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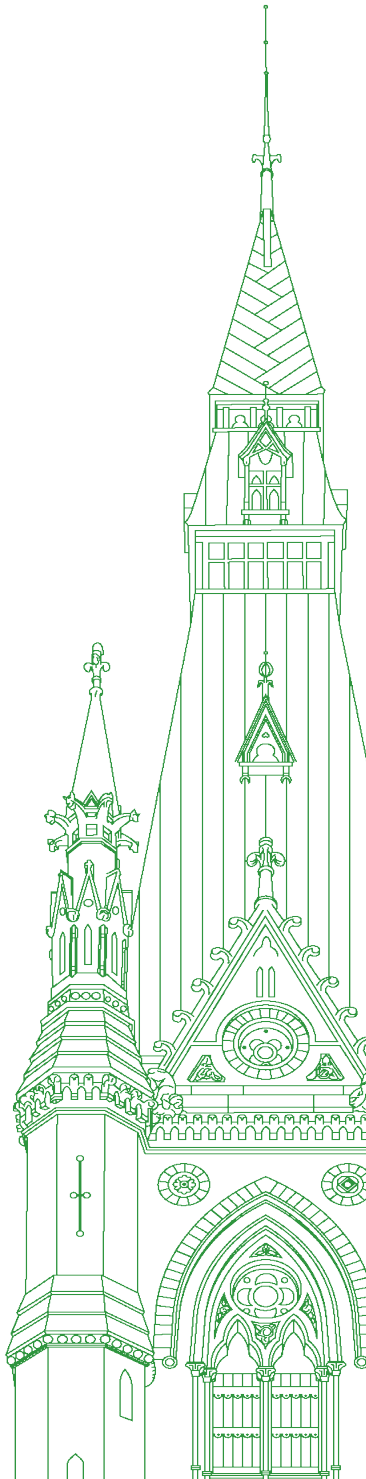
45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Board of Internal Economy

TRANSCRIPT

NUMBER 011

Thursday, October 29, 2026



Board of Internal Economy

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● (1100)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia (Chair of the Board of Internal Economy): Good morning everyone.

It's been a while since we've had a meeting of the Board of Internal Economy. We have the minutes of the June 11 meeting. It's been a few months.

Are there any changes to be made to the minutes of the previous meeting?

Mr. Perron, you have the floor.

Yves Perron (Whip of the Bloc Québécois): I just have one question, Mr. Chair.

You know how I like to talk about interpretation and translation. We have a short discussion about this at every meeting of the Board of Internal Economy. There's no direct mention of it in the agenda. Is it important for me to make a mention of it, or is it part of our routine proceedings? I've been wondering about this.

Eric Janse (Clerk of the House of Commons): That's a good question, Mr. Perron.

Usually, if it's a matter under business arising from previous meetings that's not formally on the agenda, it's not mentioned in the minutes. That's also the case when no official decision has been made. That's our usual practice.

Yves Perron: Thank you.

[*English*]

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen (Chief Government Whip): Thank you, Speaker.

Are we on number two?

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: I assume we approve of the minutes of the previous meeting. There was a question but no objection, so yes, we're on number two.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: I have two additional items that I wanted to raise with staff to look at and potentially come back. Would you like me to wait until the end to do that or do it now?

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Does it arise from the previous meeting?

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: No. So...do it at the end?

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Sure.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: Okay. We can just add that.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Is there business arising from previous meetings?

There's nothing. Okay.

I guess we'll go in camera now, or...?

[*Translation*]

I'm sorry. Mr. Perron, you have the floor.

Yves Perron: I'm nothing if not consistent, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: “Not so fast” is what you want to tell me, right?

Yves Perron: I still have to get my message across. I made a commitment to the Board of Internal Economy to keep you informed of what's going on. I'm looking for the letter from the translation bureau, which is, I believe, under a different agenda item. It's usually at this point that I update the board on interpretation and translation. I have things to say, but I'll do it when we'll discuss the translation bureau's proposal. It will be more relevant if I wait for the part when we address correspondence, if it's okay with you, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Sure.

