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—
Chair

Mr. John Williams

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC)): Good afternoon, everybody. I call the meeting to order.

The orders of the day are, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), governance and accountability within the federal public service, with an emphasis on ministerial and deputy ministerial accountability.

Our witnesses today, appearing as individuals, are Ms. Joanne Bouvier, former special assistant in Minister Gagliano's office in Public Works and Government Services Canada; Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel, former special assistant in Minister Gagliano's office; and Mr. Patrick Lebrun, former special assistant in Minister Gagliano's office.

I've put on here—and it'll show up at every meeting as item number two—pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), *Public Accounts of Canada 2004*, referred to the committee on October 21, 2004. If perchance any meeting doesn't go for the full two hours, then we will deal with the draft report we didn't deal with before. That will always show just as an item of business, and that's what that's for.

I mentioned the other day I would make two public announcements. The first is in regard to the Auditor General, of course. As we know, we were a little concerned about the fact that she was still having discussions with the Treasury Board regarding her funding, and I'm pleased to say it has been resolved. I met with the President of the Treasury Board, and he advised me that the funding for the Auditor General's office has been agreed upon and approved by the Treasury Board, so there is no need to deal with the motion that was put on the table. Therefore, I think we will just remove that.

There are also going to be ongoing discussions to set a formula in place, to provide a formula that will determine the funding for the Auditor General so they don't have to have head-to-head talks in the future.

The second one, on a pleasant note, is that there was a congratulatory note mentioned in question period the other day. The President of the Treasury Board acknowledged that he had received an award on behalf of the public sector, awarded to the President of the Treasury Board by Sheila Fraser, the Auditor General of Canada, in her capacity as chair of the Public Sector Accounting Board. It was for the work the public service has done in accrual accounting as performed by the Treasury Board and by all other departments.

While we as a public accounts committee tend to be critical of the public service, we also want to recognize the wonderful job they all do for Canada and for Canadians, and without them we would be in pretty sad shape. If any department is watching and wants to advise their staff accordingly, please do so, because we do appreciate them and are glad to see that their work is being recognized.

I'll turn to the order of the day, and there are a couple of things. This is what I always read before the start of a meeting last spring, and I'm going to read it. I basically thought I would just continue on until we're finished with this particular agenda on the sponsorship issue.

That is, to our witnesses, the refusal to answer questions or failure to reply truthfully may give rise to a charge of contempt of the House, whether the witness has been sworn in or not. In addition, witnesses who lie under oath may be charged with perjury.

This now brings us to the next point, that through the sponsorship issue in the springtime all the witnesses were sworn in. Now, is this the committee's desire or not its desire? Do you want the witnesses sworn in or do you want them to just appear without being sworn in? The decision is yours. Is there any comment?

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you.

I just have a question. What were the committee's criteria for taking this step the last time?

The Chair: The issue was that at one point in time it was raised by a member of the committee that they wanted that particular witness sworn in, and just so we didn't make any particular rule for any particular person, the committee just decided everybody would be sworn in from that point forward. Then it was just a matter of course that they were all done.

Mr. Holland.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to be clear on how the proceedings are going to work today. Is it the intent of committee—and I say this for the benefit of understanding how this process is going to roll out—that parliamentary privilege will be upheld? We're potentially going to have conflicts with respect to Gomery and what proceedings we hear today, and if that comes back and there's something contradictory, are we going to consider waiving privilege? Are we going to uphold privilege, given the fact that these individuals have testified before Gomery? I want to make sure we're clear on that.

The Chair: Privilege applies. Privilege was reaffirmed by the House just a matter of weeks ago in response to the issue before Mr. Gomery's commission, and it is in effect. Witnesses are covered by it until the House changes its mind.

In fact, these witnesses have been advised in writing, I believe, that they're covered off by privilege. A letter was sent to them: "All testimony provided to parliamentary committees is protected by privilege. Consequently, you may not be subject to criminal prosecution and no civil action may be instituted against you in respect of any testimony you provide the committee".

That's been the way for 315 years, I think.

We're back to the question.

Mr. David Christopherson: If everybody was and this is a continuation of that, I suppose we might be accused of treating people differently for whatever reason. I really don't care that much, but maybe we should for consistency's sake, just so nobody suggests there are different categories of witnesses on this issue. But I really don't have strong feelings either way, Chair.

The Chair: I don't have any strong feelings. Does anybody have any strong feelings, yea or nay?

Mr. Fitzpatrick.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): I just wanted to make something clear on this privilege point so there's no misunderstanding on another point: if you don't tell the truth, there will be negative consequences. The protection is only there for people who want to come here and tell the truth. It's not there for people to mislead this House or anybody else.

• (1540)

The Chair: Yes, and that's what I said: the refusal to answer questions or failure to reply truthfully may give rise to a charge of contempt—or perjury if they're sworn in. Is it agreed that we swear the witnesses in?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That will be the way until we're finished with the sponsorship inquiry, and then we'll decide what we're going to do from that point forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Lebrun (Former Special Assistant in Minister Gagliano's Office, PWGSC, As Individual): I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So help me God.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier (Former Special Assistant in Minister Gagliano's Office, Department of Public Works and Govern-

ment Services, As Individual): I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So help me God.

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel (Former Special Assistant in Minister Gagliano's Office, Department of Public Works and Government Services, As Individual): I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So help me God.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We always invite people to make an opening statement. Two of our witnesses said they would just give a verbal opening statement, and Ms. Bouvier has provided a written statement.

Mr. Lebrun, do you want to make a brief opening statement?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

I've based my presentation on the letter the committee clerk sent us. I'm not an expert in the matter on the agenda. Today we're talking about governance and accountability within the federal public service, with an emphasis on ministerial and deputy ministerial accountability relative to the position I held at Minister Gagliano's office. My duties in that office did not enable me to be involved in any decision-making process whatever or to take part in meetings between the minister and his deputy ministers within the department, as a result of which it is hard for me to state any opinions on those questions. However, I'll try to contribute to the committee's deliberations to the best of my knowledge and to answer any questions you may have.

Reporting directly to Minister Gagliano's chief of staff, I held the position of special assistant from January 2001 to January 2002. Until near the end of September or October, my responsibilities were: to prepare the Governor-in-Council appointment files under the minister's responsibility, the operations of the minister's office, which were to liaise with the minister's assistant concerning employee equipment needs, the leave of staff and support staff provided by the department and to monitor the budgetary operations of the minister's office. Lastly, as regards the Sponsorship Program, I was responsible for liaison between members of Parliament, the minister, promoters and the office of Pierre Tremblay at the Communications Coordination Services Branch at Public Works. My only contact in that branch was Isabelle Roy. I subsequently performed caucus liaison duties, which fell more under the responsibilities of Mr. Gagliano as minister responsible for Quebec.

It's hard for me, not being directly involved in the development or operation of programs, to offer a judgment on the governance and accountability principles in that context. It's also hard for me to clearly define the responsibilities of the players involved with respect to the various acts that were committed or decisions made during that period.

However, I can tell you that it is clear in my mind that the minister remains accountable to parliamentarians. Members have the opportunity to question ministers during their various appearances before the House standing committees and in the daily question period in the House of Commons. In my view, an accountability exercise is clearly carried on in those circumstances.

In the context of my duties, it is more difficult to ascertain the responsibility of the minister or deputy ministers within the Department of Public Works and Government Services during that period. The operating framework within the public service is dictated by a certain hierarchy. This entails relations between the minister's office and the public service, as well as the delegation of powers in decision-making and financial approvals. Were they respected? Once again, it's hard for me to answer since I did not take part in meetings between the minister and his deputy ministers.

I hope my answers to your questions will contribute to the study of the subject before the committee. Thank you.

• (1545)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lebrun.

I should have mentioned before we started today that this meeting is not to get into the sponsorship inquiry as to what happened. We're trying to deal with a governance issue, focusing on ministerial and deputy ministerial responsibility. This thing was right off the rails, and it was off the rails for a long time. There must have been a culture and environment or something going on in that office that tolerated something going off the rails; so many people were involved and knew it was off the rails.

The investigation today is to try to understand the office of the minister, and perhaps next week the office of the sponsorship program, so that we can understand the feeling and the culture of what was going on there. So I would ask members to restrict their remarks and questions to that general direction, rather than getting into the sponsorship inquiry, because that's being done down the street at the Gomery investigation. That's the intent of what we're here for today.

My apologies, Ms. Bouvier. You have a written statement, which I believe has been distributed to all in both official languages, so I'll ask you to read it, please.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Members of the committee, my name is Joanne Bouvier. I've been a public servant for 24 years with the Department of Public Works and Government Services. I have held various positions within this department. I was on loan to ministers' offices from 1987 to 1994 as an office manager, and again from 1996 to May 2003 as chief, non-institutional mail registry.

