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—
Chair

Mr. Gary Goodyear

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•(1150)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC)): This meeting is now in public, colleagues.

At the last meeting, as you will recall, we did have witnesses regarding decorum in the House. Mr. Marleau was there, as was Dawn Black and also Senator Champagne. We had a lengthy discussion on this issue of decorum. We did advise that the draft report would be circulated. That was at the request of the steering committee.

The last time we spoke on this issue, colleagues, was November 21, according to my notes. At that meeting it was understood that this issue had been discussed at length and that the whips would ultimately take it back to their respective caucuses and that we would then put it back on the agenda just as a follow-up. That is exactly what the steering committee has accepted to do today. Hopefully we can deal with this issue once and for all.

I open this up for comment. Perhaps we can go around the table and from the whips get a brief update as to what their respective caucuses had them bring back to us.

Mr. Godin, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): As you know, Mr. Chairman, this is a motion about decorum that the NDP put forward. We take this matter very seriously: something must be done.

When he appeared before the committee, Speaker Milliken practically told us that he didn't have the authority to take a question away from a party, because he had to follow the list drawn up all the parties. In addition, he said that if he imposed a penalty, this could give a party publicity, and that it was therefore in one way counter-productive.

I have to say in all sincerity that I simply do not agree with him. I think the Speaker of the House has the authority, in the context of his responsibilities, to remove the ability to ask a question from a political party or from a member of Parliament. In the past, he has taken away a privilege of this type for one month for less offensive behaviour, in my view. However, he is not prepared to do anything to stop the inappropriate behaviour of MPs in the House of Commons.

I hear from teachers in my area, and I'm sure you hear the same things in your regions, who came to the House of Commons and said

they would never bring their students back to the House, because it is certainly no place to learn good habits.

I remember one of our colleagues once said that in the House we are not at school and we are not at church and that we are all adults. It is true that we are not at school or at church, and that we are all adults, but we do not behave like adults. We are here to pass legislation and to ensure that rules are respected, and so on, but we are not even able to behave ourselves properly.

That is why I would move that the committee include the following recommendations in its list of recommendations. The first reads as follows:

That the Standing Order be amended to give the Speaker clear authority (with or without the support of the House) to expel a disruptive member from the Chamber and to prevent him or her from accessing the parliamentary precincts for a prescribed period of time, and that the party Whips give their support to the Speaker in such rulings.

We recommend that when the House is in session, the party Whips meet formally weekly with the Speaker to review specific behaviour and how these issues can be addressed and resolved.

The second recommendation reads as follows:

That the party Whips agree to give their collective support and authority to the Speaker to not recognize members in accordance with the prescribed rotation of questions during question period when a member or group of members of a particular party are not cooperative with rules of decorum and cause significant delays in the proceedings of the House of Commons, particularly during Question Period.

We believe that weekly meetings when the House is in session between the party Whips and the Speaker to review specific behaviour will provide an opportunity to work to create an environment of cooperation in the House of Commons.

I disagree with Mr. Milliken. If the Speaker of the House takes a privilege away from us and if we are therefore the object of media attention, that will happen only once or twice. I do not think Canadians will approve of behaviour of this type from members of Parliament. If a member finds it amusing to get expelled from the House, I think that when he or she returns home, there will be a political price to pay.

If we leave things as they are, there will be no improvement to decorum. However, I think we can change things. I would therefore like to put forward these two suggestions for the committee's consideration.

•(1155)

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

We'll have Mr. Hill and then Monsieur Guimond.

Go ahead, Mr. Hill, please.

Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Speaking on behalf of the Conservative Party, and the commitment that I made as the whip to bring this to our caucus and to consistently and constantly and repeatedly try to impress upon my caucus colleagues the need for greater decorum in the House, I can inform the committee, without revealing caucus confidentiality, that on a regular basis I communicate to my caucus colleagues exactly that, in very blunt terms.

Despite Mr. Godin's best intentions here with his recommendations, when I reflect back upon a fairly lengthy discussion that this committee has already been seized with over this issue, I would have to say that the Speaker said, when he was before us, that he feels he does have the necessary tools to do the job. Certainly that was the impression I had. I could review the transcript, I guess, of that particular meeting and refresh my memory, but certainly that was the impression I had, that he believes he does have the tools to adequately do what he can.

