interests too strongly and not have that tempering effect of the national interest.

Then there are the system maintenance functions Parliament performs. The first is recruitment. By bringing people together, you recruit the people who are going to be the great public servants, whether elected or before they're elected or after they're elected. If they're in Parliament, interacting face to face, they're going to build political acuity and the skills they need to perform those functions even better.

Second, Parliament also integrates. It builds the bridges. People come from across the country and learn about other parts of the country by listening to their colleagues. That creates a certain harmony. There's a socialization function, and this replies to the arguments on diversity. Not requiring people to be in Parliament, or saying that due to particular demographic or personal characteristics, they need to be online, means that if people are not here in person, Parliament is not forced to change.

A good example of that is a member of the Ontario legislature who was hearing impaired. They realized the bells to call people to vote did not work, and that's when they installed lights. That is just one example, but there are many more I could go into, including washrooms. They changed when women came into Parliament, but we won't go into that.

Finally, there's a legitimation function. Parliament must not only work, but it must be seen to work in order for Canadians to understand what government does and why it's important. When the legislature is in operation and there's accountability, you get transparency of policies. Government is seen to work better and people believe their views are being heard.

• (1105)

In my recommendations, which I included in the brief that I know you have, I do mention that the hybrid format would be good for committees, I believe. It could be used there. I think it should be investigated, because you can get more witnesses through that approach. Otherwise, I think Parliament should be sitting in person.

I'll just stop there just to say that Parliament works when it's seen to work. That's a healthy democracy.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dr. Brock.

We will now go to opening comments and remarks from Dr. Malloy.

**Mr. Jonathan Malloy (Bell Chair in Canadian Parliamentary Democracy, Department of Political Science, Carleton University, As an Individual):** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC):** On a point of order, Madam Chair, I just want to say that it was a long time ago when I first met Mr. Jonathan Malloy.

**The Chair:** Is this a conflict of interest?

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Partly. He was my adviser in graduate school. I would be remiss if I didn't mention this, and I know this might mean something to the member. In 1996, he wrote a seminal piece in Canadian Public Administration on "Reconciling expectations and reality in House of Commons committees", and when I was thinking about his appearance here today, I thought I would raise that seminal work in committee in good faith.

**The Chair:** Can we just thank you?

We try to run a functional, professional committee meeting here, and I'm going to try to maintain that today. I thank you for bringing up something. I'm not sure why it's relevant, but maybe we'll find out later.

With that, Dr. Malloy, we go to you for opening comments. I apologize for that intervention.

**Mr. Jonathan Malloy:** We'll give him an A+ for effort there.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Jonathan Malloy. I'm a professor of political science at Carleton University, as I said, where I hold the Bell chair in Canadian parliamentary democracy. I'm also former president of the Canadian Study of Parliament Group, although I speak only for myself today.

I appreciate the chance to speak on hybrid proceedings. I will immediately begin by noting that I have not conducted any primary data gathering myself on this topic—I haven't crunched numbers or anything like that—but I have published reflections on the matter and I thought a great deal about the overall issue in the context of Parliament and its purpose.

I don't advocate either for or against hybrid proceedings. Instead, I offer a challenge: Discussions with hybrid proceedings cannot be separated from the larger context of the institution itself, and so the hybrid issue is an important test of the maturity of the Parliament of Canada, and in this case specifically the House of Commons.

My mentor, C.E.S. Franks of Queen's University, once wrote that the reform of Parliament is not merely a technical matter of making Parliament more effective and efficient, although it's often presented in both terms; reform is also questioning the purposes for which political powers should be used in Canada and how various interests and viewpoints succeed or fail to influence political choices and outcomes.

I hold similar views. The apparent lack of long-term consensus in this House of Commons about hybrid proceedings betrays a larger weakness and immaturity of the institution. Hybrid proceedings are far beyond a technical matter. They are rooted, as Franks wrote, in how various interests and viewpoints succeed or fail to influence political choices and outcomes.

Despite its age, and I speak with respect for the committee here today, the Parliament of Canada often acts as an immature institution, not able to stand up for itself and its own interests beyond partisanship, especially compared to its closest counterparts. The most vivid illustration is the repeated abuse of prorogation by Canadian governments on short notice to escape difficult political circumstances. Both the previous two governments and the current one have done so, the last despite an election promise to refrain from the practice.

In comparison, Australia and New Zealand have largely discarded the practice of prorogation entirely, and in 2019 the U.K. government tried and failed to prorogue Parliament to get out of a sticky situation, this being seen as an unacceptable violation of the institution's norms and integrity for mere partisan purposes.

We see this institutional immaturity in other ways, such as the comparative weakness of the Commons' Speaker compared to the British counterpart.

I thus unhappily view the apparent current lack of a long-term consensus on hybrid proceedings to be another illustration of the adolescent immaturity of the Canadian Parliament.

There are obvious arguments both for and against hybrid proceedings, which this committee will be well familiar with, many of them not substantially different from discussions in any workplace in 2022. I need not review them in detail. Obviously, remote participation provides certain conveniences and can facilitate better access and reduce inequities, but it also means less opportunity for informal interaction and building and maintaining institutional culture that goes beyond the screen. These are trade-offs with which we are all wrestling these days in various organizations.

More unique and distinct to Parliament is the dimension of partisanship and partisan interests as they pertain to hybrid proceedings, and this is what concerns me. The institution is approaching hybrid proceedings in the same way in which far too much of the institution is run: by short-term interests and whatever suits the side of the House one happens to be sitting on.

I do want to recognize the progress made over the last two years, and I recognize there are momentous complexities here, but regardless, the lack of a long-term consensus on a hybrid House is concerning. It does not reflect well on the institution and its maturity.

Again, I do not firmly advocate a particular solution here. What I do advocate is consensus, which requires give and take from all sides and going beyond immediate interests. I do realize parliamentarians are often given vague advice along these lines to work together better. Nevertheless, this is my advice, and I repeat my opening challenge: that the hybrid issue is an important test of the maturity of the Parliament of Canada, in this case specifically of the House of Commons. The institution needs to get this right to show Canadians that Parliament can stand up for itself as an institution.

Thank you very much.

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Malloy.

Now, we will have Dr. Thomas and Dr. Rayment sharing their opening time.

I will pass the screen over to you, Dr. Thomas, and then you can just pass straight to Dr. Rayment.

Thank you.

**Dr. Melanee Thomas (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calgary, As an Individual):** Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Dr. Melanee Thomas, and I'll be sharing my time today with Dr. Rayment. We join you from Calgary, Alberta, in Treaty 7 territory.

We focus on a key question: Does maintaining hybridity help or hinder Parliament in fulfilling its core functions of representation

and accountability? For us, hybridity can clearly help Parliament fulfill these two functions. What is crucial is its design.

If designed well, hybridity is a relatively straightforward fix for several systemic barriers in Canadian politics. It's not a panacea, but it undeniably could help. Given this, for us, the bar to reject adopting a permanent hybrid option in Parliament is very high.

We highlight two considerations—how a hybrid option helps facilitate representation and accountability, and then, results from research Dr. Rayment is working on about support among members of Parliament for hybrid proceedings.

On that first core function of representation, there's no question that continuing with a hybrid option improves Parliament's ability to operate as a representative institution. Hybridity improves this both in terms of who gets elected to Parliament and in terms of who is able to participate in parliamentary debate.

Allowing MPs the option to participate in remote proceedings when they need to has the potential to shift who considers running for and serving in public office, notably with regard to Canadians with caregiving and other constraints. Folks with parenting responsibilities and elder care responsibilities and people with illnesses or disabilities might look at the prospect of a regular commute to Ottawa and think, "Absolutely not; I can't swing that", and so they would self-select out of elected office. We know from decades of research that it is disproportionately women who are systematically selecting out.

When it comes to parliamentary debate, providing the option to participate remotely ensures that the voices of members of Parliament are heard and that their constituents can be represented even when the MP is unable to be physically present in Ottawa due to illness, caregiving responsibilities or whatever else might arise.

Hybridity will not remove all of the systemic barriers that women, indigenous people, racialized people and people with disabilities face with respect to a career in elected public office, but providing the option sends an important signal about who Parliament is designed for and who is welcome within the institution.

With regard to accountability, what we mean when we speak of it is parliamentarians' ability to learn, follow up on, scrutinize and accept or reject what the government is doing. For us, hybrid and remote proceedings could improve accountability in Parliament for reasons similar to the reasons that it improves representation: Hybridity ensures more MPs can participate in the processes Parliament uses to hold government to account.

The key question is design, not mode. While it is not a panacea, we see great potential for hybrid proceedings to be designed in a way to enhance Parliament's accountability functions.

• (1115)

**Dr. Erica Rayment (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calgary, As an Individual):** I'm going to add a few additional considerations to supplement Dr. Thomas's remarks about hybridity and core parliamentary functions.

First, I want to speak very briefly about the downstream impacts of a more inclusive Parliament, and then I'd also like to share insights from some new research about MPs' attitudes towards hybridity.