I also served within the deputy minister's office from February 1995 to April 1996 as an administrative assistant, and again as of mid-May 2003 to the present, where I am a strategic adviser to the deputy minister, Mr. David Marshall.

I worked in Minister Gagliano's office from May 1999 to the first week of January 2001. In that capacity I reported to Mr. Jean-Marc Bard, executive assistant to the minister.

During my 18 months in the minister's office, my duties were as follows. I managed the daily operation of the office and liaised with the departmental staff on any follow-ups required by the minister's office on general matters of administration, human resources, budget, and accommodation. I also handled the sponsorship and millennium requests for that office.

The process for the sponsorship requests was as follows. Requests came in verbally or in writing, and in some instances by exempt staff, members of Parliament, or by an organization or group. My role was to give a summary of each request to the executive assistant, Jean-Marc Bard, including sums of moneys asked for the event.

Once the executive assistant had given his approval or non-approval, I would send these requests to the Communications Coordination Services Branch, commonly known as CCSB, and would relay verbally the executive assistant's direction with respect to funding.

The sponsorship files were not registered in a departmental system. I made copies to keep track of these files for the office. The executive assistant would also meet regularly or speak to Pierre Tremblay, the executive director of CCSB. On occasion I was asked to brief the minister, along with Monsieur Bard, on new requests and events, based on reports provided by Communications Coordination Services Branch.

Again, approval direction came from either the executive assistant or Minister Gagliano. Nothing in the normal course of the daily operation left the office without the executive assistant's approval, either verbal or written.

In order to give the committee an idea of the number of requests that were sent to the minister's office, when I arrived in May 1999 there were approximately 80 to 90 files; when I left in December 2000 there were over 800 files on sponsorship.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that the sponsorship files that were forwarded to Minister Gagliano's office during my assignment to that office weren't all approved, but they were definitely all reviewed or discussed, by either the chief of staff or the minister, before being sent to the office of the Communications Coordination Services Branch. I would also like to say that all the files were left to my replacement, Patrick Lebrun, when I left in January 2001.

• (1550)

[*English*]

In May 2002 I was asked by my director, Madame Dominique Francoeur, to participate on the quick response team, or QRT. My role for the quick response team was a mixture of functions—reviewing access to information requests, verifying auditor's notes, verifying files.

Mr. Chairman, you have invited me here today to discuss issues related to governance and accountability. I am by no means an expert on these topics, but I will answer all of your questions to the best of my ability.

Merci.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

As I indicated, we're not asking for expert opinions on governance. We just want to find out how things were in the office you were working in.

Madame Ippersiel, do you have an opening statement you'd like to make, please?

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

I'm currently on sick leave and therefore haven't had a chance to prepare a very elaborate statement. I will simply tell you that I've been employed by the Government of Canada for nearly 30 years. I started at the Public Service Commission in 1974. I've held positions as a secretary, financial clerk and administrative assistant, among others, at the Language Training Branch and the Training Programs Branch.

From July 1991 to July 1994, I held an assistant's position at the Communications Branch of the Department of Public Works and Government Services. From August to December 1994, I acted as a project officer at the National Capital Commission. From December 1994 to June 1997, I held assistant positions in the office of Minister Dingwall, at the Department of Public Works and Government Services, and at the Department of Health. From July 1997 to September 2001, I held a secretarial position and an administrative assistant position for the chief of staff of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

From October 2001 to January 2002, I was a special assistant responsible for sponsorship files at the Department of Public Works in Minister Gagliano's office. From January to April 2002, I was still a special assistant. I would mention here that the shuffle occurred and that I continued working in the same position, as a special assistant responsible for sponsorship files at the Department of Public Works, but in Minister Boudria's office. From April 2002 to June 2004, I held an analyst position in the new Sponsorship Program at Communication Canada. Since June, I have been in a project officer position at Canadian Heritage, where I am on secondment.

I will answer all your questions to the best of my knowledge. That's all.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you again. Thank you very much. Merci beaucoup.

Again, to our members, remember these witnesses today are not people who were responsible for policy; therefore, don't ask them to justify any policies. The sponsorship program was being dealt with in these offices. It was seriously off the rails, and we want to know to what extent the rules of Canada were being advised, informed, and what they thought about the program within the office.

I will be somewhat tight today and may rule questions out of order if I feel they are getting off in a direction that would confuse the waters between us and the Gomery commission.

Mr. Fitzpatrick, please, for eight minutes.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, folks, for showing up.

I guess maybe the line of questions I have would probably be for you, Madame Bouvier, as you're in a unique position. You've worked in the minister's department, the political operations, and you also worked in the public service, so you've had dual roles. I'm somewhat curious as to how those roles might contrast between those different positions.

You say that from 1987 until 1994 you were on loan to a minister's office. Which minister was that?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: It was during the Conservative government; it was Minister Elmer MacKay.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: What portfolio was that?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Public Works; it was always Public Works.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: And from 1996 to 2003, you were involved with another...?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: From 1996 until 2003. In 1996, it was Madame Diane Marleau who was the Minister of Public Works.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: I'm just curious, but in those roles, for somebody in your position, were there clear rules and guidelines on how you would conduct yourself in those offices?

• (1555)

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes, because at that time, up until I joined Minister Gagliano's office, I was still a public servant, so I had a director and another manager. I had two levels of managers to go through.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: But were you reporting to somebody in the minister's office?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Not for those specific periods of time, only from May 1999 until the first week of January or the end of December 2000. Then I had a direct reporting relationship with the executive assistant to the minister. The way we were situated is that we were physically in the same office, but there was a separation; the registry, where all the correspondence was done, was a separate entity from the minister's office.

In that period of time when I worked for Minister Gagliano, I was in the minister's office as a special assistant, but I had kept my substantive position as a departmental assistant.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: But you were responsible to the minister when you were working in his office, right?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: It was twofold. My responsibility was to the department and I also had responsibility.... Because of daily operations, I reported directly to the executive assistant to the minister, and consequently the minister.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: I'm curious. When you were working in the minister's office, would there have been a clear code of ethics or standards set out for employees in the minister's office?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: For a minister's office I always continued with the same code, or I—

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: But you had to wear two caps when you were in those jobs, so you would have known whether the minister had a code of ethics for his employees. Did they have one?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes. I was witness to letters to the ethics counsellor when they were hiring people—exempt staff.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: If a person was working in a minister's office and was being asked to do something they thought was unacceptable, not ethical and so on, what would be your recourse?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Well, I wouldn't have any recourse. At that point in time it would have been for a level higher, so I would have brought it to the executive assistant for the political staff.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Was that an effective process?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I think so. I brought it to their attention, so the advice I needed to give was there.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: So if there was something going on that you didn't think was right, you brought it to their attention and they got it sorted out.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I can't honestly say. Sometimes I wasn't at the tail end. I wouldn't know—

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Well, if they didn't get it sorted out, how could you say it was working?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: No. I said I brought it to their attention for sorting out.

The Chair: She advised a superior, and that was the extent of her responsibility.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: So if it was reported to a senior person and the thing kept going on, would you keep on doing what you thought was unacceptable? Would you keep on doing that kind of work if they didn't do anything about it?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Are you asking me if they were instructing me to do something...for the political staff?

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Well, if you were participating in something you knew was wrong, not according to rules or guidelines or ethical standards, would you continue to do it?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Well, to my knowledge, I didn't participate in any wrongdoing. I know that's not your question, but for the political staff I would advise the executive assistant, and then it would be taken from there. That was my role.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: When you were working in the public service rather than the minister's office, did you have occasion from time to time to see ministers intervene or interfere in the process in the department?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: No.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: When you were working in the minister's office, any of these ministers—since you were wearing two caps, you were responsible to the public service and ministers both—did you see occasions where a minister was intervening or interfering in the workings of the public service?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I don't think I would say it was interference, but I would think they would make recommendations and the recommendations were basically followed. But I was not the one to carry those out.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: When you were working in the minister's office, were you executing government policy or were you doing politics?

• (1600)

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: It was purely departmental. It wasn't politics—partisan politics.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: In your mind, is the rule book clear for public servants as to what's right and what's wrong when you're working for the Government of Canada?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes, I think so. There's an ethics policy.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Hindsight is said to be 20/20 and experience is a good teacher. With your 25 years of working in both the public service and the minister's office, do you have any words of wisdom as a front-line person as to how we could have the wheels of government work more efficiently and better for the Canadian public?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I think people should really consider what they're getting into. If they're willing to take on those responsibilities and to act on both sides, on two fronts, there should be a clear understanding from the onset.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Fitzpatrick.