At the same time, he did tell us that it's up to every one of the 307 other members of Parliament who sit upstairs in the chamber to do what they can.

I made comments at that time, and I know that other whips—indeed, other members around this table, whether they were whips or not—were in general agreement that there are a couple of other things that need to happen. One is peer pressure from individuals who sit around offending colleagues, if I could call them that, regardless of partisan party stripe. And the other is to implore our colleagues to exert self-discipline in how we conduct ourselves, recognizing, as Mr. Godin correctly states, that we are on national television, and the Canadian people, from time to time, I think are rightly appalled at the behaviour that goes on in there.

Again, unless I'm corrected, I believe the Speaker indicated that he believes he has the ultimate sanction already. He has exerted it from time to time during his tenure. If some people are consistent offenders, he talks to them, and then he just doesn't recognize them. So if they want to get up on Q and A during debate, he will pass them over and not recognize them. To me that's the ultimate sanction, without getting into fines and various other methods that may or may not be particularly helpful.

From our earlier discussion, unfortunately, what we get into is who is going to make the arbitrary decision that a particular MP deserves to be disciplined and others don't. Therein lies the problem, and the Speaker himself referred to it. Obviously, the voices of the people who are physically located nearer to his chair are going to be louder to him because of the set-up in the House, where only the microphone in front of the person who actually has the floor is turned on.

With all due respect to Mr. Godin, because of the physical location of his party, one individual down there could be particularly incensed on a given day and be making quite a loud noise. The Speaker wouldn't necessarily hear that, or certainly wouldn't hear it at the same volume as someone who is standing immediately to the person's right or left. The Speaker talked about the challenge he has, which is that, obviously, it's the people who are located physically

near him who would seem to him to be the most outspoken, if I can say that.

So there are a number of factors at play here. I think we've quite exhaustively dealt with this. We've all recognized the challenges.

I take my fellow whips at their word that they have done as I have, which is to consistently and constantly remind our colleagues that we are in front of the Canadian public and that it behooves all of us to try to restore a higher level of decorum to the chamber.

I will maintain that as long as I hold this post, because it's a commitment I made to the people who are sitting in this room. I have the full support of my Prime Minister, my leader, as I suspect the whips do of the other three parties, to continue to do that.

• (1200)

I would note that the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper has started—I can't remember when they started, but it was sometime in this Parliament—this so-called civility meter, whereby they assign the task of reviewing question period in particular for each day, and then report: it's recorded in the next day's paper what the level of civility was.

A couple of days ago was the first time I've noticed that the rating was five on five. In other words, the rating was that the Speaker had a relatively easy time of maintaining control of the chamber, according to the rating system they came up with.

I thought that obviously was signalling that there was an improvement. It varies from day to day, depending on the topic that is being discussed and depending, of course, on the way questions are framed—and conversely, on the way the answers are framed.

Anyway, my view is that we have dealt with this. Concerning the one part of the recommendation about the whips meeting regularly—I don't know whether it has to be every week or not, but regularly—with the Speaker, so that the five of us can sit down and discuss whether we think we're gaining or losing in our battle to restore a bit more decorum, I don't have a problem with it. It's obviously dependent upon the rather tight schedules of all the whips, but I would be willing to commit to endeavouring to sit down with the Speaker regularly to discuss this, and perhaps discuss whether there is a need.

From my recollection, when he appeared here he did not see a need to change the Standing Orders to give him more power than he already has. He just wanted to ensure that he had the support of all of us—all parties, all whips, all leaders, ultimately—so that if and when he is forced to use some of the power he has, he would have our support.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hill.

Monsieur Guimond, and then Mr. Owens.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to start by thanking my colleague Yvon Godin from the NDP for his cooperation and his proposals regarding our report. I think this needs to be mentioned. He also took the initiative to bring forward a text.

I would like to ask Mr. Godin a question before discussing the substance of the matter. I have looked at the English version of these recommendations, and I would like him to explain something to me.

The first recommendation states:

That the Standing Orders be amended to give the Speaker clear authority (with or without the support of the House) to expel [...]

So in English you say:

[*English*]

“with or without the support of the House”.

[*Translation*]

What support are you referring to? Is this a reference to cutting financial support, that is a member's access to his or her budget, or a salary reduction? What do you mean when you say "with or without the support of the House"?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm going to allow the answer to that question right now, Monsieur Godin, if you have the answer. Then we'll continue with our round of discussion.

