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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger





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• (1100)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 33 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

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

We also welcome new members today to PROC. We're going to give them a warm welcome, but we're going to take care of a little bit of business first.

I'll pass it over to the clerk.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Justin Vaive):** Hello, members of the committee.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition.

I'm now prepared to receive motions for first vice-chair.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** I move that Mr. John Nater be elected vice-chair of the committee.

[*English*]

**The Clerk:** It's been moved by Monsieur Berthold that Mr. Nater be elected first vice-chair.

Are there any further motions?

Seeing none, is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare the motion carried and Mr. Nater duly elected first vice-chair of the committee. Congratulations.

**The Chair:** Perfect.

Welcome to the new members.

Mr. Nater, we're looking forward to working closely together.

It's a really good day to be here, because we have an exciting first panel, which consists of current members of Parliament representing all four parties. The second panel looks at the use of hybrid proceedings in other jurisdictions, with the Speakers of two provin-

cial legislative assemblies and a representative of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

I would let the committee know that our virtual witnesses have all successfully undergone the pre-meeting connectivity and audio tests.

For our first panel, I would like to welcome Carol Hughes, MP for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing; Yvonne Jones, MP for Labrador; Tom Kmiec, MP for Calgary Shepard; Andréanne Larouche, MP for Shefford; and Jean Yip, MP for Scarborough—Agincourt, who is joining us virtually.

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

MP Hughes, welcome to PROC. Please take the floor for up to three minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP):** Good morning. I'm pleased to be with you today.

First, I'd like to recognize that we're on the unceded Anishinabe territory of the Algonquins, who have occupied these lands for thousands of years.

Today's discussion is to determine whether attending meetings virtually should remain an option for parliamentarians and witnesses. Witnesses have long been able to appear by videoconference, so that clearly works to some extent.

As Assistant Deputy Speaker of the House, I must admit that we've had some issues, even in committee. I know the technicians are working to improve connectivity. Moreover, it's primarily the government's responsibility to ensure that everyone across the country has a good enough Internet connection to give them fair opportunity to take part in parliamentary sittings and all other types of meetings.

Even before I became Assistant Deputy Speaker of the House, there were times I'd have appreciated being able to participate remotely in a sitting of the House. However, I couldn't have done that because I didn't have access to the technology.

I've had several surgeries on one of my heels and I know there are more to come. In these kinds of circumstances, it's very hard to travel to attend meetings. It's hard to fly or even to drive if you've had surgery on the foot you use to drive. I don't think I should be penalized for wanting to take care of myself due to health concerns.

• (1105)

[*English*]

Again, there have been instances where I have seen parliamentarians who have illnesses who find themselves coming here to Parliament earlier than anticipated. As a matter of fact, just yesterday I overheard an MP say, "I'm just starting a cold."

I want to add that whether it's the death of a loved one, injury, illness or flights—we've all been experiencing that if you're flying, it has been very problematic—it's beyond our control. We should still be able to participate no matter what. I went to Mongolia a few years back, and they were further ahead than we were with voting.

I think we need to look at where we are now, in today's day and age, and continue to do this. Obviously, there should be some guidelines the whip's offices, committees themselves and Parliament will have to look at as to what would be acceptable. I would say that I would not expect to be able to just virtually participate without the approval of the whip's office. I just wanted to add that. When we look at the distances between some communities, it is difficult at times to be able to be here on time.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Hughes.

We will now move on to Ms. Jones.

Welcome to the committee. For up to three minutes, the time is yours.

**Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, committee members. Thank you for making time to hear presentations from MPs this morning.

First of all, there's a little handout that you're going to get. There are four key points that I want to raise as part of my contribution this morning.

First, I think the hybrid Parliament has been a success. It came together rather quickly in a very difficult time. Like most changes you make, there were some growing pains, and while we went through some of those growing pains, I'm sure there are other ways that we can improve upon the system as well.

I want to make sure that it is not lost on people that there has been a shift in this country since 2020. In ridings like mine, it has really been felt in my capacity to do my job. Let me walk you through it.

First of all, you have a map that shows the entirety of my riding. It's a small population of 30,000 people in a geographic area of 300,000 square kilometres. That is not small. If you were to take the island of Newfoundland and the provinces of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, they would all fit in my riding. That's an area served by 31 MPs; my area is served by one MP, which is me. Populations vary, of course, as you know.

How do I get to my riding? That's what I want to talk about as part of my presentation. You can see how large it is. It borders on Quebec in two areas and goes way up north towards Nunavut. How do you get there? There are four distinct regions. Forty per cent of my riding is isolated, with fly-in and fly-out communities only. The rest of it I can access by road once I'm on the ground. Road access from one community to the community furthest away that I can drive to is over 12,000 kilometres. It's not a short drive.

To give you an idea, I very rarely leave here on a Friday, because it's impossible for me to get to my riding before Saturday, and then I have to leave on Sunday to come back. The hybrid Parliament was the first opportunity I had to be there on a Friday: to arrive through St. John's on Friday morning, get online, do my House duty and do my votes—whatever the case was—and then have the rest of the day in my riding. I was able to do that sometimes on Monday.

Now, with the flight schedule, we were having a seven-day-a-week schedule from Air Canada, so I could go to Halifax and go into Goose Bay, go to St. John's overnight and the next day go into Goose Bay or go into Blanc-Sablon on the Quebec side to go to that part of my riding. It is very complicated, because it is very spread out and not connected. Then, on the other days, I go to western Labrador on this side of the Quebec border, so I overnight in Montreal, I take an early flight at 5:30 a.m. and I get there by mid-afternoon on Friday.

That's just to give you an example, because there is an argument that says, "You knew what you were signing on for." Well, when I signed on, there were two airlines seven days a week. Today, I have one—and that's down to three days a week—and a single airline going into most communities, sometimes if at all. That has made it very difficult.

I have four very important points and I'm happy to discuss them later if anyone has questions.

• (1110)

**The Chair:** We'll try to get those out in the questions.

Thank you, Ms. Jones.

Mr. Kmiec, welcome back to committee. You have up to three minutes.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let me give a contrarian view on hybrid Parliament.

I don't think it's much of a secret that I'm opposed to continuing hybrid Parliament in almost all formats. I think it works very well for committees to invite witnesses by teleconference, but it doesn't work very well to build the camaraderie and high morale each caucus requires.

My comments are as the former elected national caucus chair of the Conservative Party, a recognized party on Parliament Hill. I served that role from 2019 until 2021, so it was during the entire length of the pandemic. I believe we were the first caucus to meet online over Zoom, which we selected as the best method of meeting. We met for the first three meetings with no interpretation, because the House of Commons wasn't able to provide it.

I also say this as the father of three living kids. My youngest daughter, Lucy-Rose, passed away on August 13, 2018. I took time off in order to grieve. This was then turned into a private member's bill, based on the experience I had.

I came back too early to Parliament on October 15. I will readily say that. Returning so quickly was not good for my marriage at the time, but my team made it possible for me to participate by making sure I was paired for very important votes in my riding. Those votes happened October 3. I still monitored my email. As you know, everybody grieving for a lost loved one will do this. You find things to distract yourself with, because, otherwise, you will go mad with grief. I was distracting myself by checking my emails every so often while I took care of my grieving kids as well.

On October 3, I became the first member who was not a minister to be paired with another member who was not a minister on our side of the House. The whip was very gracious to pair me up. Pairing is in Standing Order 44.1. I have sent a letter to the committee in the past—committees making up previous Parliaments. We should empower members, not the whips. Let us pair ourselves with gentlemen and ladies in other caucuses with whom we build a relationship over the years. Hybrid Parliament makes it impossible to build those relationships one-to-one—those very intimate interpersonal relationships we need to have, which are based on trust.

I will remind the committee about the reason you're having this study. It's that there's a member on this committee by the name of Greg Fergus, for whom I have a lot of respect and with whom I've built a mutual sense of respect over the years, working on the finance committee. That is the reason why this committee is able to pursue this study, right now. We would not have been able to do that over a hybrid Zoom Parliament setting. You're just boxes to me on the screen.

When I chaired meetings of the Conservative caucus, there were 150-plus boxes on a screen. You can't really build relationships like that. I know some people had fun right before votes. There were people singing and camaraderie, but it's not the same thing as having someone over for a discussion.

The other thing I want to say and put on the record is this: We are not 338 Service Canada ombudsperson offices. Our purpose in life is not to fix Service Canada's problems. That's Service Canada's job. I know many of us find a lot of meaningful work in helping individual constituent case files, but our work is as legislators. Our work is to keep the government accountable, including members of the Liberal government caucus and every other caucus.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for the time.

• (1115)

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

[*Translation*]

Next, we have Ms. Larouche.

Welcome to the committee, Ms. Larouche.

You have the floor for three minutes.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank the committee members for inviting me today to hear my comments on this important issue of hybrid parliamentary proceedings.

I testify before you today having just spent a week at the 145th Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly, which focused on creating parliaments that better reflect both sexes and gender diversity. I testified as a mother, a new role I took up this past February 13. Naomie is now eight months old.

Because I was able to do it, I chose to go back to work with my daughter by my side. I returned to Parliament on February 28, with help from my sister first and then from my partner when he got back from a business trip.