Monsieur Sauvageau, s'il vous plaît, pour huit minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): I would like to welcome all three of you. I've taken notes because I didn't want to get lost. That rarely happens. I usually ask questions spontaneously, but, like you, I'm trying to be careful.

My first question is for any of the three witnesses, who worked directly or indirectly with Mr. Gagliano at Public Works Canada. I'd like to be clear: my question doesn't concern the Sponsorship Program, as the Chairman has asked us to emphasize, but rather other programs. You didn't manage only one program. Public Works and Government Services Canada administered a number of programs.

Can you tell us whether other programs were managed like the Sponsorship Program within the department? For example, you no doubt observed a change of attitude or atmosphere in the department when Mr. Dingwall handed over to Ms. Marleau. Can you tell us whether, for other programs, you witnessed any verbal agreements between the deputy minister and the minister, contrary to the regulatory way of doing things?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Given the positions I held during the period, at my responsibility level, we didn't know what was going on in the other programs. We were strictly concerned with ministerial correspondence. I understand that you can read things, but there was no very pronounced difference between the way the two offices operated at the time.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: With your permission, it's written on your sheet that you handled the requests under the Sponsorship Program and the millennium project for the minister's office.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: We didn't handle the millennium project. That was a general program. I think it was headed up by Herb Gray's office. Our department, or our office, received the kits that were intended for the members at the time. That was managed by the political assistant from Quebec.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: It was managed by the political assistant from Quebec?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes, he managed the kits because that concerned the ridings. He received the kits on the minister's behalf.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: All right. The other two persons may wish to answer as well...

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: When I worked at Minister Dingwall's office, I was secretary to the special assistant from Quebec. I only did secretarial work. I wasn't involved in anything.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Did you see anything?

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: What I saw was only in the area of office work, such as correspondence or things like that. Nothing more.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: What about you, Mr. Lebrun?

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: In my case, it's hard to say anything. I didn't deal with other Public Works Canada program. I only worked on the Sponsorship Program. Subsequently, my duties were more related to the responsibilities of the minister's political lieutenant. So, in terms of the hierarchy, I didn't have to deal with or see how the other Public Works Canada programs operated.

The only thing I could mention, and Ms. Bouvier mentioned it a little in her opening remarks, is that none of the correspondence concerning the sponsorships was registered at the secretarial service of Public Works Canada, but went directly to the Communications Coordination Services Branch, to Pierre Tremblay's office.

•(1605)

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: I want to clarify my question. You may have answered it clearly, but I didn't understand. There were agreements. You say that you orally communicated the instructions of the chief of staff concerning funding changes. That can't be consistent with the standards. Were the projects that were accepted forwarded directly?

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: All correspondence was forwarded there directly, without being registered.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: To your knowledge, did any other programs, apart from the Sponsorship Program, have such unusual standards?

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: I gave you a partial answer when I said that was the only type of correspondence that didn't go through the normal channels. For example, all correspondence concerning any Crown corporation was recorded in correspondence and sent to the Crown corporation concerned for processing, or whatever. That was the only place. That partly answers your question.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Thank you.

Ms. Bouvier, was your relationship with Minister Gagliano different from the one you had with Minister Marleau?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes. When I worked with Minister Marleau, I wasn't lent to the office as a special assistant. With Ms. Marleau, I worked strictly in my managerial capacity on ministerial correspondence.

I occasionally met Minister Gagliano. That was the difference. When I worked for Ms. Marleau, I didn't sit down with her at her meetings with the chief of staff. However, when I worked for Mr. Gagliano, I sat down with Mr. Bard and Mr. Gagliano.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: I'm going to ask you a question on Bill C-11, which concerns whistleblowing in the public service, but first I'd like to ask you this. Mr. Gagliano said that one minister could not be responsible for his department since it was too big. Minister Alcock, the President of the Treasury Board, told us that the minister was responsible for his department, that that was his responsibility. Mr. Lebrun, I think you said virtually the same thing as Mr. Alcock, if I'm not mistaken, that the minister is responsible for his department.

We're beginning a study on accountability and governance in the departments. In your view, is the minister responsible? Is the deputy minister responsible? Is everyone responsible for actions that are taken? Is it too much for a minister to be responsible for his actions?

[English]

The Chair: You can give an answer based on your common knowledge or you can refuse to answer that, if you so desire.

As I said, they're not here to tell us about policy, so I wouldn't ask them to speak on behalf of the Government of Canada. Like all Canadians, they may be aware of what we call ministerial responsibility. They can confirm that, but you can't ask them about the policy of ministerial accountability.

[Translation]

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I believe so. In my opinion, the deputy minister and minister are responsible.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Thank you.

Bill C-11 is currently being examined in the House of Commons. It's the former Bill C-25, which was designed to enable employees who witness wrongdoing to file a complaint with the chair of the Public Service Commission or an independent officer of the House.

Do you think it would have been desirable for there to be such legislation when you worked? Do you think this bill on the disclosure of wrongdoing in the public sector is acceptable for people who work in positions such as those you occupied?

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: That's obviously the way it should be, but there's always the fear of reprisals, harassment or whatever. We think this bill is very good, but I think that public servants will still be afraid.

•(1610)

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Merci beaucoup, Monsieur Sauvageau.

Mr. Holland, for eight minutes, then Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. Mark Holland: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for taking the time to join us today and share their experience in having served Canadians for many years.

I think the issue of sponsorship is really secondary to the issue we're considering, and I think the reason you were asked to come today is more the global issue of governance and accountability. You aren't experts, I recognize that, and so some of these questions are difficult.

What I'd be interested in—again in a global sense, and you can use examples from the sponsorship file or other experience—is where you see strengths in terms of accountability, measures you witnessed or saw that you thought were helpful, areas you thought were weak, and areas where you thought there could have been more done to help on the issue of accountability. And just generally, in your experience working many, many years in the public service over different governments and different ministers, what has worked, what hasn't worked, and where have the gaps been with respect to accountability in each of your opinions?

Could you each take an opportunity to comment on that.

Mr. Lebrun, if you want to start....

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: It's hard for me to answer. First, I've never been a public servant; I've always been a political employee. I know that, in recent years, certain financial authorities have delegated to public servants, who can authorize government expenditures. I believe that, if you have the power to authorize or approve something, you should, on the other hand, have to be accountable for your actions. In that respect, I believe that those persons, to a certain degree, should be responsible for their duties or the decisions they make.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Holland: Anything...Madame Bouvier?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I guess my personal opinion would be that for the political staff when they arrive in the offices, perhaps there should be some mechanism—and there is, as the deputy minister usually meets with the political staff. That's how it's handled.

But when there is a grey area, such as mine, because I was in these positions for many years, you tend to be caught because you have a loyalty to your department and a loyalty to these people whom you come to know. But if you see that there is any wrongdoing and you disclose the wrongdoing.... What happens when you're told on both sides, "Just do as you're told"? So it's a little bit like what Ghislaine was saying: you're a little bit apprehensive, because there could be circumstances, a reprimand or what not, or basically, "Do you want to do the job, or not? If you don't, just leave. If you don't like what you're doing or don't like what you see...." So it's up to the individual, I guess, to stay true to themselves and try to make the best of that situation.

I think, though, that if you're doing this study to help public servants to do daily operations with the political staff, it should be clear, and there should be a clear policy for both and for both to be in agreement with that policy and to adhere to it. And if they stray from that, well, pull them back in and discuss it. From my experience, that would be the only thing.

From what I know now today, I would be hard pressed to do another job like that. I wouldn't want to be considered, I think.

• (1615)

The Chair: Madame Ippersiel.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: I entirely agree with Ms. Bouvier. I have nothing else to add. I entirely agree with what she's just said.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Holland: I appreciate those answers; I think they're helpful.

I'll start first with this issue. When you had a problem you would raise it with somebody who was in an executive position, somebody within the political realm, and then you would leave it at that. And I guess there may have been some discomfort sometimes in doing that and wondering where it would go and what would happen if it didn't get followed up. Would there have been a greater deal of comfort if you could have made that disclosure to an independent third party anonymously and had assurances that it would be followed up through that process? Would that help alleviate it and would that address the comment you made about not wanting to return to a position like that? Is it that type of concern that would lead you to make that statement?

Secondly, if something like that were in place, where you had an opportunity to go through a third party and make an anonymous disclosure like that, would it help remedy the type of concern you're raising?

The Chair: Are you addressing your questions to Madame Bouvier?

Mr. Mark Holland: Sorry, I am. It's to Madame Bouvier, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I think that if there were a mechanism like that in place and it were an independent party investigating the wrongdoing, or the allegations of wrongdoing, the public servants would probably be a little bit more confident. But from my experience in the last 24 years, I think the reality is that people would not come forward. And if they did...we've seen too many times the ramifications of that. They're put aside and you're on what they call the black list, and you're not going to be considered for other opportunities.