First, I just want to draw out more explicitly why it matters that hybridity can help to make Parliament more inclusive and representative, as Dr. Thomas has just highlighted.

There are lots of good reasons to care whether Parliament is diverse and inclusive, but what I want to emphasize is that diversity in terms of who serves in Parliament has an impact on the substantive issues that get addressed in politics. Research repeatedly demonstrates that who a representative is and how they experience the world shapes the issues and the positions that they will bring forward in political debate.

My own research confirms that in parliamentary debate in Canada, women MPs are dramatically more likely than men, regardless of party affiliation, to put women's issues on the political agenda and to bring women's perspectives into the parliamentary conversation. Having in place measures that make Parliament more inclusive, such as hybridity, helps to ensure that we're not missing the perspectives of the folks who might otherwise be systematically excluded from participating in Parliament.

The second thing I want to highlight is that there is actually a very high level of support among MPs for the continuation of at least some aspects of the hybrid parliamentary model. As part of a larger research project, looking at the family-friendliness of parliamentary institutions, my colleague at the University of Calgary, Susan Franceschet, and I surveyed MPs this past summer about their attitudes towards various measures that could be implemented to make it easier for parliamentarians to reconcile political and family life.

We're still in the very early stages of this project and we haven't run any kind of detailed analysis or published our results, but there are some top-line findings that I am able to share that I think are important for the conversation we're having here today.

First, there is an overwhelming support among MPs—

**The Chair:** Dr. Rayment, we're out of time, but I know we're going to get you good questions and make sure that you can share that insight. You can always submit it to the committee as well through the clerk.

**Dr. Erica Rayment:** Okay. Perfect. Thank you.

**The Chair:** We're going to do a first round of questions. We're starting with Mr. Vis, followed by Mr. Turnbull, Madame Gaudreau and then Ms. Blaney.

Go ahead, Mr. Vis.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses today. I was very much looking forward to this panel.

Upon hearing the testimony, I think I'm going to direct my first questions to either Dr. Thomas or Dr. Rayment. You talked about inclusivity of Parliament, but first let me preface that.

I am a father of two children, with a baby on the way. It is extremely challenging, being from B.C., in doing my parliamentary functions from time to time. That is what I signed up for. Some of my female colleagues who have spoken here today talked about the same challenges in our last session.

You talk about hybridity as a way to improve participation. I would actually argue that it's the opposite. Since I was elected in 2019, the government has adopted a practice that has effectively hoarded speaking times for two members, Kevin Lamoureux and Mark Gerretsen. The government doesn't actually let backbench Liberal members speak on a regular basis.

That's either because the House leader doesn't want them to speak or there is.... It's in participation during—

• (1120)

**Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** — government orders during a hybrid Parliament, and I can cite the data from the Parliament of Canada.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** I have a point of order on the basis of relevance. I don't see the relevance of this line of questioning.

Obviously Mr. Vis has lots of latitude to come to that conclusion, but I will also say that what he is saying is untrue when he says that the government doesn't allow other members to speak in the House of Commons. That's patently false.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** You didn't let me finish it, so—

**The Chair:** You will get to finish, because the floor is going to come back to you. Rest assured.

I am just going to remind us all that we have an understanding as to the work we're doing as a committee. We have chosen this study and it's important. I think we have an approach we can take, which is to define someone else or to define where we're at. Perhaps this is where Mr. Vis is going. I'm not sure, but I think we can actually have a really good conversation here and get our Parliament to the spot that it should be. I think colleagues are expecting this and I think Canadians are expecting this.

I'm going to pass the floor to you, Mr. Vis. I think you have a choice on how to use your time. I have confidence you will use it in a good way.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Mr. Turnbull and I have actually both spoken in Parliament about 72 times. Maybe I'm a bit more after last night. During government orders, I've intervened about 75 times. Mr. Turnbull, according to the Parliament of Canada, is at about 72. Mr. Lamoureux is at 780. The only person to exceed him is the Deputy Speaker, Carol Hughes.

After Mr. Lamoureux, it's Alexandra Mendès, the other Deputy Speaker, followed by Chris d'Entremont, and then Mr. Gerretsen, who has intervened, according to my numbers here, 527 times.

**Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** There is also a list of parliamentarians. There are about 20 of them—two Conservatives and about 18 Liberals, if I remember correctly—who have not intervened once during government orders.

If the purpose of a hybrid Parliament is to improve inclusivity, why are two members more or less taking up all of the speaking times during the core function of holding the government to account during government orders?

**Dr. Melanee Thomas:** I don't know if you would like us to answer at this point. I'm happy to turn it over to my colleague, Dr. Rayment, because I think we do have an answer to the question that is implied.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Yes, please. Either of you would be great. Thank you.

**Dr. Erica Rayment:** The first point is that the allocation of speaking time is a separate issue from the mode through which parliamentarians engage in parliamentary debate.

My inclination would be to put the question of how speaking time is allocated as a separate problem from hybridity. Assuming you can resolve that issue of how speaking time gets allocated, then if you have the option of hybridity on the table, which provides more opportunities for a wider range of folks to consider running for public office and then serving in public office—

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Dr. Rayment, the problem is that when people are here, they don't actually get to do their job, and it's only gotten worse under a hybrid model. As Dr. Brock outlined, the type of functionality that we have does matter. We have to be seen to work.

I just don't see, under the hybrid model, that people are able to participate in the way they want.

**Dr. Erica Rayment:** I'm wondering....

My apologies.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Please go ahead.

**Dr. Erica Rayment:** I'm wondering if you could perhaps connect the dots a little bit more clearly there. How is it that hybridity exacerbates the problems around how speaking time is allocated?

**Mr. Brad Vis:** I believe that under the hybrid system, there have been practices adopted that have limited the members' ability to participate in Parliament itself. Because they're behind a screen, they don't feel that they can stand up and speak on behalf of their constituents in the same way that they could if they were in Ottawa a little more. That is a very problematic approach to running a democracy and holding a government to account.

• (1125)

**Dr. Melanee Thomas:** Perhaps I could intervene on that one.

That's why we say that the question is a problem of design and not mode. We can come up with numerous examples about various caucus practices that do the same thing in person. This is well-es-

tablished literature on the power of leader appointments. People don't want to speak out against their party leader in caucus, for example. The norms about party discipline in Canadian politics are much, much stronger in our system than in, say, the United Kingdom or any other examples of parliament.

At the risk of being a bit blunt, what you're describing is a problem, and it's a problem with other parts of the system. I would say that this is what my colleague has described as institutional immaturity. This is a problem with design, but it is not a problem of the mode with which Parliament chooses to do its work.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you—

**Dr. Melanee Thomas:** This is why we have a very strict boundary in between. Is there a bigger issue with the institution, or is this about mode—

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you, Dr. Thomas—

**Dr. Melanee Thomas:** —and what you're talking about isn't about mode.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you, Dr. Thomas.

Dr. Brock, you mentioned in your recommendations that parties need to revisit speaker lists and restore speaker choice. Has hybrid Parliament exacerbated this problem?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dr. Vis, or Mr. Vis. I don't know why I want to call you Dr. Vis today.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Vis.

Mr. Turnbull, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today. I will certainly try to take up Dr. Malloy's challenge and try to reach consensus within these conversations. This study is extremely important.

I would like to start with Dr. Rayment and then go to Dr. Thomas.

Dr. Rayment, I want to give you the opportunity to cover those top-line findings in terms of the research you've done and the conclusions you've been able to glean from that research. I find it very interesting. Could you fill us in on those findings?

**Dr. Erica Rayment:** Sure. Absolutely. Thank you so much for the opportunity. I appreciate it.

The first top-line finding is that there is actually overwhelming support among MPs to continue to allow remote voting: 79% of respondents either somewhat or strongly agree that members on parental leave should be able to vote remotely. That was the highest for all the questions we asked about. It had the highest level of support on any of the issues. There's a high degree of support for continuing to allow remote voting.

The second relevant finding is that, unprompted, quite a few of the respondents indicated that they supported the continuation of hybrid parliamentary proceedings. In the survey, we included an open-ended question asking if there were other measures that should be considered to make Parliament more family-friendly. More than a third of the folks who provided a response in that field said that making the hybrid option permanent was an important tool that would help MPs balance work and family commitments.

The last piece I want to highlight that I think is relevant to our considerations here is that women MPs were significantly more likely than men to say that it's very difficult to be both a good parent and a good politician. Women MPs are reporting having a harder time reconciling parenthood and political life. Essentially, this provides us with additional confirmation that keeping a hybrid option will actually help make it easier for women in particular to serve in Parliament, since women who are parents, more so than men who are parents, do appear to be experiencing that barrier to participation more acutely.

Those are the very top-line findings that I think are relevant to what we're thinking about here today.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you very much for filling us in on those points. I appreciate that.