In my opinion, it's a democratic issue above all. I studied politics at Université de Sherbrooke, so I'm well aware of it. It's hard to hold government accountable in a hybrid Parliament where ministers can easily cut and run. It's easier to represent our constituents, and we're proud to do it, when all MPs are physically in the parliamentary precinct. The informal meetings and follow-ups we're able to have in person between colleagues on Parliament Hill clearly show that.

I know networking is a challenge for women. They easily become isolated when they have kids, and that hurts their chances of promotion. I studied this when I was working in the community sector and led projects addressing women and poverty.

The lack of resources on Parliament Hill for women MPs with young children can certainly make things harder. I'm talking about resources like daycare with enough spots that can take kids under 18 months old. Family lounges should be larger and more practical. They should include playpens for children, among other things. Parliament should improve its practices.

On my recent mission to Rwanda, I heard about parliaments in other countries that had responded to women's family realities. In some cases, in addition to daycare on site within Parliament, they can even provide nanny services that travel with members out on tour.

Of course, all political parties also have a role to play in helping and supporting women as mothers, whether it's providing access to physical resources such as family lounges, or being more flexible and letting others sit in for them on occasion to meet some of their obligations, including in committee.

Why would my role as a mother, which I have proudly embraced for eight months now, be incompatible with my role as an MP? In promoting a virtual or hybrid parliament, we're saying that the two roles are incompatible. However, we don't want to send out that message. First, we need to prove to the rest of society that a woman can be a mother and perform these duties with dignity, just like everyone else. We need to modernize the institution in which we sit to make room for women and mothers, by offering a more flexible schedule and more physical resources. To do so, Parliament must adopt meaningful inclusion measures, including those I mentioned earlier. Otherwise, we won't be able to recruit more women.

I'd be happy to elaborate during the question period.

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

[*English*]

Now we'll go to Ms. Jean Yip.

Welcome to committee. You have up to three minutes.

**Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.):** Thank you for inviting me.

This is personally very difficult for me, as it brings up memories that I have put away. It is so important for me to be here, because we have an opportunity to create a path that is both more compassionate and more practical.

My late husband, Arnold Chan, was the previous member of Parliament for Scarborough—Agincourt. He became ill while in office with nasopharyngeal cancer, more commonly known as head and neck cancer. Arnold passed away five years ago.

Exhausting as it was, Arnold travelled back and forth. His cancer treatments were in Toronto, but he felt the need to be in Ottawa to be present for his job, including as the deputy government House leader. He sat on this very committee. Arnold was committed to upholding his parliamentary duties in Ottawa right to the end. This meant he had to be there in person. Even though it compromised his health, Arnold pushed himself. He did not want to let his constituents or his colleagues down.

Arnold spoke at this committee even when he needed constant water because, physically, speaking was so difficult. He absolutely loved what he was doing. As a result, I had to split my time with an increasingly terminally ill husband in Ottawa and my three boys at home. It was the worst time of my life. My children were losing their father, and I was losing my best friend and husband.

Arnold needed to focus his energy on getting through the day instead of travelling back and forth to Ottawa. He was fragile and immunocompromised, but risked further sickness by being physically present in Parliament. My children should have had more time with their father, and Arnold should have been better able to fulfill his commitments as an MP.

Having the virtual option would have helped him manage his health, and given him more time with his family. Time is so precious, and it never can be regained.

Now as the MP, being a single parent makes any job tougher. You have to run twice as fast. In fact, every Sunday I would not sleep for 24 hours in order buy groceries, organize the week's meals, help with homework, laundry, pay the bills and deal with all the necessities of managing a household. Anyone who has every had life happen would have appreciated a hybrid option. I regret that my three boys became independent much earlier than they should have been. It was not easy on them, and I missed some of my children's special moments. Again, the time lost cannot be made up.

Lastly, my testimony here today would not have been possible without hybrid support. I must be in the riding to appear in person for an important hearing. I cannot think of a better use of hybrid than to allow me to participate at this committee and to represent my constituents at the hearing tonight.

I would like to close with a quote from Arnold in his last speech to the House:

We have to listen to each other. In so doing, we will make this place a stronger place.

Thank you.

• (1120)

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

We will now enter into six-minute rounds. This is just a reminder that comments and questions from everyone should go through the chair.

We will start with Mr. Calkins for six minutes.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC):** Madam Chair, if I promise to behave, can I speak directly to our colleagues? Is that okay?

Thank you very much, Carol, for your presentation. I actually found it quite interesting. I want to ask you a few questions first, and then I'll probably move on to one of our other colleagues.

You talked specifically about surgeries and illnesses, and your personal experience with some of your health matters. I don't have a lot of sympathy for flights, honestly, because we choose when we fly. If we choose to leave at the last minute, we end up late at the House of Commons. That's on us, but I do get the fact that you are also in a rural area that's probably quite a ways away, and it's difficult to get here at times. That's sometimes true for guys like me from Alberta as well.

I want to ask you about the whip approval part that you had in your notes.

Do you think there should be a very specific, circumscribed use of hybrid Parliament, and do you think the whips should be the ones involved in approving that?

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** At this point in time, I'm not sure about other parties. If I'm going to be away from Ottawa, I have to let my whip's office know and I have to get permission. I would tend to think that, as we move forward, this is probably happening as well. We are required to be here, unless we have permission from the whip to be away for special reasons.

I would agree that there is a role for a virtual hybrid Parliament to continue in some shape or form. It is the responsibility of PROC and the parties themselves to look at who gives the approval for this. I would think it would be the whip's office that would be giving the approval to do this when someone has had surgery and they can't be here, or they've missed their flight.

I know that you also fly. Often, I've had to jump in the car—and I've been lucky to be able to do this, but Ms. Jones wouldn't be able to—and drive here to get here in time.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** I understand. Yes, flights are not as good as they used to be from Alberta, either. I think it's a problem across the country; there's no doubt about it.

As a member of the speakership, would you say that, as a matter of accountability, if members of Parliament are choosing to use virtual or use hybrid and not attend Parliament—let's say, hypothetically, that there weren't circumscribed rules but that it was up to the MP to decide how they wanted to do that, and let's say they had the whip's approval to be attending virtually from their constituency that week—the House of Commons should be tracking whether somebody is voting remotely, whether they're voting in person, whether they're attending or logging in virtually, or whether they're speaking in person? Do you think that that should be something that should be reported to the public?

• (1125)

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** I think that the public is able to see it for themselves.

As far as reporting, again, I think that would be up to PROC and what you decide, as you do your study, as to how you would like to see that. Again, I think, for special circumstances, it is the responsibility of each party to have those prescribed guidelines. I know we currently have it. We had it before virtual Parliament, and we still have it now. If I'm going to be away, I would need to get permission from the whip's office to be away, and I am expected to participate virtually unless I happen to have a doctor's appointment at that time, at question period time or whenever.

Yes, I think there is a huge role for the hybrid Parliament to play. We are in that technology world now, and I don't think that anybody is.... Hopefully, nobody is abusing it. I think that everybody who can be here is here unless they have special circumstances. I know that every party has been using it even though they can be here right now. I don't know what their circumstances are as to why they're not here and are participating virtually. As Ms. Yip says, she has electoral reform hearings tonight. I would assume—

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** I only have a little bit of time, Carol, so I'll let them speak for themselves, if that's okay, but thank you for your answer.

Tom, I have a question for you about your pairing suggestion. It is in the Standing Orders. The interesting comment I heard from

you was that you didn't think that the whips should be involved in approving a pairing if you find a colleague from another caucus—for example, you and I, who are on the opposition, we would find a government member—to pair with us. Could you elaborate on that a bit more, please?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Sure.

In the United Kingdom, they have a system that's based on just the honour code—and it's had problems in the past—but two members can pair and then you can go and inform the whips that you are paired for whatever length of time you need the pairing for.

Pairing has been used routinely in the past, but in the early 1990s, Standing Order 44.1 was changed to include the whips. Since then, the whips have almost exclusively had control of it. However, over the decades as whips change—and you know this, having been a former whip—there's a lot of knowledge that needs to be downloaded from whip to whip to whip as that role changes. I just think that we as members are able to find members who we agree with and who we build a relationship over time with and that, based simply on a handshake agreement, we can inform the clerks and the whips after the fact that we are to be paired for a vote. The way the system works right now, there are all those books and binders on the table in the chamber. Those are not just for decoration; they're actually useful. One of those binders is a pairing binder, and within it, the whips have to sign the names—not the members.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Sahota, you have up to six minutes.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I really wish we had so much more time than we do with all of the witnesses today. The testimony thus far has been really interesting and rich.

I'll start with MP Yip.

MP Yip, I got the chance to serve with Arnold on this very committee, and I miss him very much and the contributions he made. I remember during a lot of those committee hearings a bit of what you referenced about his having to have water or about the fact that he wasn't feeling well on many occasions during committee, yet he still had to sit there. It was very difficult to watch him in the later days, and it was almost even inhumane. I know he wanted to be here and he wanted to participate because this place was so important to him, but you could physically see his health deteriorating. I actually felt like the best place would have been for him to be resting, and perhaps he could have had more time with his sons—I don't know.

