



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Board of Internal Economy

TRANSCRIPT

NUMBER 015

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Thursday, November 17, 2022



Board of Internal Economy

Thursday, November 17, 2022

• (1105)

[English]

Hon. Anthony Rota (Speaker of the House of Commons): We'll get started. This is meeting number 15.

We'll start with item number 1, which is the minutes of the previous meeting.

[Translation]

Would anyone like to comment on the minutes of the previous meeting?

As no one wishes to comment, we will go to item 2.

[English]

It's business arising from previous meetings.

[Translation]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Bloc Québécois Whip): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask two follow-up questions about page 2 of the November 3 minutes, but first I want to commend you for all the letters you have written to the various partners to raise awareness about the interpreters' working conditions and ways to prevent interpreter injuries.

We have asked the translation bureau to give us a clear idea of what additional resources they will be able to provide, given that they are recruiting new accredited freelance interpreters who can work remotely.

Has the translation bureau responded?

Hon. Anthony Rota: No, we haven't received anything yet.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, you have the patience of a saint.

It really doesn't make sense to me that the translation bureau doesn't respond to requests from the Board of Internal Economy and won't give us a clear picture of the resources it has. I recall the chief government whip's and government House leader's enthusiasm when the translation bureau's acting president and CEO informed us that they had hired new interpreters.

We thought our problems were going to be resolved, but I see that not only are they not resolved, but we still have not heard back from the translation bureau. What can we do to pressure the translation bureau to respond to the Board of Internal Economy's request?

Hon. Anthony Rota: That's a very good question.

We've asked the translation bureau several times to report back to us. Whether it's good or bad news, I'd like to know what's happening.

Since Mr. Patrice is discussing this with the translation bureau, perhaps he can better answer you. I will turn the floor over to him.

Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We followed up again this week and the translation bureau has promised us a response by tomorrow at the latest, but that remains to be seen.

With your permission, I could ask Mr. Aubé, Mr. Lemoine and Mr. McDonald to join us. They had discussions and a meeting with the translation bureau earlier this week about the resources that the bureau plans to provide to the House over the next few weeks and into January. My colleagues could give you do a verbal report on those discussions.

Hon. Anthony Rota: It would be nice to get some answers and know what's happening.

Mr. McDonald, you have the floor.

Mr. Ian McDonald (Clerk Assistant, Committees and Legislative Services Directorate , House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In your information packet, you have a letter on the discussions we had late Tuesday with our partners at Interpretation Services.

At the last meeting of the Board of Internal Economy, you asked a question related to the House sitting until midnight. Interpretation Services confirmed that, for now, its resources remain the same. It's in the process of marking accreditation exams for new candidates, it's in negotiations and it will be hiring more freelancers as well. However, all of these are still in progress and it will be several weeks before we have more information about them.

In the meantime, we're currently establishing a new process for providing the whips by noon on Fridays with an idea of the resources available for the following week. As always, we'll do an analysis with all our partners on a day-to-day basis. There could be changes between Friday and the following week, but in any event, we'll give this information to the whips on Fridays so that the parties can make decisions that depend on resource availability as quickly as possible.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: The acting president and CEO of the translation bureau had talked about 30 interpreters, but my understanding is that it's more like 12 new interpreters who must complete the accreditation process before they are put on active duty. However, I find the processes quite lengthy, given the urgency of interpreting needs.

Next Thursday, I believe my colleague Mr. MacKinnon is going to be happy, because it may be the last time we talk about this situation on the Board of Internal Economy. We will have some answers and some problems will be resolved. At the very least, we'll have a better idea of when the problems will be resolved.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, there was an incident this week. For those who do not already know, I want to let the members of the Board of Internal Economy know that a member of the Bloc Québécois, Mrs. Vignola, suffered an acoustic shock during a committee meeting. The shock caused her to experience tinnitus and dizziness for 24 hours. She has since recovered and is doing better, but she was lucky. She was in the committee room and wearing her headset. However, the volume was so low at one point that her reflex was to turn it all the way up, and when the sound volume returned to normal she experienced acoustic shock because the volume of her earpiece was still all the way up.