I note in a recent article that you two wrote together, which is great, you said, "we must not lose sight of the ways in which remote participation can make Parliament more democratic by making it more inclusive, equitable and accountable." I thought that was a very compelling statement. I think you've covered a lot of that in your remarks today.

I wanted to home in a little bit more on accountability. I'm constantly listening to both sides of the debates that we have on this topic. I was a member of PROC when we did the initial work during the pandemic on developing the hybrid provisions, and there was often.... Opposition parties rightfully need to be able to hold the government to account, which I totally get, and I think you two said in that article that a hybrid parliament doesn't necessarily preclude opposition parties from holding the government to account. Can you speak to that a little bit more and give us your reasons?

I'll start with Dr. Thomas.

• (1130)

**Dr. Melanee Thomas:** The thing I would repeat is that this is a question of design, not mode. At the risk of being a bit salty, if the thing that makes committee work better is allowing witnesses like us to be able to appear remotely, the same principles would hold for members of Parliament on this one, so I feel like you can't really bifurcate those two things. If it's good for witnesses to appear remotely, then I struggle to see how the same considerations wouldn't appear for other parts of parliamentary work.

Again, I keep coming back to this idea of it being a question of design and how the institutional design is built into how this work happens, and once you push on that, it's difficult to see how the mode with which that actually happens ends up being the crux.

Dr. Rayment might have other comments on that, but I'm not sure.

**Dr. Erica Rayment:** To build on what Dr. Thomas has said, I think I would only add one thing. The mode through which you're questioning a cabinet minister or investigating a piece of legislation, or whatever it might be, whether that's happening through a Zoom meeting or in person, is neither here nor there so long as there is the actual opportunity to press on those things and dig into them and so on. The more the opportunity for more folks, more parliamentarians, to do that questioning and that investigation and dig into legislation or whatever it might be, the better that scrutiny is going to be. If you can expand the scope of who's able to participate by having the hybrid option on the table, then you're increasing opportunities for accountability.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you. I think that makes a lot of sense.

You have both chosen to participate today remotely. Why did you choose to participate remotely as opposed to flying all the way to Ottawa?

**Dr. Erica Rayment:** I guess I can jump in on that one.

I am currently 39 weeks pregnant, so it would not have been an option for me to come to Ottawa. No airline would let me step onto an airplane at this present time. If I only had the opportunity to participate in person, I would not have been able to participate. I guess the family-friendliness piece is really that the rubber's hitting the road here right now.

**Dr. Melanee Thomas:** For me—

**The Chair:** Thank you. You're going to have to share that on the next answer, maybe. Sorry. Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** We're having some good exchanges here.

We're talking about accountability and being able to talk to each other in person and virtually. There's the perception that we have and the image we must project as parliamentarians.

My question is for Ms. Brock.

You proposed a solution. Witnesses testifying in committees could do so virtually, whereas we would commit to sitting in Parliament in person.

I'd like you to tell me more about that, to convince me and so I can question others who are conducting studies on the subject.

**Prof. Kathy L. Brock:** Thank you for your question.

I have to speak in English. I speak French too slowly and constantly stumble over my words. Pardon me.

[English]

**Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.):** I have a point of order. There's no interpretation.

**The Chair:** That's probably because it's not in French.



You can speak in whatever official language you would like.

**Prof. Kathy L. Brock:** I began just by apologizing, in French, that I would not be speaking in French.

The key difference between parliamentarians being in person and witnesses being online goes to two things, first of all. As some of the literature shows now with parliaments and what we've seen in some jurisdictions in Asia during the pandemic in particular but also in Europe, you can bring in witnesses from around the world much more easily, so it expands who can actually speak to parliamentarians.

The other reason goes back to a point that was raised earlier. When you have witnesses online, it's okay if we're all treated the same and we all have the same status, but when parliamentarians are online, you do tend to notice—and I've watched the House of Commons with real interest on this—that the power dynamic is enforced. You do get the ministers or the shadow ministers, and the regular parliamentarian is left off a bit. That's why one of my recommendations coming out of the pandemic was that speakers lists be revisited and that the Speaker be able to choose and recognize more people in Parliament to make it more inclusive.

I argue that this is essential because then people will actually have more opportunities to speak and perhaps parties will be more inclusive in their lists of speakers as well.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you.

Just a few minutes ago, someone said that ministers could be accountable virtually. What do you think about that?

[*English*]

**Prof. Kathy L. Brock:** Could you clarify in English the last bit?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I hope I can have an extra minute, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** You can ask your question in French because the interpretation's working.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** A minister has to be accountable and answer opposition questions. Barely two minutes ago, someone said that the hybrid or virtual model was equitable, fair and appropriate.

Do ministers have to be in person in order to be accountable, for estimates or during the period of questions and discussion, or can they also appear virtually?

**Prof. Kathy L. Brock:** Thank you.

When ministers respond

[*English*]

online, the minister's going to be more likely to read notes, to resort to paper, and perhaps not to consider people's reactions or the body language that you get. There can often be an inhibiting of an exchange between parliamentarians. Often when a minister or the governing party sees the opposition react strongly to something,

then they can take that to caucus and discuss it there. Then you can get some amendments to policies, to ideas, that are very fruitful.

We have seen that happen in the past, I think.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** We talked about human access. Ms. Rayment and Ms. Thomas, could you send the committee your findings once your research is complete? That would be very useful to us.

My question is for both of you.

In the hybrid model, how could we have the kind of impromptu and informal discussions we have during meals taken together, for example? We've seen in this committee that we can reach a consensus when we attend in person.

**Dr. Melanee Thomas:** Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

I think it would be important to separate the ideas of some members of Parliament being permanently on hybrid versus having the option to use it when you need it.

What we're envisioning is that having the option on the table gives members of Parliament the flexibility to figure out how best for them to manage their representational work between the work in the House of Commons and within their constituency, depending on the circumstances as they arise. We don't anticipate that this means that some members will always be in the constituency and never appear inside the legislature itself. Those informal functions could still continue. What we're adding is just another tool for MPs to be able to do that work.

The other thing that worries me a little bit about prioritizing this informal stuff that's off the books is that I still want to keep pushing that there still needs to be accountability to the Canadian public about how this work is being done. If the reason to take hybrid off completely as an option is in service of all of this informal stuff that is rarely documented and isn't going to appear in Hansard and things along those lines, I think that raises a different accountability issue back to the Canadian public, because it's work that we simply don't see.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Absolutely.

I have one final question for you. You just mentioned that it's possible to hold meetings in a hybrid format, but not all the time. What parameters would be used to determine that? Would there be any rules governing virtual participation in meetings without having to explain why we can't be there or violating our privacy?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Answer quickly, please.

**Dr. Melanee Thomas:** Yes, this gets into the question of design, for sure.

One thing that Dr. Rayment and I have spoken about that makes us very nervous is the idea that it would be up to, say, a caucus whip to control access to being able to use hybridity. It feels like a sword of Damocles over a member of Parliament, so my preference would be that the rules or the process that would allow a member of Parliament to use that tool kit would be at their own discretion or operating on their best judgment, outside of how the.... We just don't want to further empower the whips, basically. That's what this comes to.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dr. Thomas.

It's quite fitting, because we are moving on to Ms. Blaney, the whip for the NDP.

Six minutes go to you.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** Thank you so much, Chair, and I will do my best to go through you as we are meant to do.

Yes, I am the NDP whip. I have quite a collection and enjoy power, obviously. I do find it really frustrating how people perceive whips. I'd love to talk with you any time about what the job really looks like.

One of the things that I note living and working in this place is that there is a by-the-party perspective and assumption of rightness, and there is not always a consideration of curiosity.

I would really love to have a meaningful discussion here about what works in terms of virtual parliament. I really appreciate what you said about the design, because there are key things that would make the whole of Parliament better, and this is one way that we could make it accessible for some people.

Earlier this week we heard testimony from MPs and former MPs who talked about the challenges they faced and how much having a format like this would have allowed them to take that time and moment in their lives to address that issue.

I think it's important that as we talk about this, we talk not only about the humanity of MPs but also about the humanity of our communities. There have been a few times when I've been here and I've really wanted to be at home because there was a crisis in one of my communities. If I had been able to stand with those people, it would have made them feel comfort from a role that is so important to them, so I really hope that we get to a place where we could have consensus, where we talk about what works and what systems might allow us to move forward.

I will come to Dr. Thomas and Dr. Rayment. I'll leave it to the two of you to decide. One of the things that you talked about is having the ability to use the hybrid model if you needed it for one reason or another. As the whip, I can tell you that I often know things about my caucus' personal life that I wouldn't share broadly, not because of any dastardly sort of power grab but because I really respect them as human beings. I want you to know that I perceive the whip's role as facilitating humanity in a job that often forgets it.

In terms of design, how do you see our being able to have hybridity as an option? How would members use that option, and how would they be accountable to their caucus and to Parliament that it is being used in a useful way?