Yves Perron: Is it the right time to do that? Yes? So I'm in the right place. I'm confused, but not that confused.

I would like to respond to the correspondence we received from the translation bureau, which proposes the creation of a committee. As I've said before here and elsewhere regarding the translation bureau, I'm very supportive of that idea. I think it's a good, constructive suggestion which will allow everyone to follow how this situation evolves.

However, I still want to give a quick update. I promise to be brief, but I have committed to providing this update.

There are still a number of interpretation-related incidents: connection problems, bad sound quality and consoles that aren't working in some rooms. We keep mentioning it, but nothing gets fixed. I had to inform House administrators. It's not entirely normal for us to have to go to the upper echelons like that. They have other things to do. Again, I'm not saying this to point fingers at anyone; I'm trying to be constructive. This is part of a general context in which this issue seems to be taken somewhat lightly, at least from the francophone point of view.

We've also started to see—I think it's important to point this out here—a decrease in the quality of simultaneous interpretation. We hadn't seen much of that previously. You know that I ask for daily reports from my team of members on the various House of Commons committees, and I really stress that point. I recently heard a number of comments to the effect that people didn't understand what the interpreter was saying, that it was hard to keep up and that the pace was extremely slow. Some of my members even switched to the English channel, because they didn't want to miss the details. That's precisely what I don't want to see happen, ever. I know always come out overly dramatic, but this is extremely serious. That's not to mention, of course, subcontracting, which I think is still going on. So what I want to tell you is that we're taking notes. I have all the chronology written down. We'll make correlations at some point, but I wanted to make sure that the members of the Board of Internal Economy were aware of it.

We also still have problems with unilingual anglophones not wearing their earpieces when francophones speak. I've already explained to you here that this causes secondary problems, even if the person decides that their French is good enough. That may be the case, but most of the time it's not true. We don't have a lot of bilingual people in Parliament. There was even one case where the chair of a committee didn't wear their earpiece, even though everyone knew that they were a unilingual anglophone. I pointed it out through the proper channels, and it was corrected, but that's not normal, I tell you.

When a francophone witness from Quebec comes to Parliament to give a testimony, it's very impressive. We're used to being here in this fancy place. However, let's think of someone from the outside who spent many hours very conscientiously to prepare a brief and make sure their message would be conveyed to elected officials. If that witness starts speaking French and realizes that, out of the 10 members watching him, four or five aren't wearing their earpiece and he's not sure they understand what he's saying, what is he going to do? Often, he'll switch to English or answer questions in English even though he's struggling and could give a much more accurate answer in his mother tongue. That's a problem. I don't know what collective directive we could give ourselves. Listening to what the other person is saying is a matter of basic respect.

I still see francophone MPs who, after witnessing technical problems with Bloc Québécois members, say out loud that they will ask their questions in English because it will be simpler, and switch to English. I think it's a very slippery slope.

Then—

● (1105)

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: I'm wondering who we should contact to rectify this situation. Maybe I should raise this with the Chair of the Liaison Committee?

Eric Janse: There was a meeting yesterday and I believe you were there.

Yves Perron: I raised it, but since the Liaison Committee's meeting was in camera, I didn't want to mention it.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Okay, but that would be the proper channel.

Yves Perron: As I said, I pointed it out through the proper channels.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: I'll follow up with Ms. Sgro.

Yves Perron: I still wanted you to be aware of it, Mr. Chair. I think it's important.

Also, I'm still under the impression that the House of Commons administration, the translation bureau and the minister either don't fully grasp the issue or are minimizing it. I asked the minister about it last week during question period. He assured me that there would be no budget cuts made to interpretation services. He said that it would only affect written translation and that AI would take care of it. Let me remind you that AI is far from perfect. He even said that interpreters don't fall under the translation bureau. I offered the minister a chance to correct his statements, which he did not do.