I was wondering whether you had any more comments to make as to any proposals that you would like this committee to undertake, given the testimony you gave today.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** Thank you.

I believe, after my personal experience of watching Arnold deteriorate and watching the stress that it placed on our family, that allowing a hybrid Parliament to continue with all its flexibilities would be very helpful, not just for those who have medical issues, but also those—as Ms. Jones testified—who live far away and have a large riding. It can open up more possibilities for those who consider running, bring younger people in as members and support a better work-life balance.

We could have had more time.

• (1130)

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** What do you think about the idea of pairing?

Given that type of health circumstance, how long do you think Arnold would have needed at home? Would it have been easy to find another member to pair with, considering pairing always requires two people? It comes to mind that we may not always have doubles in the House, given the same circumstance for the same length of time that might be needed for a member.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** I think pairing may work for some circumstances but not for longer-term issues, like a health issue or if you have to take a couple of weeks to stay home with a child or with an elderly parent. The coordination alone is difficult.

All of us have to do trades for when we are away from committee, or if we have to go away for a conference or so forth. It's difficult enough just to find somebody to substitute your spot, never mind trying to coordinate it in the longer term. That is where going hybrid or having hybrid provides the flexibility.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Does pairing provide the opportunity, which I know Arnold appreciated very much, to be able to participate or represent your constituents at that time?

**Ms. Jean Yip:** I think pairing would have just been short term, but it would not have provided greater comfort in knowing that there is somebody who is going to be there for the longer term. Hybrid provides some assurance that you can be there if you want, or you can find other means.

I feel that it would have made the situation for our family much more amenable.

I'm sorry. I need a moment.

I will just say this. I think the flexibility of hybrid will help those who serve be healthier, both physically and mentally. It will help all of us do the job that we love.

Thank you.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** My next question goes to MP Kmiec. You referenced the use of pairing in terms of the U.K. using the practice. I was wondering if you were aware that the U.K. also has a practice of proxy voting.

Were you aware of that?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Yes.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Proxy voting is a method by which if you are ill or if you have to take maternity leave or bereavement leave, it gives you the ability to participate and to register your vote. Were you aware of that? That gives those MPs in the U.K. a lot more

ability to participate while they're not there, rather than just pairing off and not being a part of Parliament during that time.

I tend to agree with you in feeling that members should be present as often as possible in Parliament, because it creates a good network and bond. Do you feel it's better for them to at least be visible on a box and be able to participate vocally when something like that occurs, instead of not being there at all?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. We are at our time.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Could I get just a yes or a no?

**The Chair:** That's a lot to ask from that long question.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Chair, can I just answer with "it depends"?

• (1135)

**The Chair:** Sure.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** With just a yes or no, is it better to have them participate than not participate at all?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** It depends.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** "It depends" is your answer.

**The Chair:** It sounds like the "or" option.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, I'd like to offer my condolences to my colleagues, particularly Ms. Yip. I was a caregiver for my father, who had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis for over a decade. I'd also like to say to my colleague Mr. Kmiec that words cannot express how it feels to lose a loved one, especially a child.

I'd like my colleague Ms. Larouche to elaborate on some of the things she covered. Among other things, she said that networking was more of a challenge for women. I'd like more information on that.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Like I said, that was really central to the working groups I set up to address issues involving women and poverty. When women can't network, it's very difficult for many of them to make progress on certain issues, and even to get promotions.

If I work from home instead of on Parliament Hill, I can't meet with representatives from an association or discuss a more specific matter with colleagues. When I'm on Parliament Hill, I can call my partner or the babysitter to tell them that I'll be working a half-hour longer to have a drink and speak with certain people. For women, that networking is the key to making progress on certain issues.

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

You gave some examples in terms of the lack of resources. I want to know what else is missing. I even saw members nodding to agree that, yes, Parliament cannot manage to offer all the amenities. I'd like more information on that.

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** It's really important. As we've seen, Quebec led the way in creating its daycare network. They proved that having a safe place to leave their kids was the reason a lot of women were able to go back to work.

The same is true for family lounges with added resources. My partner could also have used a space like that. These are resources we can use rather than stay home and deal with the whole mental burden that comes with that.

That's something we experienced during the pandemic. On the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, of which I'm vice-chair, we studied the pandemic's disproportionate effects on women. We found that telework and having to manage children at home had a huge impact on women's mental health.

To balance work and family, it's important that I keep the two separated. On the one hand, I have my work, and on the other I have the time I can spend with my daughter.

We have resources in the workplace, but we could also consider having resources outside the workplace, such as nanny services. As I said, these are solutions observed in other countries' parliaments that make it possible for young women to fulfill their duties as an MP and a mother.

**Ms. Marie-H l ne Gaudreau:** A recent witness before our committee testified that telework might lead us to do more. What are the pros and cons of working at the office when someone has a child they want to take care of and spent time with? How does being on a screen rather than in the room affect accountability for every MP in the House of Commons?

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** This goes to the whole question of parliamentary accountability. When we're there in the House, we can have informal discussions with colleagues in the hallways. In a hybrid Parliament, when we're working from home, we can't have those informal discussions or follow up on site.

It's mostly because being at home with your child has an impact on the work you can do, for it puts more pressure on you. I feel that's really a key factor, and it goes to the heart of the matter.

As I said, I'm just back from a trip to Rwanda. I heard people say that Parliament is no place to bring my child. I was told I should be at home. Some of the things they said were quite brutal. For example, they said I was using my child. However, it's important to me that I convey a different message, and not suggest that because I'm a good mother, I can't be a good MP, or vice-versa.

I also talked about space. Sometimes it's hard to keep things in check when you're working from home. That became obvious during the pandemic. We let go and the number of Zoom meetings grew. It went on and on until we could no longer tell the difference between work time and personal time. When we work on screen, we tend to hold more and more Zoom meetings. However, it's important that we be able to physically distance ourselves from that.

That's also why I talked about more flexible schedules. I'm living proof: When you're a mother and you have to attend debates until midnight for purely political reasons, you can start to question things.

I'd even take it further. We sometimes forget that this is a minority government. The voters we represent asked us to negotiate with the government so we could get along. You can't agree to get along from a computer screen. I've just returned from a diplomatic mission and I can attest to that: all the informal discussions we had with colleagues to make progress wouldn't have happened if we'd been on a screen. In a minority government context, that's also an important issue to raise.

• (1140)

**Ms. Marie-H l ne Gaudreau:** I only have a few seconds left.

To summarize what we've heard, generally speaking, working at the office helps keep people from shirking their responsibilities. It makes us ask questions, get answers and make things happen.

Does that mean the hybrid model prevents accountability?

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** That's exactly it, because you can't have the same impact.

As MPs, first and foremost we represent our constituents. So we have to listen to them and carry their message. If we stay in the bubble of our constituency, we won't get the opportunity to discuss our issues with our colleagues in Parliament and, based on comments from the people, find a way to introduce more meaningful bills that lead to laws better representing what we see on the ground that will help the people.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank all of the folks who are here to testify.

For me, as we go through this, I'm really interested in having concrete discussions about how we can come together on this, because I don't think it is an all-or-nothing. I personally like being here better. I think it's really important. I know since the very beginning that when I would speak and I would hear from other parties that they would have similar issues, we were able to work together. I think that will always be important. I'm very aware of that.

I also acknowledge that if people are having severe health challenges or are caring for someone and they cannot leave their home, I don't want to silence that voice. I think it's very important when you are elected that your voice is heard in this place. Things happen. I think of other testimony, and Carol's as well today, where they talked about real health issues that mean you cannot travel—you cannot. Does that mean your voice is silenced for that period of time?

Voting is part of it, but that is not all of it. It's also the House work and the committee work. We saw people do tremendous work and make speeches in the House of Commons and their committees virtually, because we have that tool. I'm very hopeful that we can come together and have really concrete discussions about what works well, what our concerns are and how we do this in a way that increases inclusion and doesn't exclude.

I'm going to come to you, Ms. Jones. You said you had four main points. I want to give you an opportunity to share those with the committee, since you didn't have enough time in your presentation.

**Ms. Yvonne Jones:** Thank you very much, MP Blaney.

First of all, much of what I had there has been raised by my colleagues. I, too, unfortunately, have lost a child.

During COVID-19 I lost my brother, so I know how important it was for me to have access to hybrid Parliament so I could be with my family and with his kids at that time as well. I really felt if that option wasn't there for me, my privileges as an MP would have been compromised as well, because it gave me that added opportunity to still be able to participate in Parliament and to support my family, and to have them support me at a time when I needed it.

I'm also a cancer survivor. I went through cancer in politics and I went through other major surgical procedures—as I heard Carol talk about. A number of our colleagues have. I listened to Jean this morning. It's absolutely heartbreaking to hear her story.

One thing that I think hybrid allows us to do is to continue to participate and have input, even if it's at a distance. It might not be the preferred option. Like you, I love being with my colleagues. I love being in the House of Commons, being in person for committees, but realistically we have lives that sometimes do not allow us to do the things we really want to do, but we can still participate. Hybrid allows us the opportunity.

I really believe the question for the committee should be how we incorporate a hybrid model going forward. When does it come into play? How does it support MPs? I don't think it should be a question of whether we use it or whether we don't use it. I think the question is how we use it to strengthen Parliament.