• (1145)

**Dr. Erica Rayment:** I'll start and then hand it over to Dr. Thomas to elaborate.

I think certainly you would want to see at a level that applies across the board the parameters and conditions under which it is an option to decide that this week, or whenever it is, you're going to participate remotely from your constituency. Clearly you're not going to do that without notifying your caucus. I think notifying the whip is better than having the whip say that you've already used hybrid a whole bunch this session, or whatever it might be, and that it's not going to be allowed.

I think the concern is more that it could become one more tool in the potential tool kit for enforcing discipline in a system and context where party discipline is already quite strong. We wouldn't necessarily want to see that increased. I think the idea would be more from a logistical and practical perspective. Of course, you would need to notify your caucus and whip so that they know who's in person and who's remote, but they wouldn't necessarily have it on a basis of providing permission to do it.

Dr. Thomas, did you want to add to that?

**Dr. Melanee Thomas:** Yes.

This reflects concerns that we see in other options that are used in Westminster in London, such as pairing, where one member who can't be present would be paired with somebody else so that you would keep the partisan balance the same on a vote.

I wrote about the problem we have with that with my colleague Dr. Amanda Bittner at Memorial. We wrote something about this in the Canadian Parliamentary Review. It's specifically with respect to the parental leave policy that's now in place for the Canadian House of Commons and about how these options feel like they're less appropriate. What it means is it's taking that representational voice for at least one member of Parliament, or several, out of the mix.

If you had a remote voting option and a member was in the constituency because they were receiving treatment for a medical condition or had just had a labour and delivery, or a disaster had happened in the community—as you had mentioned—or there was something very compelling to keep them there, either personal, representational or otherwise, then they would still have the option to be able to come in and do some part of the House duties that are also part of their job.

The other thing that comes to my mind about this is how the options for being absent from the legislature are so slow to be updated in Canada, precisely because people who are pregnant.... You can tell that they've just never had to deal with somebody who's had to leave because of a labour and delivery. They're not sick.

I know that in Alberta, the Alberta legislature didn't address this issue. There's a 10-day permitted absence unless there's an illness. They had to change it to include pregnancy, because the existing measure wasn't appropriate. It strikes me as a holistic way to think about what's going on in people's lives.

Also, it's a good opportunity to think about what's going on with constituency representation and how that can be better balanced to accommodate work in the House as well.

The thing that would be disheartening for us would be if it would devolve into some of the existing patterns that we think create some of the things that we identify in the literature as dysfunction in terms of how the institution works.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Blaney. Thank you, Dr. Thomas.

Mr. Calkins, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question is for Professor Brock.

Generally speaking, I found your opening remarks to be quite well thought out and to reflect a really mature knowledge of how Parliament actually works.

I'm going to premise my question by saying that every one of us here is a representative. I represent every single person in my constituency—128,000 people—men, women, people of different colours and people of different ethnic origins. There is every bit as much diversity in my constituency as there would be in most of the other ridings in this country.

I actually don't subscribe to the point of view that I don't understand an issue because I'm not from a particular culture or have a particular upbringing, or whatever the case might be. On any given day, I might be discussing the regulations and rules pertaining to how an aircraft lands just as much as I might be talking about how to make the quality of life better for my constituents. I think everybody who gets elected is more than capable of being able to represent everybody in their constituency and all of their needs, and we somewhat become subject matter experts on all of these issues.

My concern is that if we're not present... If you don't go to class, for example, it's hard to learn. As a former teacher at a college myself—that was the job I had before I came here—I taught some classes virtually, such as computer programming, and I taught some in person. I can tell you that the people who were in classes I taught in person left with a much greater understanding than the people I taught virtually.

Given that—and I don't subscribe to the notion that we have to be a diverse group in the House to have diverse opinions in representing the people we represent, because I think people are regardless able to do that—I have a question on the quality of our democracy. I heard Ms. Thomas say that if somebody is engaged in a debate or a speech in the House of Commons, it somehow changes the ebb and flow of how a policy or piece of legislation is actually changed. My experience in 17 years of being here as a member of Parliament is that it's the conversations you have outside the room, in the hallway and after the committee is done. When we suspend our committees for five minutes—which chairs will often do—and

then come back, all of a sudden the committee is now getting along fine because the people who were in the room were able to have a conversation and sort these things out.

I'm worried about the effectiveness and the quality of the decisions that are made. This is supposed to be a place where people get together and the good ideas bubble to the top to the benefit of all. My concern is that if we're not here—or at least not enough of us are here on an ongoing basis—we're not going to get the best decisions.

• (1150)

**Prof. Kathy L. Brock:** Thank you very much for that. I agree.

I'm going to answer this in a couple of ways. I really respect my colleagues' work. I think they make some excellent points. I do think it's not a question of mode; this is a question of how Parliament functions and what people learn from each other. In my brief, I have a short anecdote, which I'm going to share with you.

My students, two weeks ago, divided into groups. Instead of pre-assigning them, I let them self-select. These are graduate students. When I walked around to all the groups, I noticed that they had self-selected into binary-option sex groups and also by race, so male and female, apparently.

As I walked around, I asked them what happened. They said, "Well, I'm more comfortable here." Then, one of the students, a student from the Middle Eastern community in Toronto, said to me, "Prof, you have to remember that we're the first generation to be entirely online as undergrads. We're still operating the way we did in high school. We aren't crossing the divisions the way you're forced to do in university when you work together in a more professional way."

With Parliament, I think that if you continue to go online, that does break down that integrative function that Parliament has. I have a lot of respect for all of you here because you have tough lives. I understand that, but I think that Parliament, in all its richness and its wisdom, has found ways to accommodate people, ways to adjust.

I mentioned the washrooms because in the 1990s, the big studies on women in politics indicated that the women's washrooms were always in the corner of the building. Now they've moved them to be more central. That's because women were there in person.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dr. Brock. Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

Ms. Sahota, five minutes go to you, and then we'll switch to the next panel.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I've really enjoyed all of the exchanges. I agree with a lot of things that have been said. I also question some of the things that have been said. At some points, it seems we may be talking about a virtual Parliament versus an in-person Parliament. I think we all agree that in-person activity has its benefits. The side-room talks have their benefits.

We are all here. We are functioning in a hybrid Parliament today. All of the committee members are here in person, sitting at this table, with the exception of a couple of witnesses, who wouldn't have been able to testify today had they not had this hybrid option.

I want to talk a little bit about the diversity that we were talking about. Yes, it's good to make sure we have that diversity in the room. I believe Professor Brock talked about some modernization we did with women's bathrooms and lights flashing. All of those things happened so long ago. There's modernization that we talked about around electronic voting. The technology is all there and available at our desks at the House of Commons, but we haven't been able to come to consensus on some of those issues.

Is it important now to take it a step further, now that the pandemic has shown us what is possible and how much more inclusive this place can be? Should we be looking at those things? Should we be adopting practices from what we have learned in the pandemic and how we have improved our technology, or should we be happy with the flashing lights and the fact that we have women's bathrooms today?

My question goes to Professor Thomas to start.

• (1155)

**Dr. Melanee Thomas:** I think if we are serious about representing the Canadian public, it's worth paying close attention to the empirical evidence from decades of research that shows how who is in the room matters.

While I believe that every representative will do a good and sincere job of representing all their constituents in all of their diversity, there still is the reality that as individuals, we have different lived experiences. That gives us a different lens on the world. That shapes how we think about questions of evidence and questions of priorities. It is something that has profoundly shaped how we all see the world, and that is actually relevant to policy and how the work is done.

I would like to turn it to Dr. Rayment, because this is a subject of some deep systematic work that she's done with how speech has worked inside decades of the Canadian Parliament. I think that this evidence is really important to bring to bear here.

**Dr. Erica Rayment:** Sure.

My dissertation research—soon to be a book, hopefully—looks at these patterns of speech and how different parliamentarians speak differently about different issues.

The evidence really does show, at least when it comes to women—I haven't had the opportunity to look at representation of other groups—that women parliamentarians, regardless of party affiliation, are more likely to speak about women and raise issues that relate to women. Having in place measures that make it possible for women to participate in Parliament, and likely for other under-rep-

resented groups to participate in Parliament, brings in new perspectives.

On the question about whether we should think about having a hybrid option or the option to participate virtually, think about whether this can be used on a continued basis moving forward, now that we have been forced to think about how we do this in the context of the pandemic. Is this something we can leverage to improve how Parliament functions?

I think we can think about hybridity as the next stage in the evolution of things like having the lights flashing and the bells ringing when it's time to vote. It's the next thing of making Parliament more inclusive in the same way as we can think about having women's washrooms. This is another step that we can have. It's not necessarily in the physical space of Parliament Hill, but it's another tool that can be used to ensure that Parliament is more inclusive and diverse.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** I want to squeeze in one more quick thought.

At the very beginning days before having a hybrid Parliament or virtual Parliament, when ministers were not here, they were not here. When they were travelling—in my first few terms here, many ministers often had work to do outside of the House and outside of Parliament—they just physically weren't present and they weren't virtually present either. They were not answering questions in the House of Commons.