I'm putting that on the record here. It's not the end of the world, but it's worrying. We're supposed to be diligent and say things that are true. We're told that there have been no budget cuts made to interpretation, but working conditions have nevertheless been diminished. We all know it, we've talked about it here. Many casual employees have left, so the capacity has decreased. As I mentioned at the beginning of the meeting, we're starting to notice a worrying decline in quality and we're wondering who these interpreters are. Are they the newly licensed ones for this year?

I don't want to jump to conclusions, take easy shortcuts or engage in populism; I'm just describing things the way I perceive them and with all due respect.

I'm told that there will be cuts at the translation bureau for written translation only, but there's already a lack of resources. Committees experience delays. Every one of my members reported at least once that reports were not received on time. Just recently, a meeting I was attending had to be cancelled because the committee hadn't received a translated document. Now, we're told that expenses will be cut by 25% and that AI will do the rest. However, and we've all seen in the media, AI sometimes translates the translation bureau's acronym as “tuberculosis”. It's funny and we laugh about it, and we're obviously going to notice something like that.

● (1110)

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: That's crazy.

Yves Perron: It's both funny and not funny, because if budget cuts keep—

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: It's not funny.

Yves Perron: I'll have something even less funny for you in 30 seconds.

If AI churns out completely irrelevant translations, we know we're going to notice. But if we end up trusting AI a lot more and double-checking what it produces a lot less, mistakes like that might slip through. What's even more troubling and worries me even more is that the article explained that “should”, which translates as *devrait*, and “must”, which translates as *doit*, were both translated by AI as *doit*. That's extremely serious because *devrait* and *doit* have different scopes when legislation is interpreted by the courts.

I've mentioned before the incident that happened at the Standing Committee on Justice, where a clerk told us that English prevailed in the text. That is not true, and we corrected that, but what if interpreters have to interpret something that was mistranslated? What happens then?

Then we'll say that something has to be done. That worries me. I think that AI is an interesting tool, which is already used by people at the translation bureau, but it will always require human oversight.

I'll just finish quickly. The groups that represent workers in these sectors are in negotiations and, considering the situation and where we seem to be headed, they picked an English-only slogan: “Good enough”. I hope it's not true, but they believe that a transition toward “good enough” is under way.

For all these reasons, I'm very favourable to the creation of a committee. I just have two things to add. First, I'll continue to keep you informed, briefly but diligently. Second, the proposition contained in the letter regarding the membership of that committee would include two or three members of Parliament. I think it should have one member per recognized party, so three members, along with the two members representing the translation bureau, which is fine with me, and one person representing multimedia management services from the House of Commons administration, which is also fine with me, but there's someone missing. If we're talking about interpretation, translation and terminology, I think that these groups should also be represented. We want this advisory committee to function well in a constructive and transparent manner to protect the integrity of both official languages.

So that would be my proposal, Mr. Chair. I think my colleagues will agree to add at least one member to represent interpreters, translators and terminologists.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: That committee doesn't fall under our purview, but we could still send a letter with that proposal.

Eric Janse: The letter in question was sent to board members. If they have ideas or suggestions as to who should sit on that committee, it might be preferable to send that information directly to the translation bureau.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Why not send it through the board to show that we're all in agreement?

Yves Perron: If my colleagues agree—

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: I see people nodding in approval. I don't see how anyone would be opposed to that.

If we wrote down these requests and suggestions in a letter—which doesn't need to be long—and send it ourselves on Board of Internal Economy letterhead, it might have more impact.

Yves Perron: I propose that each party submit, today or tomorrow, one name for that committee.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Yes.

Yves Perron: Here's a big surprise: I think that I'll be representing my party, Mr. Chair.

● (1115)

Eric Janse: Mr. LeBlanc may have additional information.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: You have the floor, Mr. LeBlanc.

Jeffrey LeBlanc (Deputy Clerk, Procedure, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Perron, thank you for raising these issues.

I want to assure you that, when it comes to the services provided to the committees directorate—interactions with witnesses, for example—we encourage clerks to explain to every witness at every meeting how earpieces and interpretation consoles work.