The largest corporations in the world today are being run with people's boxes on the screen. I'm not suggesting everything we do as lawmakers in Canada can be done over a computer screen, but if we can run a corporation that way, surely we can accommodate a member of Parliament who has had a child, who has family issues, who is suffering through disease and medical treatments or who has lost a loved one in their lives. Surely we can accommodate them through temporary circumstances where they require that support. That is something we can all do without compromising our respon-

sibility as legislators or our responsibility to our constituents. I think the question needs to change to start with.

Other than that, as parliamentarians we have an opportunity to lead a new standard of how Parliament works in Canada, using new technologies and using the tools we have available to us. We're not the only Parliament in the world that is going to be looking at models like this, but we've tested a model. It seems to have worked. How do we take what we've done and incorporate it going forward as a new practice?

I think we can set a standard just by what we've been through in two years to show the rest of the world how parliaments can be diversified. In doing so, we're going to attract better people to politics. I believe there's nothing wrong with the people we have now, but we all know how hard it is to get someone to run for office these days. That's a serious point. We're all—

• (1145)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I'm sorry. I only have a little bit of time so I just wanted to give the last minute to Carol.

You talked about the amount of foot surgery and you don't always know when it's going to happen. I know that's a challenge too.

Could you talk a little bit about how this opens up the opportunity for you to participate as an MP?

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Again, as I've mentioned, every party has used it and continues to use it. I don't know, again, their circumstances.

During COVID-19 I also was taking care of my grandsons, because both my daughter and my son-in-law are essential workers. She's a respiratory therapist and he's a correctional worker, so I do know what it's like to have young kids and having to balance. I understand what Madame Larouche is referring to.

We need better resources here on the Hill for child care, but when those kids start going to school—and if we have single parents as well—it's very challenging.

I firmly believe there is a role to continue with hybrid. Again, I think there needs to be specific guidelines as to who authorizes MPs to be away from Ottawa.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we have Mr. Cooper for up to five minutes. Welcome to PROC.

**Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's great to be here.

I'm going direct my questions to Tom.

One of the recurring themes we've heard about the hybrid model is that it provides an opportunity for members to participate when it's impossible or very difficult for them to be here, oftentimes due to health issues. Ms. Blaney mentioned voting, but she went on to say that it's more than voting. She said that a hybrid Parliament ensures that those members' voices are not "silenced".

I'd be interested in your comments, because I think you have a bit of a different perspective.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** It's definitely different.

I believe a hybrid Parliament will nullify that distinction between a constituency week and a sessional week, which is when you're supposed to be here doing the work of a parliamentarian. There's really one thing that a parliamentarian can do that nobody else can do from their riding, and that's cast a vote. If you want to participate in public debate, then you can go on to Twitter or Facebook. Many members do participate in Twitter debates, and I know that.

You can always participate in a public debate from the comfort of your home, if you so choose, but voting, up until hybrid Parliament, was the only thing you couldn't do. Voting is the key. It's the central role of what a parliamentarian does, which is why many of my comments are based around it.

On our work-life balance expectation, during the pandemic I chaired our meetings on Wednesdays, when two of my kids were doing hybrid school. I could see their screens diagonally from mine at the back of the room. I'd have one child in the kitchen on a stool with their computer and with their headset on, and another one in front, so that I could see what was happening on their screens. They couldn't switch their screens and start playing a video game when they were supposed to be in school. We also held back our younger child from kindergarten so that he wouldn't have to go and wear a mask in kindergarten, which I thought was pointless, so I would also have to make sure that he was not turning on the TV.

That is not work-life balance. I'm trying to parent three kids at the same time they're supposed to be in school. I'm sitting behind them trying to chair a meeting of 150 people that at any moment could go off the rails because we are Conservatives with strong opinions. The kids might not have appreciated the hard parenting.

There's another thing it will do, in my view. We all get this from our constituents. I have the second-largest riding in Canada by population size. I get invited to a lot of events and a lot of homes for dinners, and participate in community events. If I'm then told that I also have to do Zoom Parliament and participate in that, that distinction is broken. Many people will say, "I know you are busy. I know you have to travel a lot. I know you are away." Whenever possible, then, we arrange those for constituency weeks, but why do we have constituency weeks if we're going to have a hybrid Parliament model? Why don't we then sit longer? There is no distinction between the two things.

If I can do a Zoom meeting on a Sunday just to keep doing my work, that takes away the Sunday as a family day, essentially. If I can do it from a lounge at an airport, or if I can do it from a vehicle while driving... Many members have started to do that as well. They participate in Parliament from their vehicles. You can see that

someone is driving them or that they themselves are driving, their phone perched precariously somewhere in their vehicle.

There is no work-life balance possible, I don't believe, in a hybrid Parliament setting.

• (1150)

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Right.

With respect to voting, do you support a continuation of the app?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I would like to see us do away with the app and move toward pairing, where the member is empowered to pair their vote.

Madam Chair, on why I love pairing, I've sent a letter, as I said, to the previous PROC chair. This is what I believe on voting. It will force members to get to know each other across party lines. I've tried that to get to know members from other political parties and to get to know them to the level where I trust them: If I make a hand-shake agreement with them on committee business or about any other business of the House, I can trust them on the matter.

There are a few of those, I think, across all parties. I have cosponsored motions and private member's bills from members of the NDP and the Liberal Party as well. Those relationships are built over time, person to person and face to face. It's very difficult to do that in a hybrid setting, especially when you're asking me to build relationships with members of other provinces. This is a very large country. There is a huge distinction between a Conservative on the west coast and a Conservative on the east coast. The same applies to the New Democrats, the Liberal Party, the Green Party and all of us. We're very different from coast to coast.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you.

What are your thoughts on proxy voting?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I'd be open to doing a system of proxy voting. The reason I go back to pairing is that pairing already exists in the Standing Orders. You don't need to create a new standing order to create proxy voting.

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

Mr. Fergus, you have up to five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to congratulate and thank my colleagues for their testimonies. One thing I noticed in each of their stories is that, basically, they're human. The situations we experience as parliamentarians are complex. We've heard very heart-rending testimonies from Ms. Yip and Mr. Kmiec concerning their family situations, and we heard Ms. Hughes, Ms. Jones and Ms. Larouche talk about their respective challenges.

I truly enjoyed Mr. Kmiec's response to the question from my colleague Ms. Sahota, who asked him if he felt that proxy voting was a good solution. He replied that it depended. I'd actually say that that response applies to everything else as well: It depends.

We've experienced something remarkable over the last two or even three years. For health reasons, we've had to keep a distance from others. We recognize that some Canadians had jobs that required that they work in person, but many were able to work remotely. As a result, we all worked from somewhere else for a while.

In the current situation, although hybrid meetings are still possible, I see that very few members choose to not attend meetings in person. The vast majority attend in person. That's also the case around this table: all the members on this committee are here in person, and we've noticed that they have been since September.

So, to reiterate what Ms. Jones said, I feel we should use this tool in exceptional situations, in the event of something serious. It may also be something happening in our constituency. In our role as MPs, it's important for us to be here to vote and maintain fellowship, but it's also important to be there with our fellow Canadians to show our solidarity with our communities.

Ms. Jones, you explained that it was hard for you to get to Ottawa, particularly since the pandemic, because a lot fewer flights are available. Can you tell us a bit about that? It's easy for me. My constituency is on the other side of the river, so I take the 41 bus in the morning to get here. What about you?

• (1155)

[English]

**Ms. Yvonne Jones:** Thank you, MP Fergus. I appreciate the question.

When you live in a northern riding like I do—and Rachel and some of the others at the table, and many in the House of Commons—when we sign up to be a parliamentarian, we know the distances. What happens is that there are factors that change that impact our work. That's what's happening in my case, right now, with the shift in airlines and the lack of transportation capacity to get between there and Ottawa.

When I look at my schedule, other than the constituency weeks, I don't get to go to my riding on the weekends. In order to do my parliamentary duties here, I can't be in my constituency on the weekends. It's physically impossible, based on the airline schedules and how I have to travel to get there and get back. I need that extra day in order to be able to do that. Is that an extenuating circumstance? I don't know. However, if there were a hybrid option, I could at least opt for that option one or two days out of a month, so that I would get that weekend to go back to my riding.

I see hybrid as an option for MPs who are really going through challenging and difficult circumstances. We're all human beings. We're all going to face those things in our lives, cases and stories like those everyone heard here today.

You go all over the country. Employers today are looking at how they can make a better workplace environment for their employees, how they can make a better situation for them and their families,

and get good productivity out of them on the job. We need to be doing the same as a Parliament.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that exchange.

[Translation]

Ms. Gaudreau, please ask a brief question.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Okay, Madam Chair.

Earlier, I asked a question about parliamentary responsibility and accountability. In her testimony, Ms. Larouche said that it was hard to enforce these two concepts in a hybrid Parliament. I'd like Ms. Larouche to give us a couple of examples of how the government could shirk its responsibilities in a hybrid proceedings situation.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** I'd like to point out two things.