Please, Mr. Godin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: When we say that the Speaker has "the clear authority to expel a disruptive member", the term "expel" has no implications regarding salary or anything else. Rather, it means that the member may be expelled without there being a vote in the House. It seems that in the past, the Speaker sometimes requested the support of the House to expel a member of Parliament. Now, he will be able to do that with or without the support of the House.

Mr. Michel Guimond: I've been a member of Parliament since 1993 and some colleagues have been expelled in that time for calling another member a liar. It is like baseball: three strikes and you're out! On the third strike, the Speaker ordered the member to leave, and the member was expelled.

Mr. Yvon Godin: But he was entitled to go to his office, while in this case, that would not even be possible.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Yvon Godin: The member would be denied access to the parliamentary precinct.

Mr. Michel Guimond: The recommendation reads: "[...] and from accessing the parliamentary precincts [...]"

With your permission, I will have to consult the members of my caucus. I would not want them to take my head off; I still need it.

However, Mr. Godin, my congratulations still stand.

Like our colleague, Jay, I agree that the whip should take the initiative to meet with the Speaker to discuss discipline in the House and other matters of mutual interest. However, we do have a problem

with the frequency suggested, given how busy members of Parliament are.

For me, I do not know whether it would be helpful and desirable to bind ourselves to a requirement to meet with the Speaker once a week. We can keep our doors open, depending on the requirements, and perhaps have a meeting once a month or twice a session. I have difficulties with the idea of meeting with the Speaker once a week.

I would like to make one last comment. I imagine we will be working on the draft report that has been sent to us. Are we ready to make a decision about it right now? Have we already studied it paragraph by paragraph?

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Michel Guimond: I am talking about the draft report we have before us. I may have missed a meeting before the holiday adjournment.

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Very well.

● (1205)

[*English*]

The Chair: Not in any real detail, Monsieur Guimond.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: We will have to work on the draft report again, but perhaps not today. Normally, that would be done in camera.

We will have to work on the report paragraph by paragraph. My general comment about the draft that we have before us—I don't know whether I'm too sentimental—is that it is like cotton candy: a bit too sweet. Given the importance of decorum and discipline in the House, it should have more teeth. James, our super-competent researcher, probably wrote it when he was in the Christmas holiday spirit.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Finally, we should perhaps think about including some of Mr. Godin's suggestions in our report.

[*English*]

The Chair: We can have that report ready to discuss in detail next week. We can probably get the report done.

With respect to the motion on the floor, however, we still have one more speaker.

Mr. Owen.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Should our whip go first?

The Chair: I have your name down, but I'm comfortable switching it to Madam Redman.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, we could share. I'm sorry, I thought you were going around asking all the whips, so I was sitting here assuming my turn would come.

In the main, I would echo all of Mr. Hill's sentiments. I believe the tools are there. I think the Speaker was quite clear about the fact that he does have the necessary authority. Then what we need to do is police ourselves; I agree with Jay. I'm sure each whip here takes people aside when the behaviour that continues day after day. Some people have a bad day; some people get a little rowdy. Wednesdays seem to be particularly raucous in the House. I think we've all come to recognize that.

There are rules in place. There are points of privilege when people go over lines and when they use language they shouldn't. I think all of those rules need to be in place and I think are in place.

The recommendations, as well-intended as Monsieur Godin's recommendations are, in a lot of ways could have the opposite effect, because then the Speaker is looking at a very extreme ramification of what is currently an understood and acceptable practice. Ignoring somebody who was submitted on a Speaker's list from asking a question, from being recognized in the House, is probably the ultimate hobbling of a member of Parliament.

To actually throw us out of the precinct, that's a very tough ramification. Were I the Speaker, I would think, gee, do I want to go down this road? So in some ways it could have the opposite effect.

I don't think we need weekly meetings. I well recall, as I'm sure we all do, that from time to time the Speaker has hauled us up on the rug collectively and said, you have to improve the decorum.

The eyes of the media are also upon us, and I think that contributes to a bit of moral suasion for us to be better behaved. I can't have everybody who needs adult supervision sitting right next to me in the House, but we try to keep them within yelling distance.