Do you have any thoughts on that?

**The Chair:** You'll have to save that for later. I'm sorry, but your time is up and we are going to be switching panels.

I want to thank everyone for their time today. It's been a great conversation, so I thank you all for bringing the perspectives you have. I want you to know that PROC committee members appreciate your time. Should you wish to add anything, please send it in writing to the clerk.

With that, keep well and safe.

Dr. Rayment, we look forward to an update.

I hope everyone keeps well and safe. Take care.

• (1155)

(Pause)

• (1205)

**The Chair:** I'd like to welcome today's second panel for our review of the House of Commons virtual hybrid proceedings provisions, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022.

Our second panel includes, from the Canadian Association of Professional Employees, André Picotte, acting president, and Paule Antonelli, acting president of Local 900 and the interpreters' representative for the Local 900 council.

From the International Association of Conference Interpreters, we have Linda Ballantyne, president, and Jim Thompson, communication and parliamentary advisor.

From Public Services and Procurement Canada's translation bureau, we have Matthew Ball, acting chief executive officer, and Caroline Corneau, acting vice-president, services to Parliament and interpretation sector.

I'll ask everyone to make sure their earpieces are in, if they have a preferred language. If they have any issues, let us know and we'll assist. This is a new comment we'll be adding, moving forward.

We'll now hear opening comments, starting with André Picotte.

Welcome.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Picotte (Acting President, Canadian Association of Professional Employees):** Madam Chair, members of the committee, good afternoon.

Thank you for this opportunity to express our views on this very important matter.

My name is André Picotte, and I am acting vice-president of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees, or CAPE. I am normally the vice-president for CAPE's TR group. I'm accompanied by Paule Antonelli, Local 900 acting president and interpreters' representative on CAPE Local 900 Council.

CAPE is the third largest union in the federal public sector. It represents more than 23,000 economists and policy analysts, statisticians, Library of Parliament researchers, analysts at the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer and some 80 professional interpreters in the federal public sector.

I'd like to say an enthusiastic hello to the interpreters providing interpretation service today. I'd also like to thank them and their colleagues for their outstanding work.

Since Parliament switched to hybrid meetings in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interpreters' work has been dogged by technical issues and the failure of certain participants to comply with technical standards. Since 2020, hearing issues have forced 33 of 70 official language interpreters to take some 349 sick leave days. Every month, approximately 10 interpreters are reassigned to other duties on the advice of their physicians.

CAPE worked with the Translation Bureau and members of all the parties and appeared before several parliamentary committees. As no viable solution to the interpreters' health and safety issues was proposed, CAPE ultimately filed a complaint with the labour program of Employment and Social Development Canada on February 1, 2022.

Labour program representatives concluded that the Translation Bureau had failed in its duty to protect the health and safety of its employees, having regard to the new technological risks that had

been clearly identified in the report on audio quality on Parliament Hill that the National Research Council Canada, the NRC, submitted to Parliament in October 2021.

Parliament's audiovisual services team, which strives to improve the quality of the sound transmitted to interpreters, addressed the problems associated with the incompatibilities between the system in place and the Zoom platform. Even though interpreters now have access to the full range of frequencies required under ISO standards—that fact remains to be confirmed by tests conducted by NRC, which were postponed until the Thanksgiving break—no improvement in sound quality has been observed since NRC conducted the tests in May 2021. Stéphan Aubé, chief information officer of the Digital Services and Real Property unit of the House of Commons, freely admitted that the sound obtained during remote sessions never met ISO standards.

Furthermore, the Transition Bureau has yet to apply the 2022 government conference interpretation guidelines providing that interpreters should never provide interpretation service where basic technical requirements are not met.

In conclusion, Madam Chair and members of the committee, I would repeat that interpreters are your principal allies in faithfully relaying, in the other official language, the message, with all its subtleties, that you wish to transmit to your electors and other Canadians. In-person meetings are less trying for them because the sound is better, and problems occur when a single member of Parliament or witness participates in the meeting remotely.

However, as committee meetings and hybrid sessions are likely to continue, it is imperative that health impacts on our professional member employees and their ability to continue working in their field be limited.

What must be done for people to continue participating?

The quality of sound transmitted by the audiovisual system must be improved and care must be taken to ensure that people participating remotely meet basic technical requirements.

• (1210)

Once again, I would like to thank the interpreters for doing their best in incredibly difficult conditions since the start of the pandemic.

Thank you for your time and attention. We will be pleased to answer your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your comments.

I now give the floor to Ms. Ballantyne.

**Mrs. Linda Ballantyne (President, International Association of Conference Interpreters - Canada Region):** We thank you for inviting the International Association of Conference Interpreters Canada, or AIIC Canada, to present our thoughts on hybrid proceedings.

Good afternoon, everyone.

I want to thank my colleagues, the interpreters.

We belong to a global organization that operates wherever conference interpretation is provided.

[English]

AIIC Canada understands that new technologies are here to stay and is interested in working with the translation bureau—the TB, as we call it—to ensure that it remains a centre of linguistic excellence, offering the best working conditions to its suppliers so as to provide the highest-quality services while safeguarding interpreters' health and well-being over the course of their careers.

At the beginning of the pandemic, to its credit, the TB took steps to ensure quality and interpreter safety by reducing the number of hours of work in virtual settings. It's widely understood that in-person settings, where interpreters are in the same room as active speakers, offer the best conditions for quality interpretation. It's also widely understood that interpreting remote participants over the Internet increases cognitive load and has caused auditory disorders and injuries amongst interpreters the world over.

Despite what you heard from the House of Commons administration on Tuesday, the National Research Council's testing has proven that the House of Commons AV system distorts Zoom, so the sound delivered from remote participants to interpreters becomes both unintelligible and a serious health hazard. This is a key point.

The House administration testified to your committee on Tuesday this week that the House of Commons audio system meets ISO standards. Omitted from their testimony is that this is true only for in-person sound. Audio from remote participants continues to be dangerous and frequently unintelligible, placing quality interpretation and the health and safety of interpreters at risk.

Interpreting remote interventions is what has generated many problems. The science is not sufficiently advanced to have definite answers to the causes, but empirically, given the number of injuries we've witnessed since virtual Parliament in Canada, we know that there is a serious problem.

AIIC Canada believes the special conditions of work instituted for virtual settings need to remain unchanged for hybrid meetings. Canada would be following the lead of the pan-European human rights organization and the Council of Europe, which have decided on conditions applicable to hybrid meetings.

For instance, should the total number of remote interventions amount to less than 25 minutes over the course of an interpreter's entire working day, the meeting will be classified as in-person.

Should the total number of remote interventions last between 25 and 50 minutes, the meeting will be classified as hybrid, with no changes in working hours but with extra financial compensation. I would like to discuss financial compensation, if you're interested, during question period.

Should the total number of remote interventions exceed 50 minutes over the course of an entire day, the meeting will be classified as full remote, with increased team strength or shorter working hours, plus financial compensation.

In Canada, the TB intends to go in the opposite direction. It's already offering assignments under prepandemic hours of work for virtual hybrid meetings. They are not waiting for verification of the House audio system, saying it's fine for in-person meetings. This misses the point entirely anyway. The TB is requiring that a majority of participants need to be remote before special conditions kick in to protect quality and interpreter health. This is what makes no sense. What matters is this: Who is doing the most talking? Is it those in the room or those connecting remotely? A hybrid policy to protect quality and our safety should be based on this consideration.

We know that most airtime of committee meetings is occupied by witnesses, many of whom will continue to connect remotely to save money, time and the planet—and because some are pregnant, as we heard earlier today. Your colleagues on LANG, in a unanimous motion to the House, have expressed concern about interpreters' auditory health. If hybrid meetings are to be a fixture of the House in the future, we urge you to weigh in too in order to protect quality and our health.

• (1215)

[Translation]

Let me be clear, AIIC Canada does not oppose new technologies that enable a hybrid Parliament and allow members of Parliament and other stakeholders to participate remotely. It goes without saying that it's up to you to decide how the House wishes to conduct its proceedings.

We ask that you provide conditions that are conducive to the high-quality services that all parliamentarians and Canadians are entitled to receive while protecting the health and welfare of interpreters.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Ballantyne.

[English]

Mr. Ball, you have the floor.

**Mr. Matthew Ball (Acting Chief Executive Officer, Public Services and Procurement Canada, Translation Bureau):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

My name is Matthew Ball. I'm the acting CEO of the translation bureau. We're part of Public Services and Procurement Canada.

With me today is Caroline Corneau, who's the acting vice-president of service to Parliament and interpretation.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered today on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

Honourable members of the committee, thank you for inviting us to participate in this panel alongside Monsieur Picotte and Madam Antonelli from the Canadian Association of Professional Employees and Ms. Ballantyne and Mr. Thompson from the International Association of Conference Interpreters. These long-standing partners of the bureau are valuable allies in our efforts to ensure quality interpretation services for our clients and optimal working conditions for our interpreters.