As I said, we've seen that a hybrid Parliament created a clearer separation between the duties of Prime Minister, minister and MP. When ministers are asked about a thorny issue, they're not accountable in the same way when they are on a screen. There's the work we do during Question Period, obviously, but a MP's work doesn't end there. I'll give you an example. When I began as a MP, I had a delicate matter to handle with a department. I had to follow up on a request for a program. I was able to just walk across the House of Commons and speak directly with the minister. The lines were much more blurred as to the duties of a minister and an MP. When we work using a hybrid model, I can't have that type of discussion with a minister. However, we also play a key role as MP.

To sum up, attending sittings in person ensures that accountability, those hallway discussions and those informal meetings with members we see on Parliament Hill, for example. When we're in our constituency, we can listen to the people, but they also expect us to present their case and be their voice in Parliament.

That's the first thing I wanted to clarify.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to talk about the dual role that women are forced to take on by pitting their roles as mother and MP against each other. As I said, it's important for me to separate my private life from my work life. That's not easy with all the Zoom meetings we attend from home. It often has a negative impact on how we see our duties. When we hold hybrid meetings, there's less of a separation between work and the quality time we spend with our children. Psychologists have demonstrated that. There's a reason why so many studies have shown the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on women. Adding on more responsibilities has increased the mental burden on women. That's true for mothers, but also for some fathers, I must say. It's been hard for them to distinguish between their roles.

I'd also like to offer my condolences to my colleagues who have lost a loved one and told their stories.

• (1200)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We thank Ms. Hughes, Ms. Larouche, Mr. Kmiec and Ms. Jones for spending time with us this morning and we wish them a good day.

We'll suspend for a moment before continuing with our second panel.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1210)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I would like to welcome members back for this second panel on our study of hybrid proceedings.

[*Translation*]

Please welcome the Hon. Ted Arnott, MMP and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and the Hon. Derek Bennett, MHA and Speaker of the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly.

Mr. Arnott, we'll begin with you.

Welcome.

[*English*]

**Hon. Ted Arnott (Speaker, Legislative Assembly of Ontario):** Thank you very much, Chair Chagger.

Good afternoon. I'm Ted Arnott. I'm the member of provincial Parliament for Wellington—Halton Hills and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

I'm glad to have this opportunity to address the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in discussing our parliamentary proceedings during the COVID-19 pandemic and how we responded here at Queen's Park.

Like all Canadians who were asked to begin working from home in March of 2020, the Ontario legislature similarly adjourned its business until such time that the government House leader indicated to me, as Speaker, that it was in the public interest for members to reconvene.

When they did so, on May 12, 2020, the House adopted a motion that allowed committees to use electronic means of communication when they were authorized to resume meetings. The motion specified that committee members, witnesses and/or staff would not be required to be in the same physical place. This allowed for remote committee participation by members and staff without the need to be physically present in a committee room at Queen's Park, which was unprecedented at the time at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

While committees were authorized to meet virtually, the chamber proceedings remained in person throughout, with some modifications to the voting procedures and the number of members present in the chamber, in line with the public health advice we were receiving from Ontario's chief medical officer of health. Therefore, the bulk of this presentation will focus on committees, as they did have some hybrid components.

In total, the nine standing committees and one select committee conducted 328 meetings in the hybrid virtual format before returning to exclusively in-person meetings as of March 1, 2022, this year.

Hybrid committee meetings were still anchored in a committee room in the Legislative Building with the chair, acting chair and a committee clerk required to be physically present. Zoom was selected as the hosting platform for these hybrid committee meetings. An assembly staff from different branches worked together to conduct exhaustive testing in preparation for the change. Security, connectivity, user experience and ease were all tested at various times.

Guideline documents, manuals and tip sheets were developed for members, staff and witnesses in order to ease the transition to the new format. Each committee room was fitted with four TVs and extra cameras so that all participants in the room could view all the remote participants. In keeping with physical distancing best practices, members and staff present in the committee rooms were encouraged to sit apart from one another. Furthermore, each committee agreed that the members of the public attending as witnesses should appear virtually.

Each committee held a pre-meeting of 15 minutes before their scheduled start time for the chair to confirm the attendance of all members participating by Zoom and work out any technical difficulties that might have arisen.

All Zoom participants, excluding MPPs, were required to join an administrative confirmation meeting hosted on a separate Zoom call by a procedural services assistant. The assistant confirmed the participants' identification, conducted a technical audio and video quality check and then provided the main committee Zoom link to join the meeting. This ensured that only registered participants had access to the committee's Zoom meeting link, and it enhanced the security of the meeting.

Over time, as the use of Zoom became the norm, the role of the administrative clerk was no longer needed. However, the practice of conducting an administrative confirmation meeting for all external participants was maintained, as it had been effective in ensuring secure meetings.

Committees also began using their SharePoint site to securely distribute all relevant committee documents to members. This included written submissions, notices, agendas and even confidential committee documents. The site prompted members to log in with their personal assembly credentials to access the documents to which they would have “view only” access.

The order of the House that allowed for hybrid committee meetings provided that the chair would ensure that the Standing Orders and regular committee practices were observed to the greatest extent possible, making adjustments to committee procedures only where necessary to facilitate the physical distancing and electronic participation of members, witnesses and staff.

• (1215)

Adjusted committee procedures included the confirmation of identity and presence in Ontario. The chair was required, by order of the House, to verify the identity of members participating remotely and confirm they were physically present in Ontario, in order for them to be considered to be in attendance and part of the quorum. This was largely done during the pre-meeting, but it was also done during committee proceedings, as necessary.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Speaker Arnott.

We look forward to hearing more from you in the question-and-answer round.

I'll now go to Speaker Bennett.

**Hon. Derek Bennett (Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, Madam Chair, Speaker Arnott and other committee members.

As said, my name is Derek Bennett. I'm Speaker of the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador, and I'm also the member for the district of Lewisporte-Twillingate.

Before discussing the Newfoundland and Labrador assembly's approach to virtual proceedings, I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for the invitation to speak today. I certainly welcome the opportunity to speak about the provisions and accommodations put in place by our legislature during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the initial lockdown in Newfoundland and Labrador over COVID-19, the House met twice in person—once in March and once in May—for one-day sittings to deal with urgent legislation matters related to the pandemic. For both of these sittings, the House met with a quorum of just 10 members, along with necessary table officers and the sergeant-at-arms. We did not have any pages present. The galleries were closed to visitors, and the press gallery was restricted to half its normal capacity.

When the House met in person on May 5, 2020, it passed a motion appointing a select committee to govern virtual proceedings,

which was tasked with determining the manner in which the House may conduct virtual proceedings during the COVID-19 pandemic. The resolution provided authority for the select committee to meet virtually, in order to determine the manner in which virtual proceedings of the House may be held. It also provided that the measures recommended by the select committee and adopted by the House would apply, as appropriate, to meetings of other committees and the House of Assembly Management Commission. Prior to this, there was no authority for any virtual proceedings.

The select committee included the members of the standing orders committee, the House leaders, and one unaffiliated member. The order of reference adopted by the House provided that the select committee's report be tabled no later than July 1, 2020. Once tabled, it was deemed to have been presented to and adopted by the House of Assembly on that date.

The select committee's report included nine recommendations to provide for virtual proceedings in addition to procedural guidance on the following matters: participation; dress code and attire; background and virtual set-up; quorum; place of speaking; audio and visual functions; recognition of speakers; sitting times; points of order and privilege; admission of strangers; discipline; and voting. These provisions were in place until December 2020. However, in September 2020, the Standing Orders were changed to provide for virtual proceedings as circumstances warranted. The decision to proceed virtually is made by the Speaker in consultation with the House leaders.

Following [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] to ensure readiness from a technological, procedural and logistical perspective and that virtual proceedings could be successfully supported and facilitated, should they be required. Much of the testing focused on the integration of virtual participants with members attending in person in the chamber, as well as integration with our broadcast.

While the capabilities and authority exist for general assemblies to meet in a virtual hybrid configuration, they have never been used. However, they were used extensively by committees of the House and the management commission. The daily proceedings of the House have a fluid nature to them. As an example, oral question period is allocated in blocks of time, and the caucuses determine rotation of questions within their block. In a virtual proceeding, this fluidity is not possible.

In particular, I note the first statement in recommendation number one of the select committee's report states, “It is preferred that sittings of the House be conducted with all Members physically present.”

Since June 2020, favourable epidemiology, combined with sufficient physical space in the chamber, has allowed the Newfoundland and Labrador assembly to meet in person and all members to be accommodated. The configuration to accommodate appropriate physical distancing, in accordance with health guidelines, resulted in various versions of the seating arrangements in the House of Assembly.

Other measures to facilitate safe in-person sittings included requiring members to speak from a seated position and wear a mask when not speaking; suspending page services; adopting a resolution requiring members to be vaccinated; closing the visitors' gallery to the public; and reducing capacity in the press gallery. Further, a provisional standing order was adopted to provide for deferred voting. To date, that provision has not been used.

As we have all experienced, the COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges that required significant work and planning to enable the continued functioning of the legislature, often under tight timelines, with various unknown factors and rapidly changing circumstances.

• (1220)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Speaker Bennett, for your great words. We look forward to having an exchange with you during the question-and-answer period.

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now call on Mr. Calkins.

You have up to six minutes.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** It's Mr. Nater.