It's normal we have some sound issues, because we're working with equipment. However, I want to make sure that all the equipment we use in the in-person meeting rooms is also adequate, so that we don't experience acoustic shock and sound issues.

Despite the very encouraging findings of the experts, who agree that the House of Commons audiovisual system is adequate, the fact remains that we have frequently experienced sound issues since Monday. In addition to Mrs. Vignola's acoustic shock, we've noticed a lot of sound and interpretation-related issues at our committee meetings this week.

So I'm wondering what more we can do to prevent further injury for interpreters or members who attend meetings in person in the committee rooms, especially since we now know that these issues are not caused by the system.

• (1110)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Aubé, I believe you should answer this question.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, we take that incident seriously. As you know, we believe that people's health and safety is important. I have reviewed the incident and I did see what happened to Mrs. Vignola. We have checked the console on site and, so far, have not found any problems. Tomorrow, representatives from Bosch, the

supplier of the products, have been invited to come to the site to do further checks. I'm meeting with them and my team to do these additional tests, validate our results and make sure all systems are working properly.

As you say, these risks were there in the past. When these incidents occur, however, we need to take them seriously and make sure we protect the people using the equipment. Mrs. Vignola's incident happened in the committee room when no one was participating virtually. So we can't blame the hybrid mode of participation in this case.

With respect to remote participation in meetings, we want to continue to work with you to make clear decisions. When participant sound is not good, we don't want to put the health and safety of interpreters at risk. We want to work with you to find a way to tighten up our rules and ensure that participants have the right equipment and work environment so that sound is excellent for interpreters and those attending in person.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the last item I wanted to follow up on is the decision we made regarding ground transportation between the secondary residence and a normal place of work. This is on page 3 of the November 3 minutes.

Is this decision effective on the date it was made? Will this information be shared with all members?

Hon. Anthony Rota: Yes, the decision has taken effect. However, I don't know if or when this information was released.

I will turn the floor over to Mr. Patrice so he can answer your question.

Mr. Michel Patrice: The communiqué is going out tomorrow to all MPs.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: So we can announce it next week.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Absolutely.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Perfect. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Thank you, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Mr. Julian, you now have the floor.

Mr. Peter Julian (House Leader, New Democratic Party): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I agree with Mrs. DeBellefeuille. The letters we received prior to the meeting talk about the factors related to interpretation and the fact that their impact will not be known until the new year. I'm concerned about that because our needs are truly urgent. Parliamentarians and interpreters have been affected, and the incident with the interpreter in the Senate is of great concern to us, and rightly so.

I feel it's extremely important that we have a report on this at every Board of Internal Economy meeting. We can't wait until the new year. We need to have an update at every meeting, to be able to follow up, and I just wanted to make sure that can be done.

What are your thoughts, Mr. McDonald?

• (1115)

Mr. Ian McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

We will certainly provide the information to the Board of Internal Economy when we have it. We update our partners on a daily basis. So we will be prepared to provide updates at each meeting.

Based on the information we received from the translation bureau, some of these tasks will not be completed until the House adjourns. One example is the marking of accreditation exams for new interpreters, which were held several weeks ago, but which must be marked by the interpreters who work in the House and at its committee meetings. Therefore, the results of these exams will not be available until the House adjourns.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay, thank you.

Does that mean that these new interpreters have already taken the exam?

Mr. Ian McDonald: Based on what we were told, yes, they've taken the exam. However, they still need to assess or correct—I'm not sure what the right term is—those exams, and that will be done by the same interpreters who work for committees and the House and are busy at the moment providing support for parliamentary activities. So the exams will be corrected after the House adjourns.