The technical equipment is verified before each meeting. I'm not saying that these systems are perfect and that technical difficulties don't arise from time to time, but verifications are made regularly. When problems occur, there's a follow-up.

We hold meetings with the translation bureau every two weeks to follow up on a number of matters. We do our best to take these concerns seriously. We want these meetings to accommodate every participant, witness and member in both official languages.

Yves Perron: I have no doubt about that and I appreciate it, Mr. LeBlanc.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. LeBlanc has finished.

Shall I suspend the meeting before we move in camera?

Eric Janse: Yes, it will only take a minute.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Let's take a break and go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

● (1115)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1205)

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: The public portion of this meeting will now resume.

We're back on the air with the fourth item on the agenda, request for additional budgetary supplements.

Mr. am Rhyn, director of members' financial advisory and policy services, you have the floor.

Stéphane am Rhyn (Director, Members' Financial Advisory and Policy Services, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The House administration would like the board's guidelines on a request from a member to increase their annual budget by $28,670. For context, some members receive budgetary supplements if their operating costs are higher than average. One of these supplements is based on riding size. The other one is the schedule 3 supplement, which is granted for ridings listed in schedule 3 of the Canada Elections Act. It takes into account transportation and communications limitations in the riding. Since the 2022 redistribution, the member's riding is no longer listed in schedule 3, and he is no longer eligible for the supplement. The decision to include a riding on this list rests with the Chief Electoral Officer, and that decision can only be reviewed under the provisions of the act.

[*English*]

The member is requesting an exception to the Members By-Law, based on the geographic complexity of his riding. His first request is to receive the equivalent of schedule 3, which is $25,090 annually. His second request is to include portions of the bays within his riding in the calculation of the geographic supplement. This would increase his budget by $3,580 per year.

I note that there are no objective criteria to ensure the consistent application of a similar budget increase to ridings that have a similar geography. I also note that the board did not approve similar exceptions in the past.

Lastly, in the member's correspondence, there were certain concerns raised about the redistribution, as well as the Chief Electoral Officer's determinations. However, those matters are outside the jurisdiction of the board.

We are seeking, Mr. Speaker, the board's direction on the member's requests. Thank you.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: I see Mr. Gerretsen, followed by Mr. Warkentin.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: We don't particularly have an issue with that, but one of the things we want to confirm in advance is.... The member said in his correspondence that the Chief Electoral Officer indicated it may have been an oversight that he wasn't included in that schedule. Can we get correspondence from the Chief Electoral Officer on that?

Our concern is setting a precedent, but if the Chief Electoral Officer can say yes, this may have been an oversight and it should have been in the schedule, but it can't be at this point because of the way the legislation works, I think we're fine with it. If we can get that and hear from the Chief Electoral Officer, and then perhaps discuss this at the next meeting with that correspondence, we would be more comfortable approving it.

Chris Warkentin (Chief Opposition Whip): I would support Mark's suggestion. That's what I was going to propose.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: I also support Mr. Gerretsen's proposal. I think it's a good idea.

Mr. am Rhyn, I wanted to ask you a question. You said that the schedule 3 supplement can only be reviewed under the Canada Elections Act. Is there a review process that the MP could use? Does such a process even exist?

Stéphane am Rhyn: The supplement granted to members by the House falls under the Board of Internal Economy's purview. Listing the riding in schedule 3 of the Canada Elections Act rests with Elections Canada. A review takes place with every redistribution, so every 10 years, essentially. That's pretty much how it happens.

● (1210)

Yves Perron: No appeal is possible?

Stéphane am Rhyn: No, not through this particular forum.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Bédard has something to add.

Michel Bédard (Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, House of Commons): I just wanted to add to what Mr. am Rhyn explained. Schedule 3 is established by the Chief Electoral Officer. It can be done very quickly, seven days after the representation order is implemented. In short, it's done after each representation order arising from the redistribution. The Chief Electoral Officer has seven days to amend schedule 3. Otherwise, any changes have to wait after the next redistribution.