**The Chair:** Mr. Nater, welcome to PROC. You have up to six minutes.

**Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's great to be back on PROC and to be in this august chamber. Thank you, colleagues, for your faith in me as vice-chair of this wonderful committee.

Thank you to the Speakers as well, Mr. Speaker Bennett and Mr. Speaker Arnott, for joining us and for their expertise as our provincial counterparts on the matters that are before us.

I want to start with Mr. Speaker Arnott just to clarify.

Throughout the pandemic, the Legislative Assembly itself never met virtually; it was constantly in person. Could you just explain briefly what measures were taking place in terms of the numbers within the assembly during that time to ensure that it remained safe?

**Hon. Ted Arnott:** Throughout the pandemic, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario continued to sit in person as a whole when the House sat. As I said, the committees, in many cases, were sitting virtually, but the House as a whole sat in person. We had to take, of course, a long list of new approaches in order to facilitate this and make sure that it was done safely. Most days during, I would say, the worst of the pandemic, we had fewer than 30 members of provincial Parliament in the chamber at any given time. In many cases, the caucuses had taken an approach to cohort so that if COVID-19 went through a caucus, there would be a replacement group that could come in. We did the same thing with the table staff to ensure that we could carry on even if there was an outbreak of COVID-19 amongst the caucuses.

I would say that our staff were enormously creative in order to ensure that we would have the practices and procedures necessary

to be able to continue to function in person, and we were able to do so largely safely.

• (1225)

**Mr. John Nater:** Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker Arnott.

I don't want to put you on the spot or highlight how long you've been around, but you have some great experience as a member of provincial Parliament. You're now entering your fourth decade of service in the Ontario Legislative Assembly, with almost 33 years, I believe, as a member of provincial Parliament.

With your experience in that time that you have served as an MPP, I wonder if you could comment on some of the informal or unofficial roles that an MPP plays within the legislative precinct, within the "Pink Palace" as it's often called: those informal conversations in the corridors or over a cup of coffee, or grabbing a minister in and out of question period. Could you just reflect on some of the importance that you have seen over your time at Queen's Park?

**Hon. Ted Arnott:** I think you have made a very good point, John. It's hugely valuable for elected members to be able to interact in the chamber, outside of the chamber, in the corridors and in the lobbies. Having those face-to-face conversations can be very helpful in terms of ensuring that members are informed and that they're able to share best practices and ideas, as well as for members to be able to represent their constituents.

Throughout my time as a member, when I was advocating for my constituency, in many cases I would approach ministers, whether I was on the government side or whether I was on the opposition benches, and speak to them privately. That was a very important way of advancing an issue on behalf of constituents. Without that opportunity, I think it would have been far more difficult to achieve some of the things that we were able to get for our riding over the years.

**Mr. John Nater:** Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker Arnott.

I want to turn to Mr. Speaker Bennett to ask a couple of questions.

Unfortunately, your sound did cut out at one point during your presentation. It was at a point where you were talking about reverting to hybrid proceedings if the opportunity was needed. You were mentioning that it would be a decision made by the Speaker in consultation with the House leaders of the various parties. I want to follow up on that and just clarify that.

What type of decision-making process would you go through to determine whether to go back to a hybrid sitting? What would be the considerations that you, as Speaker, would make when making that decision?

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** I guess, first of all, we would consult largely with our chief medical officer to determine what the regulations and restrictions would be within the province at the time. We only have a small team, but we have a mighty team at the clerk's office that has been monitoring the health orders and restrictions throughout the process. What we would do is meet as a group first to see what regulations would be put in place. Then we also have a good, close working relationship with our government House leaders and our unaffiliated members, so we would engage with them to update them on the procedures and what our intentions would be and largely try to get their support. Ultimately, it would be our decision, but we found it was much more valuable if we communicated and had the support of all the members.

**Mr. John Nater:** As we speak, you're meeting entirely in person.

Are there any current members or parties pushing for a return to a hybrid Parliament at this point in time within Newfoundland and Labrador?

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** No, there aren't. We're very fortunate that we only have 40 members in our House of Assembly and we have a large legislature, so we were easily able to put a safe seating plan in place that kept our six-foot physical distance. We were fortunate in that matter. There hasn't been a push for it, but as I identify, we do use it largely in our committee structure, and that proved to be very valuable. We have a number of rural MHAs, some of whom live in Labrador so flying is always a concern. Therefore, within our management commission and other committees, we have used a virtual hybrid procedure much more readily.

• (1230)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Speaker Bennett.

Mr. Turnbull, we go to you for up to six minutes.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** Thanks, Madam Chair.

Thanks to both Speaker Arnott and Speaker Bennett for joining us today.

I had originally prepared a whole list of questions for Mr. Williamson because of his great research with the Inter-Parliamentary Union. I'll probably reference a few of those in my remarks and questions to Mr. Bennett and Mr. Arnott today, because I think it's interesting to see what they think, and given the fact that Mr. Williamson didn't have a headset that was good enough for us today. I'm hoping that he comes back, by the way, because I think he would provide a lot of important testimony for this study based on the research that they've done.

Mr. Bennett, I'll go to you. Do you think that the global pandemic provided a catalyst for change? I think we've seen our Parliament and all Parliaments really innovate within the pandemic, do you think it has provided a bit of an impetus or catalyst for change within Parliaments?

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** Definitely, I think so, especially with the use of virtual hybrid sittings. I guess none of us wanted to face COVID-19 or go through a pandemic, but it did provide an opportunity for all legislatures to learn, adjust and constantly evolve to the challenges that COVID-19 brought. We had our challenges with it, without a doubt, like every legislature, but our team rolled with the challenges. We came up with new and innovative ideas on how

to address those challenges, and we worked quite well with our broadcast team and other teams to ensure that we were able to have proceedings and—

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Mr. Bennett. I'm sorry. I don't mean to cut you off. I just want to ask a follow-up question.

Would you say that those tools and innovations have ongoing utility for Parliaments to consider modernizing or adding flexibilities that could benefit all MHAs, MPPs or MPs at the federal level?

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** Yes, I do think that there is the ability to use these technologies that we were forced to use over the last two years to adapt and make our legislatures more user-friendly and more family-oriented, and to deal with some of the challenges. If people have health issues or other types of challenges like travel issues, then the opportunities for hybrid virtual sittings could definitely be used in the future.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you.

In terms of business continuity planning, which I think is really important for any legislature or Parliament, we've seen in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's work and report that many Parliaments around the world had to go above and beyond the business continuity plan that they had in existence prior to the pandemic. Essentially, they've created new business continuity plans and created these innovative digital tools to help enable Parliaments right around the world to continue in the face of a major crisis, but also, certainly, to adapt and have flexibilities and modernizations within the workplace so Parliaments can be more inclusive, family-friendly, etc.

Would you agree that's a good thing to continue, Mr. Bennett?

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** Yes, I think so, definitely. Technology is constantly evolving, so I think as we continue to use virtual hybrid proceedings if necessary, the technology will further advance. I know our legislature will continue to look at upgrading systems as they evolve and utilize the system for virtual hybrid sittings where needed, particularly in the committees mostly. Like I say, we have a vast province and the technology is expensive to use, but there are also cost savings that can be seen for travel and other expenses in the cost to bring members to our capital city.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Mr. Arnott, would you agree with Mr. Bennett's sentiments? Has the Ontario legislature updated its business continuity plan?

If you were to experience another pandemic or a major crisis of some kind, do you think you would be able to utilize the tools and innovations you developed during the pandemic to quickly pivot to hybrid proceedings?

• (1235)

**Hon. Ted Arnott:** First of all, I would indicate that I agree with Speaker Bennett and the comments he just made.

The Ontario legislature does have a robust business continuity plan, which we have worked on over the years. It is ready to go, if ever needed.

We also would agree and concur that, as technology continues to evolve and give us opportunities to bring people together, the legislatures will continue to evolve. I would add this as well. It's up to the individual legislature, including the House of Commons or the Senate, to make its own decision. I wouldn't want to suggest that it's up to me to decide.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you for that. I appreciate that.

This is my last question.

We all agree that it's preferred, and many of us would prefer, to be here in person, yet there are extenuating circumstances. We've heard this from members of Parliament today, but we've also heard it in previous meetings. People have major health issues. They are travelling great distances. They have caregiver responsibilities. They're grieving a lost loved one. Are these circumstances in which...?

Although they would prefer to be here physically, should we be enabling and including, and not excluding, those members of Parliament, MPPs or MHAs, from participating in debate? Quickly, would you agree with that?

**Hon. Ted Arnott:** Who is that addressed to?

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** It is to Mr. Bennett and then Mr. Arnott.

**The Chair:** I don't hear an answer.

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** I'm sorry—

**The Chair:** Answer really quickly, because our time is up.

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** Our legislature, right now, does it as a collective group, not individual cases.

I do see it being valuable in the future, but for the Newfoundland and Labrador legislature it is a collective decision, right now, to use virtual hybrid.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Good afternoon, Mr. Bennett and Mr. Arnott. I don't know if you remember me, but we met in Charlottetown and Halifax. I'm very happy to have had the opportunity to meet with you in person.

Here, we have an example of arrangements made for a very short committee meeting. As we've just seen, there are a few technical difficulties.