Mr. Peter Julian: This is urgent, I think everyone can agree on that.

People have already taken the exam, and those exams are now sitting on a shelf somewhere, waiting to be corrected by interpreters who are already overworked. Since no new interpreters have been added to the team yet, those exams will not be marked before the end of the session.

It sounds to me like there's a problem, because those who have passed the exam could start working right away. It would take pressure off the current team of interpreters.

In my opinion, they should make marking those exams a priority. What can be done to get the exams marked this week rather than in a few weeks?

Mr. Ian McDonald: We can only relay the information we've received to the Board of Internal Economy. This process is entirely the translation bureau's responsibility, and its representatives are in the best position to answer these questions.

I should also point out that I don't know how the translation bureau will go about hiring interpreters who pass the exam. Will they even accept the translation bureau's offer? If they do, they will still need to go through a process afterwards.

Mr. Peter Julian: I understand, but—

Hon. Anthony Rota: I'll interrupt you, if I may, Mr. Julian. I know that Mr. Patrice has been very involved in this matter.

Mr. Patrice, is there anything else you would like to say?

Mr. Michel Patrice: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's true, we've been very involved in this matter. Last week, I met with the deputy minister of the department responsible for interpreters to escalate the issue and discuss short- and medium-term solutions. I share your concerns and I'm committed to having further meetings so I can better understand the dynamics and issues at the translation bureau.

As Mr. McDonald pointed out, the bureau informed us that approximately 70 people have taken the exam and that the exams have yet to be marked. That said, we have no guarantee that those who pass the exam will work for the translation bureau, as people often use their accreditation with the bureau to offer their services elsewhere. In addition, it's my understanding that once accredited, new interpreters will have to go through other steps in addition to training before they can be placed in the heat of the action in Parliament.

We will need to have further discussions on this with the translation bureau. I'm committed to doing so quickly and to providing updates at all Board of Internal Economy meetings on the progress and content of the discussions.

• (1120)

Mr. Peter Julian: Once a candidate passes the exam, how long does it take to train them before they can begin working as an interpreter?

Mr. Michel Patrice: I'm unable to answer that, because I don't have the information. However, I can ask the translation bureau about their training and integration program for new interpreters.

Mr. Peter Julian: It would be very helpful to have this information for the next BOIE meeting, because there are almost 70 candidates who have passed the exam who could be hired. There is a shortage of interpreters, which means that the Chamber's interpreters are overworked. We owe it to them, who do an extraordinary job supporting our bilingual Parliament, to speed up the process so that other interpreters can join their team. I understand that there are human resources and administrative considerations, but the process could be expedited. If it's just a matter of marking exams and training, let's get it done as quickly as possible, because this relief could help us. Those are my comments, Mr. Patrice, and I thank you for your answers.

Mr. Aubé, I have read your letter and I thank you for it. Regarding sound quality, you conclude that “all parties agreed that the major areas of concern that had previously been highlighted in the October 2021 NRCC [National Research Council] report have been resolved”.

Who are the parties you are referring to, and have interpreters and their representatives been involved in this assessment?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: As we mentioned at the last meeting, during the tests in October, we invited people from the translation bureau, since it was the bureau that had mandated the National Research Council of Canada to carry out these tests.

Management representatives, who came here to present the council's report and the concerns raised, participated in the meeting. So the meeting was attended by representatives of the House of Commons, our consultants, representatives of the council, as well as representatives of the translation bureau, some of whom were also interpreters who had participated in or attended these tests.

Mr. Peter Julian: However, the interpreters' union was not involved.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: No, Mr. Julian. We did not involve the interpreters' union in this context, because this is a matter for the translation bureau and us. We involved the translation bureau to ensure that they could see the results of these tests and comment on them.