Mr. Mark Holland: If going to a third-party who is independent and anonymous and could review that without using the individual's name wouldn't provide assurance, what would? Can you think of something that would provide a level of security and assurance that would allow those who had a concern to bring it forward without fear of retribution? If any one of the three wants to answer, please do—Ms. Bouvier, or anybody else who feels they want to answer that.

I think it's very germane to our whole discussion, because if we talk about the public service, about wanting to strengthen it and make sure our goals and objectives are being followed, it's critically important that people such as you, who are working very hard in the interests of Canadians, if you have something that you want to raise, have a place to take that without fear of retribution.

So beyond what I've suggested or the idea I've put forward, what do you think would help address that?

The Chair: We'll have a brief response from all three speakers.

Madame Ippersiel, I think you're ready to speak.

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: I think that, if it's done anonymously, people will probably cooperate. However, if there's no protection for employees, I don't believe there will be any cooperation, since what's involved is work, salary and all that entails. What's concerned is people's lives. It should therefore be very severe.

[English]

The Chair: A brief response, Madame Bouvier and Monsieur Lebrun.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: As Ghislaine mentioned, if it were done anonymously with those guarantees, then, yes, it would encourage people to come forward. But again, I would have my doubts that it would work. We do have an independent or an ethics body that folks can go to. I don't know what their stats are on the ratio of whether this is going well or not, but in my mind it's clear that I personally would think twice about doing that, because it entails a lot of paperwork, a lot of energy, a lot of personal time, and a lot of grief. Also, as she said, there are the salary issues, money, sick leave, and what not, and people would be under the duress or stress that would come with those. This is what we've seen in the newspapers lately. People don't come forward because of things like that.

The Chair: Monsieur Lebrun.

[Translation]

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: Mr. Chairman, my case is different. I somewhat agree with Ms. Bouvier and Ms. Ippersiel, but, being part of the exempt staff and not a member of the public service, I find it hard to clearly establish the principle of the whistleblower. Certain protection measures are definitely necessary for people who disclose wrongdoings. It's definitely not something easy to do, but, at the same time, a mechanism has to be found to prevent abusive disclosure. There always has to be a balance.

If I can offer a comparison, we often hear in criminal cases that the accused feels doubly punished because he has to tell the court what he experienced. I imagine that, in a disclosure, you nevertheless have to protect the person who was a victim of wrongdoing or who admits such wrongdoing.

•(1620)

[English]

The Chair: Merci beaucoup.

It's interesting to note that the whistle-blowing legislation deals only with public servants. Therefore, I don't think it applies to people in the position of Mr. Lebrun, who was an exempt staff member in the department.

Does anybody know? Does the bill apply to exempt political staff in a department? It might be worth taking note of, because if you can't do it through the public service, you may want to use the political staff if you want to do something that's not too ethical. It's a way around it, and maybe something people think about when they're talking about the bill.

Mr. Christopherson, please, for eight minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

I thank the witnesses very much. I know it's not easy, but we appreciate very much your coming forward and being so forthright.

I thought it was interesting that both Monsieur Lebrun and Madame Bouvier, I believe—certainly Madame Bouvier in your written presentation and Monsieur Lebrun in your verbal presentation—talked about the registration of departmental correspondence. To quote your letter, Madame Bouvier, “The sponsorship files were not registered in a departmental system”.

Having been an Ontario cabinet minister, I understand somewhat the process. Ours was a correspondence unit that was attached and supervised by the deputy minister, but it covered the deputy's office as well as my office as minister, and virtually everything had to be recorded. I'm being left with the impression that when we got to the sponsorship program, it was handled differently from other pieces of legislation, in that it wasn't registered. Is that correct?

The Chair: I think you mean correspondence, not legislation.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm sorry, correspondence, yes, my mistake.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: That's right, all the other correspondence would be registered, but this one in particular was not registered. It was sent on to CCSB.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Lebrun, the same?

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: The same answer.

Mr. David Christopherson: How was that pointed out to you? When you're brought into a job, I assume you're given a briefing, training, and told this is what we do here, this is how we do it. Did somebody say yes, we do all this, but treat this one differently? How was it indicated to you that it was to be done differently from other pieces of correspondence?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: In terms of my experience, I was on the other side of the fence when Minister Gagliano arrived in June 1997. I was instructed to do that by political staff, exempt staff, personnel.

Mr. David Christopherson: You were personally directed to not register that.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes, that's right.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Lebrun.

[Translation]

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: In my case, the transition was done by Joanne. The information was transmitted to me, first, by Ms. Bouvier when the transition took place, when I took up my duties. There was a clear directive from the chief of staff, from my immediate supervisor.

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson: Within the political staff, you were advised, as a political person, to treat this differently from how you'd treat other things.

[Translation]

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: In my case, that was the only correspondence I received, but the way it had to be handled was clear. The information came directly from the political staff.

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you.

The chair mentioned at the outset that things went terribly off the rails in the office—that seems obvious, so far—and that's what we're trying to get a sense of.

I know that in your correspondence, Madame Bouvier, you also say that you handled the sponsorship and millennium requests for the office. The millennium and the sponsorship were handled differently, under two different processes?

• (1625)

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: The millennium was not registered either. The files were kept within our office. They were not sent to the department for any advice whatsoever. They were directed to the MP, who in this instance would be the minister.

Mr. David Christopherson: So you're suggesting that there were similarities between the way the sponsorship program and the millennium project were handled correspondence-wise in the office, that they were both handled differently from everything else?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: It didn't go to CCSB; it stayed within the minister's office, because it was a program intended for and directed to the MPs to solicit proposals for millennium projects. So it stayed within the political mail.

Mr. David Christopherson: Was there anything else, any other programs or any other correspondence by category, where you were advised not to record it, or just these two?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Just those two, yes.

Mr. David Christopherson: What happened with the millennium project internally? Obviously, it looks as if something else wasn't flowing in the normal course. It stayed within the political world.

Mr. Lebrun, maybe you'd be the better one to answer this.

Obviously, there's a problem with the sponsorship, and we're identifying the details of what happened day to day in the office. The first obvious thing is that somebody said, or gave the direction, don't record this. Well, right away an alarm bell goes off. But now I'm hearing you say that the millennium project was sort of given the same instruction—don't record this.

Am I correct in saying that?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I think you could say that the millennium program didn't carry the same weight as the sponsorship program. It wasn't recorded, but not because it was something to be recorded. It was delivered to the attention of the minister as an MP, for their riding. Usually they had to go and solicit proposals from their riding offices.

The kits came into the office, they were distributed to the political staffer for the Quebec region, and then he discussed it with the executive assistant. The proposals were then given to the millennium program office.

We didn't get any feedback on whether or not it was approved, or I certainly didn't get any feedback from that. They probably did, but I didn't.

Mr. David Christopherson: But what I'm hearing so far is that at least at your level, your handling of the correspondence vis-à-vis the

sponsorship program was the same as for the millennium. The two of them were not to be recorded. Even though, when they came in, you did different things, one of the things you did not do was record either issue.

Did that seem a little strange?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm very curious about what I'll describe as the "water cooler discussions". Among staff, whether political or not, was there gossip or rumours or sort of an understanding that there was something here that wasn't quite right? Nobody really wanted to stick their head in—I mean, nobody wants to go looking for trouble—but was there that sense, that feeling, in the office that there was something there that people would just as soon not have too much light on?

You can only speak from your own experience, I know.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes, from my own experience, I did raise the issue that certain files were not registered and that it went against what we were basically there to do, as a service for the minister's office. I was basically told to do as I was told by the minister's office. And this was by a director.

Mr. David Christopherson: I see. This is quite interesting, I have to say.

Was there anything else in the office that you were directed not to record? Were there other categories, ordinary categories that nobody really thought too much about, that you didn't register as a matter of course? Or was everything to be registered, with these two exceptions?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: No, I think there were some other ones that were not registered, invitations of a personal nature or something like that. They wouldn't generate a reply, or somebody to give advice to the minister—

Mr. David Christopherson: But no one would consider sponsorship scandal...or, pardon me, sponsorship program issues, to be routine. That was special. And I'm getting concerned about millennium here. I just want to know how far all of this goes. I'd like to have it taken to the next step in terms of the process, because where there's smoke, you worry that perhaps there's fire.

When people were chatting, they would chat about the sponsorship? Would it get mentioned? Did people know what they were speaking of? When they said that something here was not quite right, was it the sponsorship program?

• (1630)

The Chair: We'll have to get the answer, because you're over your time, Mr. Christopherson.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I don't think they knew it was sponsorship. I know there was some gossip around why this correspondence wasn't registered when the rest were.

Mr. David Christopherson: Did they say that about millennium too?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: No.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Mr. Chair, can I ask a question on this?