That said, based on your expertise, I'd like to hear your thoughts on what the Speaker of the House of Commons, Mr. Anthony Rota, said when he appeared before our committee a few weeks ago.

Let me explain. We're increasingly seeing that representation is a multi-faceted issue. We have committees, of course, and we have the House of Commons. I feel like we're starting to figure out engagement and accountability. The Speaker of the House of Com-

mons said that if the hybrid format were to be used permanently in Parliament, the parameters or circumstances for remote attendance would need to be established.

I'd like you to speak to that, based on your expertise. At the same time, it will answer Mr. Turnbull's question about what measures were feasible.

Who wants to respond first? I'll just pick one of you: Go ahead, Mr. Bennett.

[*English*]

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** You have my apologies. I missed a lot of your preamble and the question.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I'll summarize. If we set parameters in the House of Commons—

Are you hearing the interpretation?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Do you have interpretation, Speaker Bennett? At the bottom, you can choose the language you want to listen to.

Do you have it on English?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** In our meeting, it wasn't possible to learn enough French.

[*English*]

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** I do have it.

**The Chair:** Are you hearing Madame Gaudreau in English?

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** I am hearing in English. I just could not hear because the volume is very low. I have everything turned up on high.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Did you understand the question?

[*English*]

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** I didn't catch the question. I'm sorry.

**The Chair:** Okay.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I'll be even more brief. I hope you will take this into account for my time, Madam Chair.

I'd very respectfully like to draw on your expertise as speaker of a legislative assembly.

The Speaker of the House of Commons appeared before us and said if hybrid sittings were to become more or less permanent, we would need to set parameters and define the circumstances surrounding remote attendance.

I'd like to hear from you on that.

Go ahead, Mr. Bennett.

[*English*]

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** I think I caught most of it. I guess you were asking about the parameters around the feasibility and the use of hybrid in the long term for the House of Assembly.

From Newfoundland and Labrador's point of view, we do see the value of the hybrid opportunities that exist. From a financial point of view, it definitely has been a valuable resource that we've been using over the last two years, particularly within our committee structure. However, we have been able to adapt to utilizing it within the House of Assembly as a whole, if needed.

I'm not sure if I'm answering your question. I'll be honest with you, I find the translation very low. I'm going to resort to my clerk for a second. I don't know if she's hearing any better.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Can we do the necessary checks, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes. In the meantime, do you have any questions for Mr. Arnott?

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** I'm actually putting the same question to Mr. Arnott, but I'd like Mr. Bennett to be able to hear us properly.

Go ahead, Mr. Arnott.

[*English*]

**Hon. Ted Arnott:** Thank you very much for the question.

Yes, without question, as discussions continue on the advantages and disadvantages of hybrid Parliament and making it a more permanent feature of how we do our business, I think it would be essential that parameters be developed.

In the context of the Ontario legislature, if such a discussion were to take place, it would be the House leaders from the various recognized parties who would take the lead. The Speaker and the staff of the assembly would provide support to ensure that the discussions were fruitful. Probably, there would be involvement by a standing committee of the legislature.

Ideally, if such a course of action were pursued, it would be best if none of the parties sought partisan advantage but looked to the broader interests of Parliament in terms of the development of those parameters.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** That's very broad. If you think of other responses to my question later, we would greatly appreciate if you could forward them, if possible. We could then consider them in preparing our report, which will be released in the coming weeks.

Earlier, we heard testimony about accommodations to facilitate meeting attendance. Those who testified talked more about circumstances that had had a considerable impact on them and their family. Those are exceptional circumstances. Otherwise, if elected members must sit in person, do your assemblies provide all the

amenities needed to encourage parents to become members, so as to ensure parliamentary succession in your institutions?

I invite Mr. Arnott to answer the question.

[*English*]

**Hon. Ted Arnott:** I'm not sure that we've done enough at the legislature to support members with young families, for starters. My wife and I have raised three children, and we went through this as a family as well through the years. Our boys are now grown, but it is very difficult and challenging for members who have young families to be away from home so much. I think the legislature needs to continue to find ways to support those members who have young families.

You're right. There are situations and occurrences where members who would want to be otherwise present in the chamber for debates, for votes and for the other participation opportunities, including committee service, might not be able to because of a family emergency, a health issue, any number of things, including an issue in the riding that compels them to be home.

This is something that all members have to deal with on a regular basis. I know that all members would want to be physically present to fully participate, but there are situations and occurrences that arise to make that impossible from time to time. I think there should be acceptance and awareness on both sides of the House on that in, again, not trying to seek partisan advantage when someone's sick.

• (1245)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Speaker Arnott.

Now we'll go to Madam Blaney for up to six minutes.

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

I'm very grateful to hear from the Speakers today—of course, with special recognition to Speaker Bennett. We spent some time together in Turkey not too long ago, recognizing the incredible sacrifice of Newfoundlanders and the last section of the Trail of the Caribou. I want to thank you for being here. It's good to see you again.

I think one of the biggest changes that we could have never expected was COVID-19. We all had to respond to it very rapidly. I'm going to ask both of you the same question. I'm just wondering if you could talk a little bit about the impactful lessons of a hybrid Parliament and committee. What were the best practices that you found? How did it assist in terms of adapting and modernizing the system to deal with the pandemic, but also just to move forward in the future?

I will start with Speaker Bennett.

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** Good afternoon. It was great seeing you in Turkey. It was quite the memorable event.

Yes, COVID-19 obviously was a great learning lesson for all legislatures. I'm quite sure, like Newfoundland and Labrador, it was constantly evolving and changing. That was not only for us with the legislature, but for an election, when we had to revert to alert level five one day before our election was called. There were some great lessons to learn. As I said, we only had a small group to work with, but we constantly evolved and improved our systems as new challenges were faced.

I guess some best practices evolved.... Obviously, the virtual hybrid sitting opened up lots of opportunities for us to increase our meetings—committee meetings and things like that—which before was very challenging. With committee meetings, with such a large province, even though small in numbers, travel for members was always very difficult, especially when the House wasn't sitting. As a result of the virtual hybrid and some of the changes we made to our legislature, we've readily adapted that procedure—and I guess things evolved as it evolved.

It's been a great experience. We learn and we continue to learn from it, and we'll continue to use this virtual hybrid sitting.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you so much.

Speaker Arnott.

**Hon. Ted Arnott:** We, as a legislature, continued to sit in person, as I've said before, but the standing committees in many cases were sitting virtually.

I think the primary benefit of virtual committees was that we were able to accommodate a large number of presentations from across the province, where people could participate virtually who otherwise perhaps couldn't, especially with the difficulty with travel and the various travel restrictions and public health advisories that were upon us.

I also think that those best practices can be carried forward, again assuming that the House wants them to, and assuming that members on all sides of the House believe that it would be prudent and advantageous to do so.

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

I think we're hearing really clearly from most people that there should be some sort of criteria for why people could be away and participate virtually. I think of testimony several days ago from one of the MPs who talked about being pregnant and not being allowed to travel toward the end of her pregnancy, and what a difference it made for her to be able to continue to participate virtually, even though her health concerns made it impossible for her to be here.

I'm wondering if either of you have any thoughts on how this tool could be used to create a more inclusive environment, so that people who might be limited in their participation can participate.

Our voice in Parliament is a reflection of the people we serve. Making sure that voice is heard...we have to find the ways to do that. When we hit the pandemic, of course, one of the most important parts was how we could hold the government to account and how we could make sure our constituents' voices were heard.

I'm wondering, within the work you do, if you could share your thoughts on this. I'll start again with Speaker Bennett.

• (1250)

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** Thank you very much.

Right now, as I said earlier, we do it as a collective group. There is no ability right now within our Standing Orders for members to choose to be virtual because of health reasons or family reasons. However, it's something that has been considered, and we will be reviewing it again over the coming weeks and months to see how we can be, I guess, more inclusive and make sure that every member of the House of Assembly is able to represent the people of their districts.

We put a revision in our Standing Orders so that we allow children—infants—into the House of Assembly, should there be a parent who needs to care for a child. Since we implemented that, we've had two infants in our House of Assembly, which were definitely a welcome joy to the House.

However, as of right now, our Standing Orders do not allow for one-off types of requests.

**Hon. Ted Arnott:** The situation is similar in Ontario, but it's also been exciting for all of us as members to see some of the members who have recently become parents bringing their infant children into the chamber. We've had that on a number of occasions, and it's been welcomed by members on all sides of the House.

However, I think, again, that the issue is still participation and the ability of members to represent their constituents and participate fully. This is a discussion that all of us in our respective Parliaments need to have.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Monsieur Berthold.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank the two witnesses, who are speakers in a legislative assembly, for being here.

Mr. Bennett, can you hear me okay?

[*English*]

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** I can hear translation. It's very low, though.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Okay, I'll speak slowly.

Mr. Bennett and Mr. Arnott, I have an important question for you.

The committee is preparing to make a recommendation on the future of the parliamentary system. In other words, we'll try to determine whether we should keep the hybrid format or if we must have in-person meetings only.

You are experienced parliamentarians, so I'd like to hear your thoughts.