Mr. Peter Julian: I have one final comment to make, Mr. Speaker. It seems to me that it would be extremely important to consult the interpreters' union, given the few serious accidents that have occurred and the important contribution that interpreters make to our parliamentary life. We must also remember that the hybrid sittings of Parliament, which are a valuable tool for us, depend on the health and safety of our interpreters. It would therefore be important to carry out these consultations.

• (1125)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Aubé, is there anything you would like to add?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Julian, when we did the first tests, we consulted the union through the management side, because I know that the translation bureau has regular meetings with the interpreters' union.

When the last report is completed and translated—we believe it will be done this week—we will certainly submit it to the translation bureau representatives. If they want to invite us to their meeting, we will attend to answer their questions.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any other questions or comments?

As there are none, we will move on to item 3.

[*English*]

It's the accessibility plan 2023-25.

[*Translation*]

Mr. LaPerrière-Marcoux, you have the floor.

Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux (Director, Accessibility Implementation, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am here today to seek the Board of Internal Economy's approval of the proposed House of Commons "Accessibility Plan 2023–2025", which must be published no later than December 31, 2022, under the Accessible Canada Act the Accessible Canada Regulations.

I am also here to request permanent funding for the implementation of the plan and ensure compliance with the act, and to request temporary funding to complete the initiatives identified in the plan.

[*English*]

In terms of context, the goal of the act is to create a Canada without barriers by 2040, especially for persons with disabilities. This is to be achieved through the identification and removal of barriers and the prevention of new ones.

The plan should demonstrate the House's commitment and accountability to any person who deals with the organization. A feedback process should be set up to receive and respond to comments, and yearly progress reports will need to be prepared and published.

The act established Accessibility Standards Canada to develop national accessibility standards. Accessibility Standards Canada has established several committees that are developing standards to remove barriers in several different priority areas. A commissioner of accessibility was also appointed last spring and is responsible for the compliance and enforcement of the act and regulations, notably through the conduct of investigations and the issuance of orders.

[*Translation*]

In keeping with the principle of "Nothing without us", which is central to all the work we do on accessibility, people with disabilities must contribute to decisions related to the preparation of accessibility plans. We have therefore consulted with MPs and their staff, administration staff, parliamentary partners, people with disabilities and groups representing them.

An anonymous survey was sent to the House of Commons community last spring and over 240 responses were received. We also held 14 small group workshops with people with disabilities to identify the barriers they face in their daily lives and what we should prioritize in the plan. We also had the same type of workshops and discussions with five advocacy groups that represent individuals with disabilities.

[*English*]

The plan itself contains over 60 initiatives to be implemented in the next three years, initiatives addressing barriers identified during consultation and covering the required areas described in the act, with a focus on culture change and training. The initiatives include new offerings of accessibility training for members, their staff and House employees on general awareness; accessibility training for managers and supervisors; training on accessible customer service for members' staff; communications awareness strategies and campaigns; key employment policies and process review; and new advice services to members on HR processes, office environments and web and non-web products.

We also have more than 20 initiatives to improve the built environment, from emergency procedures to washroom accessibility, with a commitment to ensuring that accessibility continues to be a priority in the rehabilitation of Centre Block.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

As examples, the plan includes an assessment of captioning options for visitors to the galleries, research and testing of various assistive technologies, an assessment of the resources needed to provide sign language interpretation for some House business, various initiatives to promote the use of plain language, improved orientation and support for witnesses in committee, and the launch of a centralized, multidisciplinary contact service centre for members and their staff.

[*English*]

In terms of resourcing needs, to oversee the implementation of the plan and ensure compliance with the act and regulations, it is proposed that a permanent accessibility secretariat be established with an annual operational budget of \$50,000 and staffed with two positions.

We are also asking for temporary funding for fiscal year 2023-24. It is proposed that four temporary full-time equivalents be approved to complete the list of initiatives identified in the first year of the plan and to begin implementing the initiatives to be completed in the second and third years.

[*Translation*]

This concludes my presentation for today.