The Chair: No, we're going to go to Mr. Anders, but we'll put your name down and get you back on the list.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: It's just for precision.

The Chair: If you write your question down, you can ask your question later on. We're going to stick to the procedure.

Mr. Anders, please.

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): My colleague can ask a very precise question later on.

To all of you, did anyone from the Liberal Party ever come to meet with the minister about sponsorship, advertising, or research contracts?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: By "meet" do you mean personally, physically, in the office? I wasn't privy to that, but I was privy to correspondence from Liberal members.

Mr. Rob Anders: Have you stated the nature of that type of business and what you saw?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: As I said, they would write in their requests, which were analyzed with the others and then sent on to the communications branch.

Mr. Rob Anders: Do you have a sense of the number of those that you saw? Was it in the dozens, was it in the hundreds? About how many files was it? You said that when you started, the file number was anywhere from 80 to 90, and when you wrapped up you said there were about 800. Were those 800 all Liberal Party requests?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: No, I wouldn't be able to say that. Some were from organizations. Whether they had political affiliations or not, it wouldn't be in their proposals.

Mr. Rob Anders: Once again, do you have a sense of a number?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: From the Liberal requests, you mean? I wouldn't be able to tell you a specific percentage for that correspondence.

Mr. Rob Anders: But it was quite a few, obviously, if you can't recall exactly how many.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes.

Mr. Rob Anders: What about for our other two witnesses?

The Chair: Monsieur Lebrun.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: Liberal members indeed make requests. I remember also receiving correspondence, from a member who supported an event or who had requested sponsorship or from members of other parties.

There were requests from members of most of the parties in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Anders, I'm going to interrupt here just for a second.

The orders of the day are to deal with accountability and governance in the department. The concept was to find out the culture of the office in terms of why the sponsorship program was handled the way it was, which was contrary to all the rules in the

book, so that we can make the recommendations. To go down the investigation of Liberal applications, Conservative applications, or other applications is getting into the investigation rather than dealing with the issue of governance and accountability in the management of the office.

Mr. Rob Anders: I understand, Mr. Chairman. I, for example, never wrote in a sponsorship request, so I'm just trying to get a sense of how this all worked. I never got on that gravy train, Mr. Chairman, so I'm trying to wrap my head around this.

I'll focus, then, on Mr. Gagliano. He was the regional minister for Quebec. What exactly would he do in his role as regional minister for Quebec? How did you see him carrying out that role? What did that mean?

This I'll ask to Ms. Bouvier, because I think she probably—

The Chair: That too, I think, is not an appropriate question, because they were not working that close to the minister.

Am I correct in saying you were not working close to the minister?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes, that's right. I wasn't privy to those—

The Chair: They wouldn't have the answer to that.

Mr. Rob Anders: I thought Ms. Bouvier indicated that she did sit down on a regular basis with Mr. Gagliano, but not with Ms. Marleau.

The Chair: Yes, but I don't think her situation was to determine what the minister's responsibilities were as the minister for Quebec. She was taking specific direction, I presume, on correspondence—you know, this decision does this and that decision does that—but I don't think she was involved in the political debate about what a minister for Quebec is supposed to do and how he does that.

Am I correct in saying that, Ms. Bouvier?

• (1635)

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes.

Mr. Rob Anders: Okay.

Is there any way you think we could change the way we deal with whistle-blowers? For example, I know that during the Civil War, they had a law in the United States—it's an old Latin thing called *qui tam*—whereby if you found some sort of abuse of government money, you could go ahead and expose it, and if you found \$1 million worth of waste and saved the taxpayers \$1 million, you would get a percentage of that—let's say 10%. So if you found a way to save \$1 million, you'd get \$100,000.

Do you think that would be a better way of dealing with this than, for example, whistle-blower legislation?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: No, I don't think so.

Mr. Rob Anders: No?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: No, I don't agree with that.

Mr. Rob Anders: Okay. Some of you probably could have wound up millionaires off of this, I'm sure.

[Translation]

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: What do you do about someone who makes an abusive disclosure resulting in the expenditure of public funds? Does the bill make any provision in the case of someone who causes the government to spend money without a reason?

[English]

Mr. Rob Anders: Well, thank goodness it's a law that's been around for a couple thousand years, so if you launch a frivolous one, you pay the costs and you pay the other person's costs too. If it's successful, then you're in the money. So they've already figured a way through that.

Ms. Bouvier, you mentioned as well that you doubt the ethics counsellor would have success in getting out the truth on some of these things. You made that statement. Why do you feel that?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I think I mentioned earlier, in response to Mr. Holland's question, that I'm not sure if the ethics counsellor... Yes, I think a code of ethics and an ethics counsellor for both parties, with rigorous rules, would probably help.

Mr. Rob Anders: So what you're saying is that you don't believe the current rules are stringent enough, that in a sense what you have right now or what the ethics people have right now won't allow them to really get at the truth.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Again, I think I'm saying that, from what we hear in the media and from what's been happening, I don't know if they are successful with people coming forward to them as a third party.

Mr. Rob Anders: You said you favoured stricter policies with regard to ethics. How would you change them if you had an ability to make changes to those things? You're on the hot seat today. You've obviously been through a lot of this stuff over your years of dealing with these issues. I would hope, anyhow, that over that time you've probably thought about some ways in which you might have liked to see these things changed so that this doesn't happen.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Well, for me personally, if there were to be any change—and perhaps some people are not of the same view—I would get a memorandum of understanding or a contract signed by both parties or the three parties. If there's a legal course of action, then perhaps it should go that way, in front of a tribunal.

Mr. Rob Anders: A tribunal. All right.

Perhaps Mr. Sauvageau will get excited here because I'm going to follow up on one of his questions, where he was asking you whether or not there was a difference between the sponsorship program and other programs.

My sense, based on your responses coming back—and this was based on several responses over the last while—is that there really wasn't a difference. If that's the case, I'm going where Mr. Christopherson is going with this. If you feel that you had a tough time determining if there was a difference between the sponsorship program and the other programs you were dealing with, then this opens a whole new kettle of fish.

Would you like to clarify any of those things, or is that an accurate statement?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Again, for the programs, I would go back to say the rules should probably be stricter even for that, if there's one way of doing things for everyone, political and departmental staff.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Anders.

Mr. Lastewka, please, eight minutes.

Hon. Walt Lastewka (St. Catharines, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I want to discuss mostly my questions along the line of political staff and departmental staff.

Ms. Bouvier and Ms. Ippersiel, I'd like to concentrate on your area because you've worked in both, right?

Mr. Lebrun, you did not work in a department, you only worked in a minister's staff. Correct?

[Translation]

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: That's correct.

[English]

Hon. Walt Lastewka: From your perspective, what is the difference in working in a department versus a minister's office? What are the differentials?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: You get things done a lot quicker for the minister. You have a number of departmental officials who are there to respond to any matter and to make sure that it's well coordinated and there's no embarrassment brought to the minister. In that sense, I would say that would be the difference between a deputy minister and a minister's office. The only difference is that things just happen quicker when it's one of those offices that calls.

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: I would add that, when you work in the minister's office, you're more often called upon to request things than to do things. We're the ones who phone to get information. The different sectors of the department have to report to us. That's what differentiates the work in operations from that in a minister's office. When you work in departmental operations, you have to provide information. However, it's the reverse when you work for the minister's office. Consequently, we request information for the minister.

As Ms. Bouvier said, we get the answers to our questions much more quickly when we work in the department as such.

[English]

Hon. Walt Lastewka: My second question is this. Is it good to have people who work in the department to be seconded to a minister's office? What are the positive things and what are the negative things?

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: The positive side is that the departmental people usually know how the department works. They know the department's various divisions, which is an asset for the minister's office. We're usually aware of what's going on in the department. We know where to get the information. We receive a certain amount of training within the department, which can help the minister's office get its answers. We know who to go to. As employees, we're aware of what goes on in the department.

[English]

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I would agree with what Ghislaine is saying. It facilitates the flow of paper or decisions and the flow of information to and from a minister's office or a deputy minister's office when you're dealing with folks who have experience within that department.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: What is the negative side of having a departmental person working in a minister's office?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: From my personal experience, the negative side is that you are perceived to have, as Ghislaine was saying, a bit of power and prestige—and believe me, it's not so. We work long hours and the demand is greater on stress and what not, and you have to do it because you're obeying a superior.

I think the other negative side to it is that when you have to go back into the departmental way of doing things, you are subject to some negativity from colleagues with whom you worked previously. And once you're in the minister's office and then you come back into the departmental realm, it's not as easy to manoeuvre and to function.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: Does that negativity stay for a short while or a long while?

