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# Board of Internal Economy

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## Board of Internal Economy

Thursday, October 10, 2024

• (1110)

[English]

**Hon. Greg Fergus (Chair of the Board of Internal Economy):** I call this meeting to order.

[Translation]

Welcome to meeting number 33 of the Board of Internal Economy.

There are several items on the agenda. The first part of the meeting will be public. We'll go in camera for the second part, and the third part will be public. We're going to start now, because from what I can see, there's going to be a good discussion.

The first item to be discussed is the minutes of the previous meeting.

[English]

All members have had an opportunity to take a look at these. Would someone like to propose that we accept the minutes from the previous meeting?

(Motion agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

[Translation]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** The second item on the agenda is business arising from the previous meeting.

Ms. DeBellefeuille, I see you've raised your hand. The floor is yours.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Whip of the Bloc Québécois):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to follow up on a few things.

Page 2 of the minutes mentions that we had decided that the current virtual committee dashboard was less relevant. We were asked to wait a while before proposing other indicators, since the procedural team was perhaps going to submit a few to us. I was wondering where things stand on that front.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I invite Mr. McDonald and Mr. Dicaire to answer your question.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** I have some ideas, but I'm open to suggestions.

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

Good morning, Ms. DeBellefeuille.

We've started to think about what new things there might be to follow up on. One of the things we're looking at closely right now is the issue of the Larsen effect and other acoustic incidents. This is one of the points we'll be proposing as part of a renewed dashboard. We're also evaluating a number of other things, including the possibility of keeping the information we're already collecting. We'll come up with something. We'll certainly consult before we propose something to the Board of Internal Economy. We're looking into it.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** I'm quite happy to hear that. For the past two years, my political party has been monitoring the committee meetings we attend. We think it would be interesting to have an indicator covering all the difficulties associated with technology and sound, not just feedback. We also note that there is always a time lag when interpreters work remotely. I think this should be documented in the pilot project. It could be an interesting indicator.

As you can see, I'm not short of ideas. I believe in continuous improvement. When we document our data, we're able to make comparisons, and I see we're on the same track.

Is there a timeline, Mr. McDonald? Are you going to present this at the next board meeting?

**Mr. Ian McDonald:** We hope so. It may not be the final version, but we're at least going to propose the addition of some elements. We're not going to stop there, as we'll continue to add elements in the future too.

We are extremely grateful to all parties for the feedback we receive from them. We use it to make informed choices and decisions. Sometimes it takes a lot of effort to gather this information. We're aware that there's a balance to be struck. We certainly intend to propose something soon.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Mr. Julian, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Peter Julian (House leader of the New Democratic Party):** This is an extremely important topic.

Some situations involved the health and safety of our interpreters, who do an extremely important job, part of the foundation of our bilingual Parliament.

I'd like the deadline to be the next board meeting, even if what is presented is only a first draft. For our part, we are of course ready to collaborate and offer our suggestions, which are important both for the health and safety of the interpreters, but also for the smooth running of the bilingual Parliament, for which these interpretation services are very important. We'll be able to fine-tune all this later, at subsequent meetings, based on this initial outline.

This is an extremely important subject, and we're glad to know that you'll be presenting something to the board shortly.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I see a consensus emerging, as Ms. DeBellefeuille and Mr. Julian are in agreement. I assume the other participants are as well, because I see a few nods. So we'll wait for a first draft, which we'll refine as we go along at future meetings.

Mr. Dicaire, I think you have something to add.

**Mr. Benoit Dicaire (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons):** The dashboard is a quality management tool that is really relevant to enable our teams to continue the work relating to continuous improvement. So we're going to continue. As we mentioned in June, some indicators will probably be removed from the dashboard, as they are less relevant today. The indicators that will remain will be the interruption and quality indicators, in particular. We'll be able to focus a little bit more on the dispersed mode of interpretation to see if we can measure quality in dispersed mode and make specific improvements on the technology side to help us, again, support the work of Parliament.

• (1115)

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Very good.

Do you have any final comments, Ms. DeBellefeuille?

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Chair, I don't know how you want to proceed, but you received several letters over the summer to which you replied. I wonder if you'd like me to ask my follow-up questions, since they stem from the summer. I'd like to comment on the letters you received and to which you replied. Is this the time to do so? May I intervene in this matter?

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Very well.

On August 1, you received a letter from the Canadian Association of Professional Employees. In this letter, the association expressed its concern about the resumption of work in September, in response to the accidents that occurred in June, and asked for corrective measures so that interpreters could do their jobs when Parliament resumed its work in September. All the whips have received copies of this letter. I have to tell you that, when I received it, I was a little panicked, because it was August, a month and a half before Parliament resumed. We were receiving a sort of threat from the interpreters, implying that they might refuse to work if there was no change.

Thankfully, since work has resumed without a hitch, it's because good work has been done. We often point out what's not going so well, but there are two things I'd like to say.

When I received the letter, my first instinct was to call Mr. Dicaire, because, as a whip, I wanted to be reassured. The person on the other end of the line was very dedicated, available and reassur-

ing. He kept me informed and followed up regularly. It reassured me to know that the matter had been taken seriously and that Mr. Aubé's entire team, at all levels, had made every effort to ensure that our work would resume in an orderly fashion and with respect for the health and safety of our interpreters. Today, I would like to thank this team. I was really worried, but I've seen that work has resumed and that it's going well. This team therefore deserves congratulations from my political party.

Also, when I saw your reply, in which you announced that a committee was working with senators and interpreter representatives from the House of Commons and meeting on a regular basis to monitor this issue of interpreters and sound problems, it was very reassuring to me.