I thank you for your time and attention and I am ready to answer your questions.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Julian, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Then we'll go on to Mr. Scheer.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. LaPerrière-Marcoux.

I see in the document that some organizations were consulted, but there are no national paraplegic associations or provincial federations. I would like to know if this list is complete. Were there any other consultations that were carried out that are not on the list? It would be interesting to know.

[*English*]

My second question is a much more lengthy one. It is about what we will eventually see at Centre Block.

First, having worked with members of Parliament who are disabled, I think the obstacles for them to move around the precinct and move into the House have been clear to all of us. I'm looking at the end goal, which is when the Centre Block renovation is complete. What will that mean for a member of Parliament who is in a wheelchair? What will that mean for a member of Parliament who is blind or visually impaired in terms of changes? What will that mean for a member of Parliament who is deaf? We have had deaf representatives at the provincial level; we've only one at the federal level who is hard of hearing.

I'd be interested in what you see as the end goal for those members of Parliament.

It's the same question for a visitor in a wheelchair, a visitor who is blind or visually impaired, or a visitor who is deaf, severely hard of hearing or deafened. It would be interesting for us to see, conceptually, what differences there will be over the course of the next few years when the Centre Block renovation is complete.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux: Thank you for your questions, Mr. Julian.

First of all, the list in the plan includes all the agencies that we consulted. We requested many consultations from the organizations. We sent out several invitations and were able to meet with five organizations. Of course, the consultation work is ongoing and constant. We want to establish links with several organizations and continue the consultations. These are certainly organizations that we will want to consult with in the future.

I will now answer your second question. For the Centre Block rehabilitation project, we have made accessibility a priority with our partner, the Department of Public Works and Government Services. The objective is universal accessibility. We want to cover a lot of ground. Obviously, there is mobility, but we also want to take into account the various disabilities, whether they are visual, auditory or other. In our commitment, the spectrum of accessibility is very broad. There really is a strategy on accessibility. We are working on it with our partners.

The House of Commons Accessibility Plan 2023-2025 is timely. It allows us to reaffirm our objectives. We are having discussions with our partners to this effect. In rehabilitation projects, we want to meet or exceed the standards as much as possible. We set ourselves a target that is higher than the standards already set. This is the idea of universal accessibility.

A lot of thinking is going on at the moment and we will be able to present to you in a more concrete way what this will look like in the next few years.

• (1135)

Mr. Peter Julian: I would like to ask a further question.

[*English*]

Just to understand this exactly in terms of somebody whose mobility is reduced because they're in a wheelchair, is the goal to ensure that a visitor or member of Parliament can, under their own impetus, make their way into the House or make their way into the visitor centre?

I worked for many years with people with disabilities before I was elected to Parliament. I was heading up both the disability employment network in British Columbia and the Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Often you will see partial accessibility: A wheelchair ramp will end one stair before the end, so a person who is mobility impaired can't actually get into a building because of that one step.

Is the ultimate goal to ensure full mobility? If a person has an electric chair they can move, or if they're in a manual chair but have the ability to move themselves, will they will be able to get into both the House and the visitor centre? For people who are blind or visually impaired, would there be, at all stages, guides who allow them to do the same thing, whether they're an MP or a visitor? Would people who are deaf or deafened be able to follow the work in the House, either as an MP or as a visitor, because of the sign language interpretation or written captioning available to them?

Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux: Yes. The goal is for the building to be fully accessible for visitors and MPs. We are committed to that and to making those projects fully accessible, with universal accessibility.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Now we'll go to Mr. MacKinnon, followed by Mr. Scheer and Ms. Findlay.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Government House Whip): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, Mr. LaPerrière-Marcoux. The work you have just done is remarkable, and it is to your credit. I agree with the objectives of the plan. Like Mr. Julian, I was wondering about all of your consultations, which are always based on the principle of "Nothing without us", and I congratulate you as well.