• (1645)

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Again, talking from personal experience, it's just a short while until they know who the person really is...and they were just reacting to those pressures and this is why they were always asking for urgent material. I think it's a little while, but sometimes it depends on your personal suitabilities with your colleagues.

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: I entirely agree with Ms. Bouvier. At times, there can even be some settling of accounts within the department when you go back to your former co-workers.

[English]

Hon. Walt Lastewka: On an overall basis, would you rate the experience as good? Would you suggest other people have that experience or not?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I think it's good, because it's nothing that you learn in the books at school. It's good, but again perhaps with stricter rules and a clear understanding of what you're getting into from the onset. And even at that, I think sometimes they tend to deviate from that.

I think overall the experience is good. The people are good people; they're just reacting. But the pressure is there, and they're just doing their job and you're trying to do a job as well.

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: I think that working in a minister's office is a very positive experience. It shows us another aspect of office work as such. Sometimes it also encourages us to be much more curious about what politics is and what politicians are, and so on. It makes us more curious about politics.

[English]

Hon. Walt Lastewka: So I would summarize from your remarks, then, that it's a positive learning experience and it's an experience that improves your skills, but there needs to be a better understanding of roles and responsibility when you make your transition from the department to the minister's office and from the minister's office back to the department.

The other question I want to ask is this, and I wasn't sure how long you've worked for ministers. Did any of you work for previous ministers' offices in previous governments?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I did work for the previous Minister of Public Works from 1987, I believe I said in my statement, to 1994. And I went through the change, the transition from the Conservative government or the government of the day in power to the Liberal government.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: Can you tell me if there are any differences from those two experiences?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: No, I think they're basically the same. They have a mandate, they have a role to carry out, and that's how they go about their daily operations.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lastewka.

I'm going to ask a few questions myself, because I thought these questions would have been asked.

The Government of Canada has thousands and thousands of pages of rules, and you're all very competent office personnel, but the Government of Canada has rules on procedures and they also have rules on ethical conduct to do things right. Were you ever asked to read...? Is there one day a year that they set aside to refresh your memory on what the procedures are, at any time in your public service? Are you aware of the government having some policy to keep you up to speed and refreshed about what the ethical conduct is and the rules are?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes, I think the training is definitely there. There are ethics guidelines and there is ethics counselling. I'm not sure if it's still mandatory, but in my time it was mandatory to go once a year to get refreshed on the rules, a code of ethics, and a code of conduct.

The Chair: So you are kept up to date. It was in front of you.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes.

The Chair: Getting back to Mr. Christopherson's point about the water cooler conversations....

Mr. Lebrun.

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: Mr. Chairman, in that case, in the minister's office, usually when the new minister is coming in or a new staffer is coming in, we have a briefing on the ethics codes for people who have such positions, but we don't have a review every year. Every year, it's on the request of the office.

• (1650)

The Chair: Okay.

On the water cooler conversations, here we have a program that was seriously off the rails. There seems to be a recognition by a number of the staff persons that it wasn't being done right. The rules were being broken, it wasn't being sent to the department, and so on.

Was there a tension, discussion, in the office to say, "Don't go over there because that's the program", but everything else was working fine? Was there a tension, discussion, in the office, knowing that the rules were being broken?

Does anybody want to take that one?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: For my part again, when they first came in and I was instructed to do that, I raised it with my manager.

The Chair: But it was a "business as usual" attitude in the office. Nobody was saying, "We're breaking the rules here, but don't tell anybody"?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I would say that would be correct, yes.

The Chair: So it was a "business as usual" type of attitude.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes.

The Chair: Once that policy had become the norm, it was just that this was the way things were done.

You mentioned the millennium fund, is that right?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes, the millennium program or project.

The Chair: Millennium program.

You said these were coming from MPs, so you passed them on to the minister.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes.

The Chair: Was the minister approving these? Who was approving these grants? These are the millennium fund sponsorships.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: The approvals again didn't lie with the minister or the executive assistant. They were just receiving proposals and they were sending on those proposals to the millennium program office.

The Chair: Okay.

Like Mr. Anders, I don't recall getting my package. Maybe I did, and maybe I didn't, but this was a package that was sent out to all MPs.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: You got your answer. Why don't you stick to your question.

The Chair: Yes, I know, but this was a package that was sent out to all members of Parliament, and then it came back and the deputy passed it up the line because it was a political situation.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Allison, you're next—and we're into round two now, which is five minutes each.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you once again, witnesses, for coming today.

We touched on my question earlier, but I just wanted some clarification about political or non-political staff in the office. Mr. Lebrun, were you political staff?

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: Yes. When the minister is going out, you are going out with him.

Mr. Dean Allison: Okay, great.

And Ms. Bouvier?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: No, departmental staff.

Mr. Dean Allison: Just so I understand, clarify for me the difference between political and non-political staff in terms of responsibilities or roles or duties, Mr. Lebrun.

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: As political staff, you're serving the minister, so you're really exempt staff from the public service. You cannot go afterward on the official opposition. When the minister is released from his position as minister, you're losing your job as he's losing his job. Basically, it's really political, so you have to do caucus relations and your job is really related to that person who is minister.

Mr. Dean Allison: And how would your roles be different then, ladies, just for clarification? I'm hearing political, obviously caucus, as it relates to the party and stuff.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Departmental staff usually just give advice to that office, to the minister's office, and we offer services of such a nature as correspondence, administrative assistance, and perhaps a back-up driver or something like that. The difference is that we have to answer to our deputy minister. In a sense, we have to answer to the minister, but if we feel there is something about which we don't have authority to make that judgment or to make that call, the onus lies with the deputy minister to talk to the minister.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: Unlike the political staff, we keep our jobs after a shuffle.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison: Fair enough.

Once again, you guys talked about that in an earlier question. I'm not sure who raised it. It must be difficult at times with two bosses. You are responsible to the deputy minister as well as to the cabinet minister. How do you juggle those alliances?

• (1655)

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I guess you are very careful not to ruffle any feathers on either side. Your main role there is to give advice to them and to try to tell them what the options are, what the departmental recommendations are. Aside from that, if they don't go with what your advice is—advice is free; you can take it or leave it—then it escalates to a higher level, which in my case would have been those situations.

If I tell them what has to be done and they don't agree with that or they want something else done, then it's brought to a level higher than mine.

Mr. Dean Allison: Are there any other comments?

You talk about process and this is the way you believe things should be done. Mr. Lebrun, you would probably be more political in making sure that you're taking care of the party-type things versus

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: It's not only the party-type things to do everywhere you go. It's also to give political advice to the minister. It's not only related to the Liberal Party. For example, in my case, it could also be saying, well, Minister, if you're taking this decision, you could have this effect in this area; or if you're taking that kind of decision, you will have the approval or the support of those party members; or if you modify that part of the bill, you will have.... So it's really more in that sense, my work as a political adviser.

Mr. Dean Allison: So you would work with the tactical stuff—this is how we do it. You would discuss the implications of different choices and things like that.

I also want to talk about the flow of work, but I don't have enough time with a minute left, so I'll just leave it at that.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Allison.

Mr. Carr, please, five minutes.

Mr. Gary Carr (Halton, Lib.): Thank you very much, all of you, for coming here and bringing us up to date. I guess this is for Mr. Lebrun.

When you did that work, you did it for all members of Parliament, right across the political spectrum. Were there Conservatives calling you about situations...not necessarily calling you, but were there inquiries coming in from all political parties regarding the sponsorship? Or were there just Liberals?

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: No, if I received a call from any MP, I would give him the same services as I gave to a Liberal MP, for example.

Mr. Gary Carr: That's been my experience. Just to be clear, were there other parties involved in having requests for the sponsorship as well as the Liberal Party?

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: Yes, I recall receiving phone calls, or the minister received a letter, or members of Parliament talked to him about one request from a group in his home riding.

Mr. Gary Carr: So there would be letters and phone calls. They would actually go to the minister, too, and ask whether he could help them with this. It would then be funnelled through you, so you would be aware of all parties being involved in this thing.

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: Yes.

Mr. Gary Carr: In terms of some of the other duties, I understand a minister's staff is very busy, running around. In terms of the time, did you spend a whole lot of time on this particular file or was this a small part of the whole other duties that the ministerial staff had?

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: No, it took a certain amount of time. I had other responsibilities. The minister was responsible for crown corporations, which have boards, so there's a process for the appointment of board members. I was taking care of that and also the operation of the office. My time was not only 100% on the sponsorship issue.

Mr. Gary Carr: Thank you, and I think my colleague—

The Chair: That means you have about two and a half minutes.

Mr. Lastewka.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: I want to go back to some of the discussions that were in the office. I understand you said the office didn't operate differently in any major way whether it was the Conservatives or the Liberals in power.