As a centre of excellence in linguistic services, the translation bureau is proud to provide interpretation for the House of Commons. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak about the interpretation of virtual sessions in the context of your study on hybrid proceedings. Please note, however, that the translation bureau is not responsible for the technical environment in which the interpreters work.

[Translation]

Since the start of the pandemic, our interpreters, like other professionals, have provided services essential to the proper operation of democracy. Allow me to take this opportunity to thank our employees, freelancers and our partners here present for their dedication.

Since the health and safety of interpreters are the Translation Bureau's priority, we have taken measures to protect our interpreters from the consequences of virtual meetings with the help of the House Administration and our other partners. For example, speaking during a virtual meeting without using an appropriate microphone increases the risk of sound issues, which can force our interpreters to interrupt their services. The House Administration therefore provides headsets equipped with a unidirectional microphone for all members and witnesses.

And I thank you, honourable members, for using those headsets, which vastly reduce the risks, the number of health and safety incidents and service interruptions.

[English]

With regard to capacity, there is a shortage of interpreters, not just in Canada but around the world. To wit, the translation bureau, the largest employer of interpreters in Canada, has only some 70 staff interpreters in official languages. We're fortunate to be able to benefit from a pool of freelance interpreters available to help, but even the private sector capacity is limited. We have approximately 60 freelance interpreters in official languages serving parliamentarians, and their availability varies depending on the demands of their personal lives and their other clients. This means we have to be very agile in matching our supply with the demand. We are aware of the challenges this causes you as our clients, and rest assured that we are making every effort to increase our capacity.

Among other things, we continue to hire every new graduate in official languages from the only two master of conference interpreting programs in Canada. One is taught at the University of Ottawa here and the other one is at Glendon College at York University. We are also about to hold our annual accreditation exam in official languages in November. We anticipate that this will allow us to add several new interpreters to our pool of qualified suppliers.

• (1220)

[Translation]

Furthermore, this past summer, we took part in the pilot project conducted by the House Administration to determine whether interpretation services could be provided by interpreters located outside the Parliamentary Precinct, which could also expand our interpretation pool.

Honourable members of the committee, the Translation Bureau spares no effort to provide you with excellent service while protecting its interpreters. While in-person meetings afford better interpretation conditions, we know that virtual and hybrid meetings will remain a reality. Which is why, with the help of our partners in Canada and abroad, we will continue gathering reliable data, seeking innovative solutions and developing new interpreters so we can meet the needs of the House should it decide to continue with virtual and hybrid meetings.

I will be pleased to answer your questions.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for those comments.

I think I can speak for all members and reassure you, I hope, that this conversation is one we'll be learning a lot from and that we want to ensure that our interpreters succeed. You are definitely essential to the work we do, since we are a country with two official languages, so we do thank you for giving us the time and for the important work you do.

We will start with six-minute rounds, starting with Mr. Calkins, who will be followed by Mr. Turnbull, Madam Gaudreau and Ms. Blaney.

Go ahead, Mr. Calkins.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will echo the wise words she said. I am a unilingual member of Parliament and I rely completely on the interpretive services that are provided here. In the 17-some years I've been here, I want to thank you very much for enabling me to do my job to represent my constituents.

I'm going to start with the translation bureau.

Mr. Ball, I want to talk a little bit about the notion of witnesses appearing at committee prior to Zoom being used. Prior to Zoom, we had video and teleconferencing capabilities for witnesses to appear. Was that system better for the health and well-being of our interpreters than Zoom is?

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** May I answer the question?

We were doing remote interpreting services prior to that. I wouldn't say it was better. I hesitate to describe or speak with any authority on sound quality issues, but anecdotally we had problems prior to the pandemic and prior to the adoption of Zoom. We had service interruptions when interpreters were providing services for witnesses remotely.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Has the bureau been approached by Parliament or the government to circumvent the bureau being the only provider of translation services here, and has it ever been suggested that interpreters could be remote, as well as witnesses?

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** If I may answer the question, the bureau's mandate is to serve parliamentarians as they see fit. We're not privy to conversations in camera and, as I said, we do our best to work in collaboration with the House administration.

Our first priority is the health and safety of interpreters and our second priority is providing parliamentarians the services they expect and deserve. The bureau has had conversations, but there's been no specific requests that I could speak to.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Has the advent of hybrid or virtual Parliament hastened the departure of members of your bureau for health and safety reasons or because of the workload or the potential for harm? Are you recruiting as fast as you are losing?

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** If I may, Madam Chair, if I understand the question correctly.... Sorry; could I get the question repeated? I'm not sure I understood the nuance.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Has the workload as a result of a hybrid Parliament hastened the departure of people who might have been close to retirement—or anybody, for that matter, from the service?

There will be a normal ebb and flow. There will be normal succession planning. You would have demographics in your organization for when people were expected to retire. I'm asking if things have changed outside the expected realm of when people would be moving on or leaving the bureau or were not willing to work for the bureau anymore as a result of using Zoom or hybrid Parliament.

• (1225)

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** It's a difficult question for me to answer, Madam Chair. Yes, people take retirements, as they have. I would be speculating as to the cause of how much or how often our freelance interpreters are working for us.

I could maybe speak anecdotally. Working in the pandemic was a challenge for interpreters, as it was for many professionals across the country and around the world. We asked interpreters.... As an essential service they had to come onto Parliament Hill. They had to leave their homes and their families. They had to come and work in a booth that's four feet by four feet with three people together during the middle of an airborne pandemic, so it was a challenge.

We worked really hand in hand with the House administration, which eventually provided individual booths, which was a great relief to our staff and to our freelancers. We had very close collaboration with the association, with the union and AIIC as well. We communicated constantly with them to ensure that everyone felt safe, that they could do their jobs and could support parliamentarians.

I don't want to avoid the answer, but there's been a shift. We have 20 fewer suppliers on our open contract since last year. I can't tell you the reasons, but it is a reality.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** For the second part of my question, I would like Ms. Ballantyne to weigh in as well. Is your recruitment replacing what you're losing?

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** We are working on multiple fronts to increase our capacity. We support teaching at the University of Ottawa and at Glendon College. We are doing accreditation exams annually. Last year we ran an exam and had about 10 new interpreters. We've hired 10 new interpreters this year, recent graduates, so we're constantly working to improve the pool of qualified interpreters.

This is nothing new for the bureau, because interpretation has always been a shortage group, even before the pandemic. I think the pandemic has been tough for getting people, as it has been for other professions, but we're working constantly on many fronts.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Ms. Ballantyne, would you comment?

**Mrs. Linda Ballantyne:** We would agree with what Matthew Ball has stated. There's a lot of attention paid right now to trying to increase capacity.

AIIC Canada conducted a survey in July and August and we have identified that indeed there have been people leaving the profession because of difficult conditions. We believe it's been very difficult. Even if all stakeholders are working to help increase capacity, there are big challenges. We only have two master's programs in Canada. We believe that in a bilingual country such as ours, there needs to be a much bigger investment to be able to train interpreters.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fergus, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd also like to thank all the witnesses here today, and particularly our interpreters.

As the chair indicated at the beginning of the meeting, their work is essential to ours. Our work is crucial to Canada's democracy. That's why the interpreters' work is so important, and I'm very sympathetic towards them given the conditions under which they are working.

Mr. Picotte, I may have misheard your testimony. Did you really say that the best solution would be to hold in-person meetings only?

Have I understood you correctly?

**Mr. André Picotte:** Basically, what I said was that ideally, all meetings should be held in person. Of course we know that hybrid meetings are here for keeps. We're going to have to adapt, but Parliament is also going to have to adapt to the needs of our interpreters and respect their health and safety rights.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I agree with you. Thank you.

Prior to the pandemic, or at least before we adopted the hybrid option, witnesses occasionally participated in meetings by telephone.



Is there a difference in sound quality between a telephone call and the Zoom application we are currently using?

• (1230)

**Ms. Paule Antonelli (Local 900 Acting President, Interpreters' Representative on Local 900 Council (TR), Canadian Association of Professional Employees):** Madam Chair, I'd like to thank the member for his question.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Ms. Antonelli, thank you for reminding me that I should have addressed my question to the chair.

My apologies, Madam Chair.

**Ms. Paule Antonelli:** The sound that comes in through the telephone is about as bad as it gets for interpreters.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** So you're saying that the sound through the Zoom application is better.

**Ms. Paule Antonelli:** Yes, generally speaking, the sound through Zoom is better.

[*English*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Mr. Ball, could you help us out on this question?

There have been a number of steps the translation bureau has taken, I think, to try to improve the quality of the sound and the conditions in which the interpreters work. This was brought to us in the testimony that we had earlier this week. I know you spoke to it in your presentation. Could you give us a bit more of an understanding?

Also, could you scope ahead to the work you think still remains to be done to provide a safe and secure environment for our interpreters?