I therefore propose to my colleagues that we congratulate Mr. Aubé and his entire team, because they dealt with this issue diligently over the summer, when the staff perhaps didn't expect to work so intensely during a period when we sometimes expect work to be less intense. That was my comment.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you for your kind words. Mr. Aubé and his entire team work very hard with our employees. As Mr. Julian said a few minutes ago, interpreters are essential to the functioning of Parliament. The more we can work together, the better it is for everyone. Thank you.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** The last follow-up I want to make concerns the letter you received and which we all read, from the MP for Trois-Rivières. He wrote to you about the changes to our insurance coverage. For my part, since there has been a change of insurer, I have spoken to employees of the House Administration to compare our new insurance coverage with the one we had before. We want to know if House of Commons employees, MPs and their staff have equal coverage. I have submitted this request to the administration and I believe we will have this information shortly. So I'd like to thank them once again, because they're very attentive to our requests.

• (1120)

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you for the flowers.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** There will be no pot, don't worry.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you very much. The administration is working on that and hopes to get that information to the Board of Internal Economy as soon as possible.

Since there are no further interventions on items arising from the previous meeting, we will therefore move on to the third item on the agenda.

[English]

Item 3 is the annual report of the Joint Interparliamentary Council.

Colleagues, since this report on parliamentary association activities and expenditures for 2023 is before your eyes, the co-chairs of the JIC, the Joint Interparliamentary Council, have sent a letter noting that the JIC has adopted this report and is submitting it to the board for information.

[*Translation*]

If you have any questions about the report, the clerk of the Joint Interparliamentary Council is at your disposal today. We may also invite the co-chair of the Joint Inter-Parliamentary Council, Mr. d'Entremont, to appear at a later meeting.

Ms. DeBellefeuille, would you like to speak?

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** I just have two quick questions about the report, Mr. Chair.

I've noticed that in the House, reports from parliamentary delegations are sometimes tabled a year after the end of the mission. What accounts for this kind of delay? I think the clerk is more than capable of answering that question, and there's no need to invite the chair or one of the co-chairs of the Joint Interparliamentary Council.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Are you going to ask your two questions in a row or one at a time?

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** I'll ask them one at a time.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** All right.

Mr. LeBlanc, you have the floor.

**Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc (Clerk Assistant and Director General, International and Interparliamentary Affairs):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Actually, there are sometimes delays in the tabling of parliamentary delegation reports by associations, and this is due to several factors.

First, the reports are often written by analysts of the Library of Parliament or by association secretaries who have travelled with the delegation. Library of Parliament analysts also have other duties related to parliamentary committees, and these take precedence over the drafting of association activity reports. So, sometimes, the delay is due to a lack of resources linked to the analysts' workload. In the case of association secretaries, the delay may be due to the fact that preparation for the next trip takes precedence over writing the report on the last trip. So sometimes it's a question of resources.

In other cases, the report may be written directly by the parliamentarians who travelled. Indeed, if no member of staff was travelling with them, it is the parliamentarians themselves who have to draft the report, which can sometimes take some time. There can also be delays in preparing financial reports, but it wouldn't take as long as a year.

Finally, it can happen that association presidents' schedules are simply too busy and they don't have time to table a report. At the moment, there are at least a dozen reports ready to be tabled. The presidents just need to find a moment to file them.

I'd also like to add that last year, the Joint Interparliamentary Council wrote to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House

Affairs about the time limit prescribed in the Standing Orders. It suggested that this time limit, which has been in place for a very long time and is not really realistic in most situations, should be changed, so that a substantive report reflecting the seriousness of the work done can be prepared. The committee has yet to respond to this letter, so we're somewhat stuck in a situation where the prescribed deadline is a little unrealistic in certain circumstances, which means that delays can sometimes accumulate.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Ms. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Besides the dozen or so reports that are ready to be presented to the House, what is the backlog of association mission reports? How many reports need to be written?

• (1125)

**Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc:** A total of 59 reports remain to be presented from the 122 or so missions that have taken place in recent years. For some twenty reports, the delay is due to the Library of Parliament analyst. In the case of a dozen reports, the reason lies with the association secretary. In a dozen cases, it was due to the chair. For a number of other activity reports, which took place last summer, we are waiting for the finance department to process the financial reports. So there are various reasons why 59 reports are pending.

Of these, around ten are ready to be presented to the House, six of which have already been presented to the Senate. Here again, we need the association's chair or co-chair from the House to make himself available to present them to the House.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** In any case, you have enough to prepare a nice dashboard.

**Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc:** We do have a nice dashboard.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Ms. Fortier, you have the floor.

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Deputy government whip):** I'll continue in the same vein as my colleague. Out of curiosity, what is the time limit stipulated in the Standing Orders? It might be a good idea to remind Board of Internal Economy members of this.

**Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc:** The Standing Orders allow for 20 sitting days, which can vary enormously over time. For example, for an activity that took place in August, if we counted 20 sitting days, the deadline would be now. On the other hand, for an activity that took place at the end of May, the 20 sitting days could fall due in September. The time limit to prepare a report could therefore be four or five weeks, or three or four months. The number of sitting days is perhaps not the best indicator for setting a deadline.

The Joint Interparliamentary Council had suggested to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs that the deadlines for association reports be aligned with those for proactive disclosure reports on expenditures. In the latter case, the deadline for disclosing financial information is 60 days after the end of the mission. That would have been more realistic.

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** So that clarification should be made. That's fine; thank you.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** We will now continue in camera.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

The meeting is suspended.

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