My question is along this line. When you talked about passing down the millennium and sponsorship programs, I don't think I heard anything about them coming back to the office. If I did, if that was discussed, I'll bypass that.

The programs or kits or applications, I take it, went into the department. Did they come back through the department?

• (1700)

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: No. Are you talking specifically about the millennium program?

Hon. Walt Lastewka: Either/or.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: For the millennium program the kits were sent to the office that looked after the millennium program. I did not see anything personally coming back out from that office, no decisions.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: Then on the sponsorship program, you said there were no decisions being made as those kits came into the office. Is that correct? Did I hear that right?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: For the sponsorship program there were proposals coming in. Those were evaluated and they were sent on to CCSB, the Communications Coordination Services Branch.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: Regarding the point of having good instructions, roles and responsibilities, and the review of those, you mentioned once a year that would happen or when people changed that would happen. Do you think they were good enough? Do you think they should have been more extensive so people would operate within the guidelines, within the roles and responsibilities? Was there something lacking there?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Do you mean in the training sessions that are offered to the departmental employees?

Hon. Walt Lastewka: Correct.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: No, I think everything is there. The onus is also on the employee to practise and to adhere to those guidelines.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: I'll come back on my next turn.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Sauvageau, please. You have five minutes.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: I may have misstated my question or misunderstood your answer. I'd like some clarification. I rarely write down the questions and answers, but I did in this case.

I asked you whether you could tell us whether other programs were administered in the same way as the Sponsorship Program within the department. It seems to me you answered no to that question, but you answered yes to the same question asked by Mr. Christopherson as to whether the mail was registered.

You said you handled requests in the context of the Sponsorship Program and the millennium project for the minister's office. My question was whether the millennium program was administered like the Sponsorship Program, whether there were any similarities between the two.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: That's right, and I should have corrected myself: I was referring to the context of the department, of other files and programs that the Minister of Public Works and Government Services manages.

You're nevertheless right about the millennium program: there were similarities in the way of handling correspondence that was forwarded to the minister's office.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Consequently, if today we wanted to know how things happened with regard to members who wanted to make a request under the millennium program, we wouldn't find any registered mail at Public Works or the department concerned in the matter. Is that correct?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Indeed, because it was the minister's responsibility as a member. However, when the proposals were sent, a number was posted by the millennium program office.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Could you tell us whether the procedure was appreciably the same for both programs, even if one had less money than the other? To your knowledge, these were the only two programs that operated in this manner?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes, I would tend to agree with what you say.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Good. All right.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: At the start, I thought solely in terms of the employees, the department and the programs under its responsibility.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: And you, Mr. Lebrun, you had nothing to do with the millennium program?

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: I had nothing to do with that program. However, Ms. Bouvier mentioned something that did not exist in the Sponsorship Program, and that is the proposal book sent to the MPs' offices.

• (1705)

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Obviously.

Ms. Ippersiel, you seem to want to say something.

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: I didn't handle millennium files, only sponsorship files.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: All right. I don't know whether my colleague wants to continue.

Thank you very much. You clarified matters for me.

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma, BQ): My question is relatively simple. You have a number of years' experience in your job. I imagine that, along the way, during that period, you must have sensed a change in the working climate. At one point, there were political directives, changes in the programs or methods that altered your work. I also imagine that you must have felt somewhat uneasy, somewhat uncomfortable.

Could you offer the committee any suggestions so that, as parliamentarians, we can review all that, if only as regards ways of dealing between the guideline from the minister to the deputy minister and that from the deputy minister concerning you?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: At the risk of repeating what I said earlier, I think there should be an agreement between the two parties, that is to say between the exempt staff and departmental staff. Where someone from the department is asked to perform duties for the minister's office, it should be clear and there should be a written agreement between all the parties concerned. That's a suggestion I would make in the context of your study.

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon: Was there any outside pressure, either from promoters or from any other party than the minister's office? Were there any other instances in which departments interfered in the process?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I didn't deal with that kind of problem. I didn't experience any pressure from the outside.

Mr. Sébastien Gagnon: Everything necessarily went through the office.

Do you want to add something, Mr. Lebrun?

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: Some sponsorship requests were sent directly to the Communications Coordination Services Branch. The office didn't see them and wasn't in any way involved in the decision-making process surrounding the approval or denial of those requests.

[English]

The Chair: Merci beaucoup, Monsieur Gagnon.

I'm going to ask a couple of questions myself.

Ms. Bouvier, you were a public servant handling the correspondence. When you left, Mr. Lebrun was your successor. He in essence took your job. But Mr. Lebrun was a political person. Why did the job change from the public service to an exempt member of the political staff? Does anybody know why that decision was made?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes, I think it's the other way around. The job had changed because the person who was doing the job before I came in was a political exempt staff. I was the exception.

The Chair: You were the exception, okay.

The second question, getting back to this once-a-year training—this program was off the rails for quite some number of years—did anybody ever raise during their training session that the sponsorship program wasn't being handled right? Did anybody ever raise that? Did you have a group meeting once a year on your training?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: No.

The Chair: Nobody raised it, okay.

Mr. Lastewka, please, five minutes.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: I want to go back to your question, Mr. Chairman, because it's my understanding that there are departmental staff and then there are a minister's exempt staff, and some of the exempt staff are from the department and some are hired from outside. Is that not the case? I'm clarifying. I think that's the way it is. Some are departmental staff and some are a minister's exempt staff, and the minister's exempt staff are made up of people who are seconded from the department or hired from outside. Is that correct?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: No, I don't think so. I think the exempt staff usually are brought from the outside with the minister. If departmental staffers are given on loan to the minister to offer services, but only as a loan, we don't become political staffers. We keep our departmental status.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: Yes, but you're working for the minister on the minister's side of responsibilities.

•(1710)

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: Okay.

Ms. Bouvier, I guess all three of you reported to sometimes the same people, but people change.

At one time, Ms. Ippersiel, you worked for Jean-Marc Bard.

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: At first, I worked for Pierre Tremblay, then for Mr. Bard. When Mr. Tremblay left to work at CCSB, Mr. Bard took the chief of staff position, and then I worked for him.

[English]

Hon. Walt Lastewka: Ms. Bouvier?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I was twofold. Because of my departmental status, I had a director that I reported to, but in the functions from that time period from May 1999 to early January 2001, in the daily operations my reporting was to Jean-Marc Bard, but I also was reporting to my director, Dominique Francoeur.

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: In my case, it was only to Jean-Marc Bard, chief of staff.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: How do you report to two different people like that?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: On the reporting relationship for me, again personally, I guess I was the exception. With Madame Francoeur, it was basically administrative. If I needed some holiday time or sick leave or what not, there was a rule that we adhered to that we had to put in our leave slips and what not, so she would have been the signing person for that.

For the daily operations, like ordering for the minister's office, the approval would have come from Jean-Marc Bard.

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: That's what happened in my case as well. I reported to Ms. Otis administratively and to Mr. Bard or Mr. Tremblay as regards all of my day-to-day duties.

[English]

Hon. Walt Lastewka: When the two of you came from the department to work in the minister's office, how did that happen? How were you chosen? What were the procedures?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: My experience was that, because of our office handling all the political and the departmental mail, then perhaps because of the close proximity and perhaps personable suitability—I'm not quite sure—I was asked by the minister's office if I would be interested in doing a job.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: So you had the opportunity to decline if you wanted to.

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: Yes, and I did give it every consideration. I sat down with my superiors, my managers of the time and the director, and it wasn't something I said yes to overnight.

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: I was already working in Minister Dingwall's office. If memory serves me, there was an election in June 1997 and Minister Dingwall wasn't re-elected. So I was out of a job, and when someone from the Department of Public Works called to ask me whether I was interested in a position in Minister Gagliano's office, I said yes. I had an interview and got the job.

[English]

Hon. Walt Lastewka: But I thought you were assigned within the department and then moved into the minister's office. Are you saying you worked, basically, strictly as a minister's staff member? There's a little bit of confusion there.

The Chair: We're out of time, but we'll finish this question because I think this is important.

I think Mr. Lastewka was saying he thought you came from the department. Were you suggesting you came from Mr. Dingwall's MP office?

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: No. I came from Minister Dingwall's office.

I'd like to point out that I was a public servant, but I stopped being one in 1991, when I resigned. I then returned to government, but on contract. At one point, I went to work at Public Works, in the communications branch. I stayed there for about three years, then the position became surplus. I went elsewhere in the public service, but I stayed in touch with the people at the communications branch. One day, I got a call asking me whether I was interested in working in Minister Dingwall's office. So I started working there.

•(1715)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lastewka.

When you were working with Mr. Dingwall, you were working in his minister's office.

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: That's correct.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Fitzpatrick, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: I want to get back to the water cooler. It seems to be an area that should be followed up on.