As I am sure most members will, I have recently looked at the plans for the Centre Block, which are constantly evolving. I was struck by the depth of thought that has gone into and been included in these plans. First and foremost, the Parliament of Canada must be exemplary in this regard, but it must also ensure that its thinking, improvements and enhancements progress with time and new knowledge. So, I congratulate you. I personally support your project and the proposed funding.

I know that the government has announced its intention to hire many more disabled people and to set targets for this. You yourself have talked about a secretariat for the Parliament of Canada's targets. Do you also include the goal of hiring people with disabilities as part of the team you lead?

• (1140)

Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux: Mr. MacKinnon, thank you for your question and kind words.

In the first year of the implementation of the plan, we have an initiative planned for the Chamber: we want to review our recruitment processes and policy. This will be an opportunity to ask these questions. We have planned this for the first year, because the recruitment of people with disabilities is a priority that came up in the consultations. It is an important driver of change, particularly in

terms of culture. So we will have that in mind when we start this policy review. It is a central element.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Thank you.

[*English*]

Now we'll go to Mr. Scheer, followed by Ms. Findlay.

Go ahead, Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (House leader of the official opposition): Thank you very much.

I just want to echo some of the comments about the importance of this plan and of ensuring that we modernize and upgrade the precinct to accommodate as many people as we can.

In the past, when the House of Commons and the Senate had to tackle an issue or when a new initiative was proposed, often a working group of existing resources would be assembled. Groups or department heads would come together to tackle the problem and oversee it.

In relation to the proposal for a new secretariat with permanent FTEs, I want to ask you why that direction was chosen instead of getting existing HR expertise to come together and oversee this plan. Since the secretariat won't necessarily be making physical changes in the implementation but will be overseeing it, was the option of overseeing it with existing resources from the House and Senate administration considered? If so, what led you to the conclusion to have a permanent secretariat type of model?

Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux: Thank you for the question.

We created a working group that brought together all service directors and subject matter experts. We had 20 people around the table working on the preparation of this plan.

As to the approach of creating a separate secretariat, first, in the act itself there is a requirement to identify a position for someone who is responsible for receiving comments and feedback. A big part of what we have to do on an ongoing basis is consult, receive feedback and take action on that.

The other aspect is that the scope of the work in accessibility touches the whole organization in different aspects. There are HR aspects. There are emergency procedure aspects. There are built environment aspects. We believe that a centralized office that's not in one of the services is well positioned to do that. A big part of the work we have to do is to continue consulting and to take action on comments we get. A centralized office will help do that.

The vision is for the secretariat to be involved in the implementation of those initiatives and to support each service by providing advice and resources.

• (1145)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very good.

Now we'll continue with Ms. Findlay, followed by Madam DeBellefeuille.

Go ahead, Ms. Findlay.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (Chief Opposition Whip): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for all your hard work on a very important matter. I think the goal of universal accessibility is a very important one.

I have two questions. We have a new accessibility commissioner, Stephanie Cadieux. I know Stephanie well because she used to be a B.C. minister and MLA. She is in a wheelchair herself and has been for many years.

Is she part of your consultations? Is she part of this?

Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux: She is not at this point. As we set up our office and the plan goes on, one thing we will want to do is reach out and consult more. There has been a big push out there on consultation because everybody is consulting to prepare their plans. There was limited availability as well.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: First, I think the goal of her role and the whole reason for her role being created was the very purpose you are discussing. Being someone who has lived with a disability, Ms. Cadieux has both strong opinions and good ideas on these subjects, so I would encourage you to reach out to her on this.

Second, I note that as part of your work, “The Act applies to the House of Commons, and includes, for the purpose of the Act, Members' constituency offices.” This is something I ran into when I took over an office from a previous member. The House of Commons leases require the landlord to guarantee accessibility of an office. My office was and is accessible, and I made sure of that, but it became a real point of contention because the landlord was not in the same city as my office, and they did not want to guarantee, to the House, the accessibility of my office. It led to such significant issues that I ended up leaving that office and moving into a new office with a local landlord who was prepared to do that.