Must consent be obtained from all parties sitting in the House of Commons or a legislative assembly for this type of change to be applied, or can it be imposed by a government majority or by a simple vote?

I think it's a question we have to ask and that merits further consideration.

We'll begin with you, Mr. Arnott.

[*English*]

**Hon. Ted Arnott:** Again, I'm not really in a position to provide direction to the House of Commons or the Senate on this question. I think the members need to—

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Answer just for your assembly. Could that kind of change have been made by consensus or by imposing the majority of the government?

**Hon. Ted Arnott:** I think every Speaker would want to see discussions taking place involving all members, ideally, or their representatives through their House leaders and whips. Ideally, there would be a consensus determined based on honest discussion, the public interest and the interest of Parliament as a whole, with no government or opposition party trying to seek short-term partisan advantage in the discussions or the final decision that would be made.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you.

I'll let you answer, Mr. Bennett.

[*English*]

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** Thank you.

Very similarly, at the Newfoundland and Labrador legislature, we had a very in-depth discussion on this. However, as I alluded to in my opening notes, it was the recommendation of the select committee that it be preferred that all members be present when we were sitting in the House of Assembly.

As for the committee meetings, they worked quite well, but we have a smaller legislation with 40 members.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Mr. Bennett, in your remarks, you mentioned that the hybrid formula could hinder the flow of debates. Can you explain in more detail how that could negatively affect the flow of debates in an assembly or parliament?

[*English*]

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** It is very challenging as a Speaker to monitor a virtual hybrid setting. We looked at various scenarios if we

did move to that model. We did consult heavily with the House leaders and also the unaffiliated members.

We felt that we would have to move to much more structured proceedings where everything was scripted. We would know who would be speaking, which order they would be speaking in and also the full proceedings of the day. It wouldn't allow for members to rise to speak without our having previous notice.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Mr. Arnott, can you tell me why the Legislative Assembly of Ontario was so hesitant about the idea of a hybrid system?

Your assembly ultimately decided to continue sitting in person. Why did Ontario MPPs decide that?

[*English*]

**Hon. Ted Arnott:** I think it was the decision of the House to continue to sit in person. There would be individual members who might have strongly favoured continuing to sit in person and perhaps others who would have preferred to have given greater consideration to a hybrid model. In the final analysis, its final decision was to continue.

I think it's fair to say that as the Speaker of the legislature, as well as the staff of the assembly, we were prepared to look at various alternatives if the House determined that it was necessary. In the end, the House decided to carry on in person with fewer members and with public health advice brought into the building, hopefully in a way that ensured that members and staff would be safe.

Unfortunately, it restricted access to the general public much of the time. All of that is now evolving. Now that we're into the fall, we're allowing more people back in the building.

I see that the chair is wanting to cut me off.

**The Chair:** I was just so overwhelmed with everything being shared.

I know that Mrs. Romanado wanted to get to her five minutes of questioning.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Through you, I'd like to welcome our two witnesses.

I'm going to be sharing my time with Mr. Gerretsen, so I'll be quick.

I would be remiss not to mention that this morning history was made in Quebec when two MNAs were sworn in by video conference to the new National Assembly. One MNA is expecting very shortly and her husband, who is also an MNA, was sworn in as well. I'd like to say that provincial legislatures are making accommodations to include the one-offs.

In that regard, we currently have hybrid Parliament provisions until the end of June 2023. As you can see, every member of this committee is physically in the room. The option to participate in a hybrid way or virtually is there, but as you can see, most of us choose to be here.

I understand that both provincial legislatures do not have that provision right now—both Newfoundland-Labrador and Ontario. In a case where you had an elected official who could not physically go to the legislature, would that not be a breach of their parliamentary privilege? If so, what accommodations could you make for them to be able to, should they have a case of illness or if they had COVID and didn't want to infect their colleagues?

Either Speaker can comment.

**Hon. Ted Arnott:** I can go first.

The Legislative Assembly of Ontario does not currently empower the Speaker to give that authorization to members. The Speaker doesn't have that authority.

• (1300)

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Speaker Bennett.

**Hon. Derek Bennett:** Likewise, in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Speaker doesn't have the authority to do that. It would have to come from the House Assembly.

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

I'll cede the rest of my time to Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Thank you, Ms. Romanado.

Mr. Arnott, my question would be for you. I understand that you spent a long time in the Ontario legislature, dating back to 1990. You've seen a lot of people come and go since then, including somebody who shares the same last name I do, whom you probably got to know over the years. You've had an opportunity obviously to build camaraderie with individuals from across the way as well as with individuals within your own party.

We had some testimony prior to the two of you joining us to the effect that we would run the risk of not being able to create and build that camaraderie if we were to all suddenly engage in hybrid ways of communicating like this in which we wouldn't have the opportunity to mix and mingle, to sit down for lunch together and to talk amongst ourselves off-line so to speak. I'm curious, given your extensive time serving in the provincial legislature, as to whether you see that as a risk and, if you do, whether you provide any ways to try to mitigate that and to ensure it doesn't happen.

**Hon. Ted Arnott:** Thank you for the question. Yes, I would agree that the participation of members in the legislature is enhanced by their opportunities to speak to each other face to face. Camaraderie is one word; perhaps we could use collegiality. I think if individual people get to know each other across party lines, it can only add to the decorum within Parliament and also to the ability perhaps of the residents who are watching to see meaningful debate as opposed to debate degenerating into insults. There is a huge advantage in my opinion.

We've had to go through this in the last two and a half or almost three years in our society. It's not just in Parliament or in legislatures. Communication using virtual approaches is a big challenge. I do think we've done the best we could, but I would agree that when people get together face to face, that allows them to get to know each other better and allows for, I think, more discussion and dialogue.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** To that end, if I may follow up on that, would you agree then that the general use of a hybrid Parliament, if it were to function on a permanent basis, should be reserved for the exception? Should it be reserved for when people are sick and cannot come, and should not be the default that people use but should be reserved and utilized for the exceptions, for when people need to use it for various different reasons, personal or professional?

**Hon. Ted Arnott:** Again that's a question for the House of Commons and the Senate and the individual legislatures to decide, recognizing that there are advantages to what you're suggesting.

**The Chair:** That's excellent.

That brings us to the end of our time together.

Madame Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Madam Chair, I'd like to take 20 seconds to express my discontent.

When we spoke in French, we were limited, people were talking and it was bothersome. It shouldn't be that way. Despite the excellent work of the interpreters, who I thank, not only could I not hear the witnesses' answers, unfortunately, but they could not clearly hear my questions being interpreted in the other language. I wanted to mention that.

Since the committee will be welcoming other witnesses virtually, I suggest that in the future, a test be conducted to ensure that the witnesses can hear the interpretation properly.

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

I have already advised the clerk and asked that he find the source of the problems. Normally, if someone doesn't have the required headset, they shouldn't appear on our screen. There's already a verification process in place, but something went wrong today. We'll find the answers to these problems and share them with our subcommittee.

[*English*]

With that, I just want—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Chair, I'd like to quickly add something.

Earlier, I had a question for Mr. Bennett, but he couldn't hear it. If you remember correctly, Madam Chair, when I asked the two witnesses why members of their respective assemblies were so hesitant about the idea of adopting a hybrid formula, Mr. Bennett unfortunately had technical difficulties and couldn't answer the question. If he could send us a response in writing, we would greatly appreciate it. I don't want to ask the question again and risk having more interpretation issues.

• (1305)

**The Chair:** Yes, I have taken note of that.

[English]

We will definitely make sure that—

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I didn't mean to cut you off, Chair. I was just trying to get on the speakers list to raise a similar point related to this.

Obviously, we had Mr. Williamson scheduled to be here today. His quality of sound was not good enough. Could he also submit written responses to the questions that I had prepared for him? I think it's only fair that, if others can do that, I'm sure Andy Williamson should be given the same opportunity.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

On the technical issues regarding translation and so forth, we are going to make sure, first of all, to find out what happened, because it's an issue for me. It's something I take very seriously, as do all members.

We would love to hear from the Speakers who have joined us today and for them to provide us those answers. I'll ask the clerk to perhaps provide the official transcript once it's out to both of you to

make sure that you can provide us any additional content, because we would like to have that.

On the point that Mr. Turnbull raised, Mr. Williamson, as we were suspended, shared that he had submitted a brief to us in writing. The clerk will confirm it. If there are follow-up questions, we have no problem sharing those, but as I said to him, yes, he is more than welcome to send more information.

I also want to repeat that we are going to see if we can have him join again before the conclusion of this study.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I understand he submitted some remarks, but I had specific questions for him. Can I send those questions along to have him submit written answers to those questions? If that is the case, that's great. If he were to appear, that's even better, but I also know that the committee's schedule is tight and he may not be able to be rescheduled.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Turnbull. Yes, you can send them to the clerk, and I'll offer it to all members.

If you would like to send Mr. Williamson questions, they can be submitted to the clerk and the clerk will submit them to Mr. Williamson. The clerk will get back to us within, I would say, a week to confirm if Mr. Williamson is coming. Otherwise, we'll put in a deadline to providing questions, so he can respond in ample time.

With that, I hope everybody keeps well and safe, and we'll see you on Thursday.

Thank you so much to our guests.

The meeting is adjourned.

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