Yves Perron: What Mr. Gerretsen is proposing is really the only option we have to see if something can be done. I would say that the request seems reasonable because there are a bunch of small islands where people live. However, as the administration, we have to ask ourselves what precedent this could set, especially if we start to take water surface into account. Someone whose riding is located along a bay, for example, without any impact on the riding's territory could receive a higher supplement without having any need for it.

I'm not going to belabour the point. Let's do as Mr. Gerretsen suggests.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Let's move to the fifth item on the agenda: request for exception.

Mr. am Rhyn, once again, the floor is yours.

Stéphane am Rhyn: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The second request for exception to the Members By-Law is regarding the reimbursement of $1,120 to a member. The member's office realized that service fees associated with air travel in 2022 and 2025 were not claimed. I would point out that these fees are normally charged to a central fund.

[*English*]

The Members By-Law restricts the reimbursement of expenses incurred in past fiscal years. The request is therefore being brought to the board for a decision.

I note that the board has approved similar exceptions in the past. If the request is approved, the related expenses will be reimbursed to the member from a central fund.

Mr. Speaker, this concludes my presentation. I'm happy to answer questions.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: I have Mr. Gerretsen and then Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: Originally, the number was $4,000-something, and then it got reduced once it was calculated properly.

We're okay with approving the request for the $1,119.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Scheer, go ahead.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (House Leader of the Official Opposition): If my colleagues are okay with it, we're okay with it. There's no need to talk.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: What's that? I'm sorry.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: There's no need to talk.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: There's no need to talk. Okay.

Now we'll go to committee financial management and policies. The presenters are Natalie Foster, clerk assistant in committees and legislative services, and Stéphanie Haché, deputy principal clerk in committees and legislative services.

[*Translation*]

Stéphanie Haché (Deputy Principal Clerk, Committees and Legislative Services, House of Commons): We're here today to present the recommendations from the Liaison Committee regarding the financial policies and practices of House of Commons committees.

Over the past year, the Committees and Legislative Services Directorate conducted a comprehensive review of the financial rules and policies governing committee activities and identified opportunities to streamline certain processes and improve administrative efficiency, particularly with regard to the reimbursement of witnesses' expenses and the funding of committee and subcommittee activities.

[*English*]

The Liaison Committee adopted the relevant recommendations on June 3, 2026, and is seeking the approval of the board to make the required changes to the practices. These changes would be implemented within the current global envelope allocated to committees. No additional funding would be required.

There are three sets of recommendations in the submission.

The first set of recommendations concerns committees' operating expenses. The rules governing those expenses were established by the board in December 2004 and have not been revisited since. They address committees' food and beverage expenditures, the established spending limit per study and the reimbursement of witnesses' expenses.

The second set of recommendations concerns service contracts, particularly the daily rate limit for professional fees. The last time this was adjusted for inflation was in 2007. It also concerns the rules governing the awarding of contracts for legislative and special joint committees to bring them in line with those for special committees.

[*Translation*]

Finally, the last recommendation concerns subcommittees established by order of the House. It aims to reduce the board's administrative burden by applying or drawing on processes already implemented by the Liaison Committee and applying to subcommittees established by the House the same rules that already apply to subcommittees established by standing committees.

Thank you for your time. We'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.

● (1215)

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Are there any questions? Everyone seems to be in agreement. That's great.

Let's move on to the seventh point on the agenda. It's about the annual report from the Joint Interparliamentary Council, or JIC. You have before you a letter from the council's co-chairs. The report is on activities and expenditures for the fiscal year 2025-2026. The co-chairs are providing this report to the board for information purposes. Should you have any questions, the clerk of the JIC is at your disposal. Mr. Kmiec could also attend one of the JIC's upcoming meetings if you wish.

Are there any questions? It doesn't seem like it.

This brings us to the House of Commons administration's strategic plan 2027-2031. Speaking on this is our own clerk, Mr. Janse.