All that said, with constituency offices, is there a way that a member of Parliament could undertake to ensure that during their tenancy the office is accessible? That might be preferable to requiring it of a landlord, who may refuse to do that. It's just something to consider since I've lived through it.

Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux: That's a good comment. We can give support for those issues. It's often a case-by-case discussion with landlords, but members can use their budgets to make improvements, depending on negotiations with the landlord. We've done that in the past, and just recently had a question on it. We're supporting a member who wants to add access from the parking area, which is not accessible.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Yes, but that wasn't my issue. My office was accessible. That was not the problem. The problem was the guarantee required of a landlord who did not want to accept that guarantee.

Hon. Anthony Rota: I believe Monsieur Bédard might be able to answer that. He's our legal adviser.

Mr. Michel Bédard (Acting Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel): As part of the mandatory clauses that the BOIE has put in place for

members, there is an exception process whereby the law clerk and the chief financial officer can provide exceptions to the inclusion of the mandatory clauses. As to precedents, in the past, exceptions were granted when the office was not accessible for a temporary duration so that a necessary renovation could be undertaken. In another type of exception, the office was accessible, but the landlord, for whatever reason, did not want to include the clauses.

In those cases, we had a discussion with the member to ensure that the office was accessible. When we were satisfied that the office was accessible, there was an exception granted so that the member could stay on the premises that were accessible.

• (1150)

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: That didn't happen in my case, but in any event, that's good.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very good.

[*Translation*]

We will continue with Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, want to congratulate you on the work that has been done and the plan that has been proposed to us, Mr. LaPerrière-Marcoux. I don't think I'm giving away any secrets when I say that you consulted me. Indeed, during a period when my mobility was reduced and I was using a wheelchair or crutches in the House of Commons, we were able to identify some fairly significant obstacles together. In my opinion, it is when you experience it that you realize that moving around the House of Commons in a wheelchair requires quite a lot of arm strength, as the mats slow down the movement.

I thank you for listening. Together we managed to identify some architectural barriers that were related to buildings. It is never easy to adapt existing buildings. So it will be easier to build in facilities in the Centre Block that can accommodate all kinds of people who have a disability.

I wanted to thank you. This is a very important aspect. It is true that sometimes it takes legislation to force us to take action.

My point of view is somewhat similar to that of Mr. Scheer. I used to be a manager in the health care system in Quebec. In many institutions, teams and positions are designated to ensure the integration of people with disabilities, whether temporary or permanent. I think I quite agree with Mr. Scheer in saying that, even if you have a great team, you won't move forward very quickly if you don't manage to integrate across the various directorates of the administration and if there is no leadership from all of their managers in response to your office.

Given the speed at which we work, teams often operate under pressure. It is these obligations and initiatives that in many cases will then be pushed aside, when they are very important.

I support your proposal to create your office, with employees and a team. Getting the various directorates of the administration to share your leadership, however, will be a big challenge and will not be easy. So I wonder how you will do it. Do you have a game plan? Have you scheduled meetings with managers to ask them to report on progress against performance indicators? Will there be targets in each directorate to achieve and a steering room?

There needs to be some accountability for the directorates to report on their initiatives and provide their balance sheet at the end. If you don't do that, I'm very much afraid that your project, or rather its outreach, will be pretty average. So I'm wondering what your game plan is for convincing all of your colleagues to show initiative and ultimately exceed the intended goals.

Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux: That is a very good question, for which I thank you, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

To give a little more context, the preparation of the plan was a first step for us to mobilize everyone around this issue. As I mentioned earlier, we created a group of 22 people in which all the services are represented.