I look at this sort of thing as a system. There are people with power in the system, and there are a whole bunch of processes in the system that involve public servants and maybe some political assistants and so on, but they're all part of minor operations in the whole process. It seems to me to be quite evident, based on your answer, that the people involved in the micro processes in the system understand quite clearly in some cases that there are things happening that are not right.

If I interpret your answer correctly—I don't want to put words in your mouth—public servants are afraid to do anything basically because they are helpless to change the system. If they try to do anything to change the system or deal with the matter, they're like a nail sticking up and they're going to get pounded down, and it's not going to be good for their career if they try to do anything about it. Would that be a fair representation of the feeling that exists among public servants when they're at the water cooler and discussing things that are going on that they know are wrong?

Do you have any power to deal with that situation?

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: We didn't talk about the Sponsorship Program in the office. Only people who had to deal with the sponsorship files, the chief of staff and the minister were aware of those files. As for the atmosphere in the office, I must admit that we didn't really ask any questions. People who weren't directly related to those sponsorship requests didn't talk about it. If questions were asked about those requests, there were no answers.

[English]

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: I don't think this analogy is totally relevant, but I do know that in war crimes cases and so on, when you get down to the infantry or somewhere when things are going astray, a common answer by people is, "We were ordered to do so and we had no choice". It almost seems that, in a way, that's what exists in our public service here. The people working in the public service are helpless to deal with things that are wrong, that are going on within their departments. If they do, they're going to pay a big price for it. Is that right?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I think that would be the general consensus.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Thank you very much.

I had one thing I wanted to pursue before you left.

Ms. Ippersiel, you mentioned moving back and forth between the political operations and the public service. We were talking about the pros and cons, and I think you used the words that when you come back from the political operations and get back into the public service, there's a feeling of petty vengeance toward people who come back. Is that because the public service is more committed to a professional standard of conduct and there's a feeling if you go across the wall and work in the minister's department...? What would be behind this petty vengeance attitude toward somebody who does that? Why would they feel there is something wrong about that or

that you've betrayed the cause or whatever? Maybe you can enlighten us on what's behind that, what motivates that kind of feeling.

The Chair: We'll have a brief response here by whoever wants to speak on this issue.

Madam Ippersiel, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: I didn't say it in that way. The expression "settlement of accounts" that I used might have been a bit too much. However, people looked down on me a bit, as though they were telling me that I had come back to reality, that I was just like everyone else and that I would be treated like everyone else. That's all. Are you satisfied with that?

• (1720)

[English]

The Chair: Any comments, Ms. Bouvier?

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: I have just one quick comment on that. You're saying there is a kind of class system that exists here. You're somewhere up here when you're in the minister's office, and you're like a peasant if you're down here in the political operations, the public service end, and you have the aristocrats up there, so you're betraying the cause if you go up there.

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: That's a bit exaggerated. However, I did feel like that.

[English]

The Chair: I understand Mr. Carr and Mr. Lastewka are splitting their time, so five minutes between you. I don't interrupt.

Mr. Gary Carr: No, it should be the same as usual. You just let us go until we've run out of time.

Again for Mr. Lebrun, you worked in other ministers' offices as well, I understand. Was there any sense of any difference in the way this one operated versus other ministers' offices, or was it pretty much the same in your experience?

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: It was different in the sense of the person who was responsible. First of all, the sponsorship was related to only one person. Usually in a minister's office the responsibility of liaising with people who are making some requests, or with the caucus, or with all the members of Parliament will be done by region. In that case, only one political staffer was taking care of the sponsorship issues or requests. And the other thing is that this person was not allowed to talk about his files or to share some thinking or information with his colleagues.

Mr. Gary Carr: You said before that it was all political parties who were coming to you with the requests, but the MPs wouldn't have had any way of knowing what was going on in terms of the financial situation. They were just coming, thinking they were doing the right thing for their constituents. Is that correct? They would have had no way of knowing what was going on. If you were just a regular MP, you wouldn't have known. You'd go there because you knew the program was going.

All parties acknowledged that they knew the program was there. The MPs thought their job was to help service it. They would not have had any way of knowing what went on in terms of the operation, the individual MPs. Is that correct?

Mr. Patrick Lebrun: That's correct. The only thing that may have been different for MPs—even though they could not have known what was really going on—was that sometimes relations were created with the regional desk in a minister's office. In that case, for example, if you were calling your desk, you'd hear, "Wait a second, you will have to talk to my colleague", and you'd follow up with another call to that person. That was the only difference.

Mr. Gary Carr: Okay, and I'll turn it over to my colleague.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: I want to hitchhike on what Mr. Fitzpatrick tried to get across but didn't.

I understood very clearly that when you're in the minister's office there's a sense of urgency and the requirement to get information and data. I'm sure a couple of times you said, "We need that data, and we need it now; you have 10 seconds to get it". You're always getting this from the department. It's always feeding up information, right? It's the one that has to put things together and get it up to you such that you could have it shortened into brief paragraphs of information for the minister. And then all of a sudden you are one of those who has to start working back in the department doing that similar thing.

Is there resentment? When you're in the minister's office, you're almost demanding the answers, while when you move back in to the department, you're one of the ones who are getting the answers. Is the resentment basically over this type of situation or is it different?

Ms. Joanne Bouvier: I think the resentment comes from that, partly, but also when we do make requests it's not always.... It's a Friday night at five o'clock and we ask down the line, and then there's hardly anybody around to give you those answers, but you still have to get those answers up to a minister's office.

I think in that sense, too, you're looked upon as if you demanded so much out of these folks that at one point in time they'll say—as Ghislaine was saying a bit—you're coming down to our level. Now you have to give out that 150% on that Friday night at five o'clock to the minister's office because the minister wants it now. I think in that sense I would say that I don't think the intent is malicious there, but I think it's just to give us a nudge that this is the reality—we were doing it for you; and now you're part of the gang, or you're coming back to the group and you have to handle it as well.

• (1725)

The Chair: I'm afraid you're out of time in two seconds, Mr. Lastewka.

Hon. Walt Lastewka: You know what, Mr. Chairman? I'll give you those two seconds.

The Chair: Well, thank you, because I did have a question.

The question had to do with your point that you didn't talk about the sponsorship program around the water cooler. You mentioned it was only the people who handled the program who were aware of the program.

Was there a code of silence, because everybody knew about the sponsorship program but were just not going there? Or was it that

they just didn't know the program existed? You said that you didn't talk about the sponsorship program around the water cooler. Was it because you didn't know about the sponsorship program, or because you knew better than to talk about it? It was more important to talk about the weather and other things. Which was it?

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: I don't think the other employees were really aware of everything around the Sponsorship Program with regard to criteria or procedure. I don't know whether my colleagues will agree with me, but, at times, we saw political assistants asking questions about certain requests and being told that it didn't concern them. That's why we didn't talk about it. It was simply the people involved in the sponsorship requests.

[English]

The Chair: As the political staff were told to mind their own business, you took the cue from there, right?

[Translation]

Ms. Ghislaine Ippersiel: Sort of.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson gave me notice that he would like to give notice of a motion.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, yes.

Just as a courtesy, I want to advise colleagues that, consistent with our 48-hour rule, I will be tabling a motion in both languages asking the committee to have our staff do a cursory review of the millennium program in terms of whether or not the Auditor General has been in there and produced any reports. Were there any internal audits? Are there any reports or evidence of any that clearly suggests people were raising alarms?

I say that, Mr. Chair, not to scream "the sky is falling," but in hindsight, if we don't do this and it turns out that there was something untoward going on, people are going to say, you had evidence right there in front of you at the beginning, why didn't you do a little work?

I'll serve that. I think it'll be prudent to pull at this thread a little to satisfy ourselves that the millennium program was entirely squeaky clean and we don't have a second sponsorship program mystery.

The Chair: Okay, you'll have to work with the clerk on the wording of that motion. I don't think the research staff have a mandate to do this. They haven't done it for the committee. Their research is to support the committee rather than to go to do investigations on behalf of the committee.

Mr. David Christopherson: You might save me some time then, now, if you could just help me along. It was going to be something along the lines not of asking them to do any auditing research, but to determine whether or not there are any published Auditor General reports, internal audits—if there any reports out there, can you bring them forward—not do the audit. Would that be all right?

The Chair: It's perfectly legitimate to ask them to see what documents are in the public record on this issue. I wouldn't even need a motion on that.

Mr. David Christopherson: If you'll take it now, I'll gladly put it.

The Chair: Well, we don't need a motion. It'll be done. They have their direction.

Mr. David Christopherson: Beautiful. Better yet.

The Chair: I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming forward this afternoon. We appreciate your coming forward, being candid, and telling us how things are. We thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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