[*English*]

Eric Janse: It's the best part of the meeting today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, I'm seeking approval for the House of Commons administration's strategic plan 2027-2031.

[*English*]

The new plan provides members and the public with an overview of the House administration's priorities for the upcoming years. The updated framework strengthens our strategic direction and prepares the House administration for the future by emphasizing measurable success through clear outcomes, concrete objectives, key performance indicators and expected results. The plan will guide decision-making and resource planning, enabling the House administration to continue to provide exceptional, integrated and accessible service to members of Parliament.

[*Translation*]

You will see that our foundation remains rooted in the organizational vision “One House, One Team”, which fosters seamless collaboration between our different service areas. Our vision reaffirms our commitment to innovating and proactively responding to the needs of the House and its members. Our core values of integrity and impartiality, service excellence, collaboration and inclusion continue to guide our daily activities in support of parliamentary democracy.

[*English*]

The plan revolves around five strategic outcomes to guide our actions.

First, it provides a high-performing, unified ecosystem to support members in all of their roles.

Second, it focuses on performance and data collection to make reliable, transparent and continuous improvement-based decisions.

Third, it also focuses on organizational protection and security by proactively mitigating risk concerning members, our workforce and operations, while strengthening cyber, physical and operational resilience across the organization.

Fourth, it supports workforce wellness, trust, accountability and skills development, ensuring that our employees are equipped and ready to deliver service excellence today and in the future.

Fifth, and lastly, the plan focuses on modernizing infrastructure, physical spaces and digital systems while responsibly adopting emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence to enhance integration and optimize our services.

[*Translation*]

The House administration is already taking action in accordance with the strategic plan 2027-2031, including continuing the internal strategic review of operations; implementing mental health and safety programs; staff engagement and accessibility; continued collaboration for the modernization and rehabilitation of Centre Block; designing a new version of Prism, our parliamentary publications and procedural information support software; and finally, continued improvement of the physical and digital security of every parliamentary space on the Hill and in members' ridings.

In closing, I want to point out that the report will be published in digital format only, except for this official tabled version.

[*English*]

Finally, progress on the strategic plan will be communicated to Canadians and, of course, the board annually through the “Report to Canadians”.

Therefore, it's recommended that the board approve the plan and that it be tabled in the House by the Speaker.

Thank you. I welcome any questions.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Are there any questions or comments? It doesn't seem like it.

[*English*]

That brings us to the last item.

Mr. Gerretsen, there was something you wanted to raise.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are two things that I wanted to raise quickly, which I'm hoping the staff can come back to at the next meeting. I've discussed them with both Mr. Scheer and Mr. Perron, and there appears to be some agreement. Mr. Scheer might want to add something to the first one.

The first one has to do with the travel points we have to go outside Canada. We have four points that allow us to go to Washington and New York, if I have that correct. I would like to propose, especially given the context of how we're looking for new relationships throughout the world now and strengthening those, that we change those travel points to allow members to travel to any city that has a consulate in either North America or Europe. I'm wondering if staff can come back at a future meeting with how we could implement that.

I think Mr. Scheer has another suggestion to add on to that.

● (1220)

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: I believe it's four points to go anywhere there's a consulate in the United States.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: Yes, in the United States, but I suggest extending that to Europe as well—

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Okay.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: —in any combination.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Yes, any combination, so it could be four to Europe or four to the U.S.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: There's still a maximum of four—

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: It can be distributed anywhere.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: —and in any of the locations.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Scheer is next.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: To be clear, are you asking for the administration to come back with something, or are you proposing to adopt that right now?

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: For due diligence, we should allow them to come to the next meeting with it.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: That's fine. That makes it easier for me to propose my idea, which would be complementary to what Mr. Gerretsen has proposed.

There are a number of bilateral conferences held at the state and provincial levels, at which I have a fair amount of official recognition. One is the Pacific northwest. There's a central one, and I believe there's an eastern one. I've been able to participate in these conferences when they're in Canada. They're excellent meetings. They have great substance, and they're often attended by some very high-level officials from the U.S. administration.