In the first step, we asked all the services to make a complete inventory of their accessibility programs, policies and practices. Everyone had to do it and I have to tell you that it was a powerful mobilization tool. The services took this exercise very seriously. The content of the inventories we received varied, given the diversity of operations. There were very good discussions in the services.

In terms of establishing performance indicators, the plan allows us to do this in a certain way and to determine our indicators. As I said before, we have over 60 initiatives that we have to complete. We have committed to 13 in the first year, over 30 in the second year, and about 15 in the following year. In line with this commitment, my role will be to work with the services to ensure that we complete these projects.

The role of the secretariat will be to ensure that people with disabilities are consulted throughout this process. We want to work with services in the design and implementation of initiatives. Along the way, we will be able to stop and check whether we are going in the right direction, thus ensuring that our initiatives will be meaningful and meet specific needs.

Constant consultation is another element. The idea is to create channels to receive feedback. We have launched an anonymous form on the website where people, in the population or internally, can make comments. The secretariat will receive them. We are obliged to record them, respond to them, and act.

Going to service representatives to tell them that we have identified a problem and want to fix it is also part of this role. The Accessible Canada Act gives us some teeth by requiring us to publish annual progress reports, thus exerting a kind of control and pressure on our organization and its services to implement these initiatives.

In three years, in 2025, we will have to make a new plan. We will then set new initiatives and new targets. This is our first plan and we are very aware that we have a lot of awareness raising and mobilization to do. From the outset, we have seized this opportunity.

The working group will continue its activities. It will really be the central element that will mobilize all the services.

• (1155)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any other questions or comments?

[*English*]

Is everybody okay with the recommendation that's being made? Very good. We have consensus.

We'll move to item number 4. We'll call up Monsieur St George and Monsieur Fernandez.

[*Translation*]

This is a request for an exception.

Mr. St George, I yield the floor to you.

Mr. Paul St George (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am here today to seek direction from the Board of Internal Economy regarding a request for an exception by a member of Parliament. The purpose of the exception is to allow the member to charge advertising costs to his office budget for the current fiscal year. These costs, incurred between 2018 and 2021, amount to approximately \$2,000.

[*English*]

In May 2022, the administration denied the member's reimbursement requests, as per subsections 11(3) and 11(4) of the Members By-law. The member is therefore requesting that the board review the matter and allow the advertising expenses to be charged against member's office budget for the current year.

The specifics of this matter are included in the package for the board's review. This is the end of the presentation.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any questions or comments?

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank Monsieur St George, Monsieur Fernandez and the House administration for acting properly.

We've occasionally had case over the years where the MP has acted in good faith but there's been employee error. In this case, a small business didn't follow up. The thing to highlight, of course, is that the House administration and finance followed up, reviewed the advertisements, confirmed they were compliant with the board's advertising policies, confirmed that the outstanding advertising expenses could be absorbed into the MOB and said that if it's approved, the charge will be applied against the member's MOB for the current year.

I support applying the charge to this year's MOB. It does, of course, reduce the MOB. It reduces the advertising budget for the member. It's a bit embarrassing for them to go through the process. They acted in good faith and it was employee error.

I recall times in the past when we've approved similar proposals or similar requests. I certainly support the idea that finance should charge the member's MOB for the current year to resolve this so the small business can be paid.

• (1200)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there other questions or comments?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, in this particular case, I agree with the board's proposal.

In response to what Mr. Julian said, however, I would like to clarify to him that, even if it is a mistake made by an employee, we are employers, and therefore responsible for the mistakes of our

employees. I agree that mistakes are human. However, I want to make it clear to all members of the Board of Internal Economy: our employees sometimes make mistakes, but we are responsible for our employees' mistakes.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any other questions or comments?

I can take it for granted that we agree on this proposal and that it will be implemented this year.

[*English*]

We'll proceed from there, and we're approving it. That's very good.

Now we'll go in camera. We'll come back at five minutes after 12. That will give us enough time to move in camera.

[*Translation*]

The meeting suspended.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>