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** Madam Chair, we've done a lot. In the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, we were really scurrying; I will admit it. Over the last two years, we've launched quite a few initiatives. I can speak to them briefly.

We've developed and implemented an interpreter hearing protection program. This involves training, research and testing in three areas: acoustics or sound, interpreting function and audiology. We shortened the assignment length—we did that immediately in the aftermath—from six hours at the microphone to four hours.

We've developed and implemented some technical requirements for our Government of Canada clients. These are now requirements. In order to be interpreted, speakers must use a directional external microphone. We've required sound tests before meetings to improve sound quality and to minimize disruptions.

We've sponsored ongoing research with external partners such as the National Research Council, here in the House of Commons facilities, and with the University of Geneva as well, to improve the working environment for our staff. I could say that we've had very close collaboration, not just with the House administration but with AIC and the association as well.

**Mr. Jim Thompson (Communication and Parliamentary Advisor, International Association of Conference Interpreters - Canada Region):** If I may, Madam Chair, it's important to remember that freelance interpreters contribute to 45% of all the assign-

ments that are done on the Hill, almost half, but do not have access to the programs and whatnot that Mr. Ball just talked about and are not able to file health and safety incident reports, because freelancers are just that—they're not employees.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. Thompson. If you'll forgive me, I am going to have to think about what you just said. I was on a—

**Mr. Jim Thompson:** I'm sorry. I interrupted.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** That's just fine, and I'm glad you did.

**The Chair:** You have one minute left.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I have one minute, Mr. Ball.

Very quickly, we heard testimony that the testing is not adequate. Was the testing you did in the summer, or the latest round of testing, done using the unidirectional microphones that are now standard for members of Parliament and witnesses for House affairs? Is it done with the latest set of headsets that we have, the latest microphones?

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** We have asked the National Research Council to test the models of the directional microphones that the House of Commons is using. That is correct.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** We will have the results of that at some point...?

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** Yes. There was a series of first tests. We're conducting more tests in October and we hope to get results shortly thereafter.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for giving us a better understanding of the conditions under which the interpreters are working and the issue facing us.

I'd like to thank the interpreters too.

I have several questions. I'd like to read them to make sure that I don't forget any.

Mr. Ball, you may have heard that on Tuesday, I asked some questions. I'd like to know how many interpreters are needed to deal with all the weekly committee meetings. There are usually 57 meetings a week.

That's very specific and all my questions will be specific.

• (1235)

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** Madam Chair, if I may, I'd like to ask Ms. Caroline Corneau, the Acting Vice-President, to answer that question.

I don't think it's going to be very easy to answer it. As the member just mentioned, there are 57 meetings a week, but it varies enormously. Of course it also depends on the length of the meeting.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** If you haven't gone through that exercise, perhaps you could send us the information later. It's definitely going to be an important factor.

Do you have the answer, Ms. Corneau?

**Ms. Caroline Corneau (Acting Vice-President, Service to Parliament and Interpretation, Translation Bureau):** I can't in fact give you accurate numbers at the moment. However, I can say that we work with House of Commons administration to establish the schedule for 57 events. We currently have the capacity required to provide service for the 57 events you mentioned.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Madam Chair, we're going to wait for the information about how many interpreters are needed to handle the weekly meetings.

I will leave you the time to go through the exercise on the basis of a typical week. That's what we want to know.

Before the pandemic, how many interpreters were needed to handle interpretation during the weekly meetings?

Perhaps you could give me answer a little later. What we want to know is what the numbers were prior to the pandemic and what the numbers are now.

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** I'm going to ask Ms. Corneau to answer that.

**Ms. Caroline Corneau:** Madam Chair, what I can say is that conditions before the pandemic were completely different from what we have now. It's extremely difficult for me to give an accurate figure. That's because it depends on all kinds of factors.

I don't have the number at hand, but I can tell you that it's an extremely difficult exercise to go through.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Madam Chair, insofar as we would like to have a proper understanding of the repercussions on the professionals who help us do our work in both official languages, I think that it would be worthwhile to have an overview of both sets of circumstances, accompanied by numbers.

Earlier, we discussed incidents and accidents, but I didn't see any actual figures. Particularly given what we have lived through over the past two years, what are the numbers with respect to incidents since the pandemic?

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** I'll ask Ms. Corneau to provide some information about that.

**The Chair:** Ms. Corneau, you can go ahead and answer that question.

**Ms. Caroline Corneau:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Up to September 2022, we had received approximately 90 incident reports.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you.

My understanding is that it also makes it possible to work on prevention.

There were 90 incident reports. Is that number high compared to the number of incidents that used to occur prior to the pandemic? Is this a surprising number?

**Ms. Caroline Corneau:** In fact, the incidents we are talking about at the moment were related to the quality of the sound, which relies on the virtual component we are familiar with.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Okay. We heard some talk about this problem earlier.

So the hybrid format, even though some preventive action is possible, led to some accidents. We're talking about the risk of hearing injuries. I'm not sure I'm using the right terminology, but we've just learned that the source of the sound has an impact and we are concerned about it.

How many injuries were recorded?

**Ms. Caroline Corneau:** Close analysis is required to determine what constitutes an injury.

For example, in 2022, no employees went on sick leave for an extended period because of a work injury. That, I would say, is good news.

The incident and other reports are about symptoms and situations that may have occurred and that represent a risk to health and safety without necessarily constituting an injury or accident as such. That's why we can tell you that at the moment, based on all the data, about 70% of the more than 90 reports were simply incident reports, and not linked to a disabling injury. On the other hand, 30% reported a disabling injury that could require one day or a few hours of absence, or a need for temporary accommodation for a period specified by a doctor.

• (1240)

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Matters of health, safety and accessibility are important if we are to be able to do our work and determine whether or not the hybrid format is possible.

Madam Chair, can we ask the witnesses to give the committee an overview of the direct correlation between hybrid format meeting conditions and accidents?

[English]

**The Chair:** Perhaps you could share that directly with the clerk for all of us to have those numbers, or any insights. That would be great.

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** You all know very well that I like when everything goes through the chair, because you interpret it, but today I'm noticing that the tone and temperament between us is nice. That's because we know how hard you work and because you're sitting right in front of us. If you weren't, we'd sometimes lose sight of the work you do. That's why I'm not interrupting to say you have to go through the chair. It's so that you can get maximum time.

We have Ms. Blaney for six minutes.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Chair.

I thank all of you for being here. I have a great respect for the interpreters. They make my life a lot easier, and I am very grateful to them.

My first questions I'm going to hand over to the International Association of Conference Interpreters. I'll let you decide who should answer.

One thing I found interesting today was what you said about the House administration doing some testing. You felt that their testimony was true only for in-person sound, as opposed to remote sound. I'm wondering if you could explain that a little bit more.

**Mrs. Linda Ballantyne:** Thank you for the question.

We in our association have actually very little information about the most recent testing that's been conducted by the House administration's experts. We have received no report. We have been aware of testing that's been going on for two years.

The translation bureau brought in the NRC to do testing because of injuries and an interest in trying to understand what was going on. Those tests showed a number of conclusions, namely that the House administration's AV systems had problems, in addition to the problems that we understand come with these platforms such as Zoom.

When the NRC presented its findings, the House administration brought in its own experts. Our understanding is that the House administration did not agree with the findings of the NRC. We believe there's been a bit of a ping-pong game going on. We are waiting for the House administration's findings, and now we have the NRC going back in. They have apparently conducted more tests just recently. They will be testing again on Thanksgiving weekend. From what we understand, this is to validate what the House administration's experts have concluded. We've lost sight at this point of what the NRC concluded already some time ago, so we are in the dark about what is happening with the testing. All we know is that we continue to have injuries, and this has been going on for far too long.

Thanks.

**Mr. Jim Thompson:** I would just add that the committee is in the dark as well—you are—because the House administration told you on Tuesday that they are not prepared to give you the results of that report.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Okay. Thank you for that.

One thing I'm interested in, and you mentioned it earlier, is that freelancers are not putting in safety applications and so on. Are you guys tracking in any way what's happening for freelancers?

• (1245)

**Mrs. Linda Ballantyne:** Thank you very much.

It is very unfortunate that we as freelancers.... This is around the world. Freelancers around the world are suffering injuries. Freelancers are offering services in institutions around the world where the institutions are doing some tracking, but here we are a small association. We are all volunteers. It is very difficult for us to track. We would rely entirely on our freelancers reporting to us. We don't have an infrastructure for tracking. We have talked about it in AIIC internationally to try to figure out how we could do that. At this point, it is not what we are doing. It's purely anecdotal.

I can tell you that some of the anecdotes are very, very disturbing and very upsetting. We have interpreters who, since these platforms have started being used since the pandemic, are unable to work and will never be able to work again—

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you so much. I have only a minute and a bit left.

I want to take the opportunity to ask a question of CAPE again. I'll let you decide who wants to answer.