Oftentimes, our provincial counterparts have excellent relations with lawmakers on the other side of the border, so I would add into this some of these.... I don't know how we would define them, but I could send you a list of the ones I know who have been around for many years and have robust participation. Maybe we could add that in, because sometimes they're held in places that wouldn't have a consulate. I think the last one was in Bellevue, Washington, and they're also in Idaho and places like that.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: We'd have to come up with a definition.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Yes. It would make sense for MPs to be able to use a travel point to get down to a gathering of U.S. officials, policy-makers and lawmakers. If our provincial counterparts are there too, it would make sense for us to be there.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Maybe, in advance of the next meeting, we could think of a definition that would capture these.

Eric Janse: For precision, are you looking at trips involving officially recognized parliamentary associations, such as the Canada-U.S. group, or would it also be available to MPs who on their own wish to attend a certain conference?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I would suggest MPs on their own. These are conferences with itineraries and agendas published well ahead of time. They're legitimate policy workshop-type things. We could either prescribe them, as they're easy to identify—I found three—or we could develop criteria if new ones emerge. The idea would be that an MP, on his or her own initiative, could just say, yes, there's a topic there that interests me or interests my constituents and I'd like to participate in that.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Okay.

Mr. Perron is next.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree with my colleagues' ideas. Regarding Mr. Scheer's last point, I think we should set criteria or find some way to have a modicum of oversight. I'm glad he made this proposal. I do have one question: Should we consider increasing these points? Has that not been proposed for the sake of budgetary restraint?

I'll let Mr. Gerretsen, who made the initial proposal, answer that.

[*English*]

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: I haven't used one of these points in about eight years. Personally, I don't use them. We can always talk about increasing them at another time. The important thing is to be able to reach out. One of the things that I found when I travelled to Germany with Mr. Warkentin and the Speaker was an understanding of how difficult it is for Canadian lawmakers to go on their own to Europe and how easy it is for European lawmakers to come to Canada on their own. I'm just trying to fix that through this.

Although I do appreciate that, maybe we could discuss that later if it becomes—

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Okay. What we're after right now is flexibility.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: Okay. Perhaps staff could come back with it.

The second item, Mr. Speaker, is something that I have talked to the House administration about on a number of occasions. Mr. Aubé has been very supportive in trying to give me information, but it's at the point that we need to make a decision.

There's a big discrepancy in constituency office rents in different parts of the country. Vancouver, for example, is wildly more expensive. When I was talking to Mr. Scheer about it, he said that even in Saskatchewan alone, you're going to see this as well. I don't know if the solution is to increase the amount that comes from the global budget writ large or if it's to develop some system of accounting for the fact that there are different prices in different markets.

If staff could come back with some options for us in terms of how we can try to accommodate this, it would be beneficial. I hear a lot from our B.C. colleagues in particular about how they are blowing through their global budget amount in the first five or six months. Then it's all on their MOB after that. Perhaps we could ask staff to bring us some options at the next meeting.

● (1225)

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Sure.

Go ahead, Mr. Perron.

[*Translation*]

Yves Perron: We're very much in favour of this request as a matter of fairness. However, we have to come up with a formula. Mr. Gerretsen mentioned increasing the amount we get from the central budget. That could be a solution. It could also help with the issue of colleagues who represent huge ridings. Rent might not be that high, but they need several constituency offices. I need two of them, but I'm certainly not the worst one and I can't complain. I get by. Some of my colleagues have three or four points of service. That could be an interesting idea.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: So it would be the House administration—

[*English*]

Eric Janse: I have one point.

The board, of course, created a subcommittee on the strategic internal assessment of operations for the expenditure review. This exact item was something that the subcommittee asked us to look into. We were almost ready to report back to it at its last meeting. That meeting got cancelled. I don't know if you want us to perhaps go to the subcommittee first, and then based on the discussion there, it could be brought here. Work was already being done on this question.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Okay. That's good.

We're done.

Have a good day.

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