I have two questions. First, there was mention of hearing issues. Can you elaborate a bit on what types of issues there are in terms of hearing issues? Second, what do you believe the House administration could do to improve interpreters' working conditions during hybrid or remote meetings?

**Ms. Paule Antonelli:** We've chosen to talk about hearing issues because there's a wide range. They go from tinnitus, which most of us have at this stage.... That was not the case before the pandemic for most of us—most of the interpreters, I mean, and maybe parliamentarians too, with the amount of time you spend online. We need better sound for our work.

Tinnitus is the lowest thing, and then it goes on to a hypersensitivity to noise. If you have interpreters around, they will wince if you drop a knife on a plate.

**The Chair:** I was so intrigued by where you were going with that, but the bell rang.

Mr. Vis, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses here today.

[Translation]

I'm a man who sometimes speaks very loud. During the pandemic, was it difficult for you when someone like me raised his voice to make a point in the House of Commons?

[English]

**Mrs. Linda Ballantyne:** Thank you for the question.

We have a volume control button on our console in the booth.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Brad Vis:** No, no; it's a serious question, please.

**Mrs. Linda Ballantyne:** It is a serious question, and we take your question very seriously, but it is a fact that interpreters, during the pandemic, have been working with their fingers on their volume control.

One of the issues we have with the hybrid format, with people in the room and also coming in online, is the lack of level. There's a discrepancy between the sound that comes into our ears. It's a different quality of sound. It's a different volume of sound and texture of sound. All we have is a volume button.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you. That's a really important answer.

In your opinion, Ms. Ballantyne, is the way we're doing things now sustainable for your profession? If hybrid is adopted on a permanent basis, do you think that's sustainable for your essential service?

**Mrs. Linda Ballantyne:** What you ask is a very important and crucial question. We keep insisting that in-person sound is the best quality sound for us to work with. Anything that's not in-person sound is going to be very difficult for us to work with. It produces poor quality and it is dangerous.

• (1250)

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

My next question is about bilingualism.

When I'm here in Ottawa, I can speak French with my colleague, Ms. Gaudreau. However, when I'm at home on my own, I don't speak any French at all.

Do you think that the hybrid format has lowered the level of bilingualism in Canada?

**Ms. Paule Antonelli:** That would be difficult to say.

I think that parliamentarians make a huge effort to speak both languages. We appreciate these efforts, as do their colleagues who speak the other official language.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Linda Ballantyne:** We are a bilingual country. We have the Official Languages Act. It's in place precisely because not all of us speak the two languages and everyone is entitled to be able to understand everything that goes on in our democracy. That's why we have interpretation.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Right. This is what I'm trying to get at.

**Mrs. Linda Ballantyne:** This is the big challenge we have. We're here because we have a huge challenge. Our challenge here in the Canadian Parliament is all the more huge because we have a shortage of interpreters.

We don't disagree that there's a shortage everywhere, but here, we do.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** I'm sorry, I have to interrupt. I'm really trying to make an important point.

Anecdotally, do you find that because of hybrid Parliament, anglophones speak more English than French in a hybrid setting than they do in a non-hybrid setting?

**Mrs. Linda Ballantyne:** Canada did conduct a survey dating back to December 2021, I think it was. Measuring the amount of time spoken in Parliament by different parliamentarians of different languages, indeed we found that English has predominated and French has been snuffed out.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you. That's really disappointing to hear.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Paule Antonelli:** I was in the House then, and the system did not retransmit the same sound to the console. The sound wasn't very loud.

[*English*]

The sound was not carried to the....

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Romanado.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being here today.

I have a few questions to follow up on those asked by my colleague Mr. Calkins.

[*English*]

I was actually quite surprised because when I was elected in 2015, on committees we had a lot of video conferencing for witnesses who would come to testify. I was actually surprised to learn—and this has been helpful—that the quality of the audio on the video conference we used prior to hybrid wasn't very good. Witnesses would not be using the headsets. They would not be using good microphones.

[*Translation*]

We're learning now, Ms. Antonelli, that the worst sound comes from the telephone.

[*English*]

During the pandemic, at the very beginning we were doing daily phone calls with parliamentarians and we had very bad-quality telephones. On top of that, we had 338 parliamentarians who were trying to speak. It's helpful for us to know that it's actually not very good, because we do often use the telephone for caucus calls and so on. I don't use a headset when I'm on a phone call. I'm listening to the phone call. Thank you for letting us know that. It is very helpful.

In terms of how we do what we do.... For instance, I keep a distance from the microphone so I don't pop in your ears and I know, for the sake of interpreters, not to yell in the chamber. Are there other things that we can be doing? I know about wearing our proper headsets. Are there other recommendations that you could give us as parliamentarians, such as using a headset if we are on a teleconference? Would you like to elaborate?

I'll have another question as well.

• (1255)

**Ms. Paule Antonelli:** I'm sure you have heard the recommendations before about positioning the headset microphone between your mouth and your nose.

Some MPs have recurring bad connections. They just live in a corner of the country where connections are bad. If those MPs have notes and are using them, it would be important for them to provide notes if at all possible, and to speak as slowly as possible so that they can in some way compensate for how poor the connection is.

**Mr. Jim Thompson:** I would like to add another thing that could be done. It relates to the approach to the rules, the conditions, that apply for interpreters working in remote settings. The institution needs to take into account that remote sound is damaging and dangerous, and, as other institutions have done, take steps to limit exposure to that sound, and to define what an in-person meeting is in a way that takes into account the fact that there are remote participants.

Any remote sound is dangerous, and we would encourage your committee to recognize that in whatever recommendations you might make.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Thank you for that.

In a previous Parliament, I chaired a committee, and one thing that was very difficult for interpreters was when the members would talk over the witness or cut them off. The back-and-forth doesn't help in terms of interpretation, so this is just another little friendly reminder to our members not to do that.

My next question is for Mr. Ball. You talked a little bit about the pool or the pipeline of talent that you're looking to develop. There are people who are taking the two masters programs. It was a great recommendation to invest in some of those programs so that we can entice more people to consider a career in interpretation.

You mentioned that we have some already on staff. You have identified some as freelance who can assist. I understand from Madame Corneau that we do have enough interpreters at the moment to fill the 57 slots over the course of a week.

With the potential addition of new recruits coming through, if we were to invest in some more programs and training, would that help make sure that you have that buffer in terms of the pipeline of talent you will need going forward?

**The Chair:** We would welcome the answer in writing, if that's okay.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have time for a very quick question.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Thank you very much for offering me this speaking time.

There was one question I didn't get to earlier. It's for Mr. Ball or Ms. Comeau.

There was a mention of disabling injuries that caused absences from work, right? I'd like it if the witnesses could, in their report, point out where and in what context these accidents occurred.

That's the only other thing I would like. Is it possible?

**Ms. Caroline Corneau:** Yes, we can provide that information to the committee.

I don't think I have the precise information in my briefcase, unfortunately. Rather than mislead the committee, I'd rather send that information in writing.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** If you have information about any differences between the committees and the House of Commons on that, it would be nice to have all the details.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jim Thompson:** Madam Chair, just before we adjourn, there is one fact I wanted to leave with the committee. It arises from a survey of all freelance interpreters we did in July. Eighty per cent participated. The shocking thing is that half of currently accredited freelance interpreters are planning to retire in the next five years.

It's not just a question of whether we have enough interpreters for the 57 meetings in a week; members asked about sustainability. We're facing a mass retirement event, and we need to have appropriate attention paid to that.

Thank you.

• (1300)

**The Chair:** Thank you for those comments.

Thank you to all members and our witnesses for this important conversation.

I think the points that were just raised are also really relevant, because I'm understanding more and more the amount of work you do and for whom you're all doing it. It's not just for the House of Commons, but also for cabinet, for departments. I think you helped me amend some of the information I had in my head, and you've actually countered it.

I think we need to better understand the work you do, how you do it and who you do it for. If you could provide us with those details and actually differentiate between the conversation that we are having for the House of Commons versus all of your other commitments, I think that would better inform us as to where the harms are, and the opportunities, and how we can have the conversation we're having.

Thank you so much for your service.

I hope you know how much I adore you people. I really do try my best to make sure you—

**Mr. Jim Thompson:** We feel your love.

**The Chair:** —are able to do your work. All members will keep doing that.

**Voices:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** Keep well and safe.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Madam Chair, before you adjourn—you can let the witnesses go—I have a housekeeping question for you and the clerk.

As we go into this constituency week, in order to get a sense of what the calendar looks like moving forward, could we get a better understanding of the witnesses we're going to be seeing?

We only know what we've submitted. I don't know how many witnesses we have overall for this study. We committed to a certain number of—

**The Chair:** At the last meeting, we determined that I would be sharing that with the subcommittee. The clerk is just actually trying to compile that. We actually took care of this at the last meeting.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Oh, sorry. I didn't hear that. I totally missed that.

**The Chair:** Perfect.

Have a great day, everyone. Happy Thanksgiving.

The meeting is adjourned.

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