• (1210)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Are the people surrounding you normally in need of supervision while they're there?

Hon. Karen Redman: Well, specifically Marlene Jennings.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Karen Redman: I would turn it over to Mr. Owen for any additional comments.

Hon. Stephen Owen: Thank you.

Mr. Chair and colleagues, I don't have much to add—

The Chair: Order, please.

Hon. Stephen Owen: —other than a reflection.

First of all, thanks to Mr. Godin for bringing this up again, because I think we need it to be given constant attention.

I've probably been in the House less time than anybody here, but it is so curious to me, given the degree of antipathy towards politicians in this country from the general public, that during question period, when most of this misbehaviour occurs, the one time that the public actually has a view of our behaviour is the one time that we behave in the way that the public least respects. It's doubly curious because not only does it give a very bad impression, but it's generally a false impression, because it's acting, a lot of the time. So it's self-inflicted disrespect from the public that we're inviting.

I think Mr. Godin's recommendation—and I don't know that this takes a formal motion—that the whips meet with the Speaker on a weekly basis, or on a regular basis at least, is a very good idea. I've only had exposure to one Speaker and I can't compare him to others, but I certainly have the impression, with the greatest respect to someone who's doing a very difficult job, that there is very little control exercised by the Speaker. I haven't witnessed one person sanctioned in the six years that I've been here. So I think those meetings are important.

Without, as well, as Mr. Hill...exposing caucus confidences any further than Jane Taber seems to report on weekly anyway, it is curious that just after we have our national caucus meetings, when our whips...and certainly Ms. Redman has very sternly warned us to improve our behaviour, Wednesday afternoon should be the worst. So I don't know, there seems to be a perverse relationship here.

I think it is a problem that we should take very seriously, and I'm grateful that Mr. Godin brings it to our attention again, because it does affect our legitimacy as political leaders in this country.

The Chair: Colleagues, I'm still going around offering folks the opportunity to add to this discussion.

On my list is Mr. Godin, and then Mr. Proulx and Mr. Guimond.

If anybody else wants to add to the debate, I'll be watching for hands.

Mr. Godin, please.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Concerning what Mr. Owen said, if we look at the image we have, I have to agree with him, we are lower than car salesmen. We are at the bottom of the list. And yet today I hear it's going well.

I have to agree that the image we have in the House of Commons is not good. We just cannot close our eyes to that.

If we make the rules tough, that might send a message to the members that this is what could happen. If the noise the Speaker is talking about starts and you hear more from the front, maybe when he stops the noise in the front he will get to the back. When nobody makes a noise, they will pick up the back too. It's just like a zoo. That's what it is. It's like a zoo. It doesn't make sense.

The thing about having the whips meet every week as suggested, it could be when needed, on the request of a party for the whips to meet with the Speaker. That is no problem, but the Speaker himself told this group he didn't have the power to take a question off the list for a party. That's what I'm talking about. He has the power and he has done it in the past. If you get out of order, he goes to the next party. Another power is to skip a party when the behaviour is not adequate. I hope we never have to use it.

Our whole job and responsibility here is to make laws for people who don't behave, and we hope they behave well. We hope people drive 100 kilometres per hour and not 160 kilometres per hour. We come out with laws to stop the people who don't behave, and here, as lawmakers, we are worried about making laws against ourselves when we are the lowest ones in the country as recognized by our behaviour and things we do. That's what I wanted to say.

The other thing is, we had Robert Marleau here and he said in the U.K. they have these rules that you are removed from the premises and from your office. If they have those types of rules, then maybe we should check the behaviour in the U.K. and hope they never have to use them and we never have to use them, but we just want to close our eyes to a problem that a report was accepted here by all parties in 1992. It was recognized. The people who come to Parliament are people from our regions coming to Parliament. Teachers are saying they don't want to bring students any more, and we want to close our eyes to a problem we have in the House of Commons. It is a shame.

It is not going well, and the Speaker should not worry about us giving him power to make decisions in the House of Commons. I'm hoping that he never has to use them, but I think we should show an example.

•(1215)

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Proulx, and then Monsieur Guimond.

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will use my very humble experience as one of the chair's occupants. If you recall, I questioned Mr. Marleau in that sense. The Speaker has all the tools he needs to quieten everything down. You all know, of course, that as soon as the Speaker stands up from his chair, all the microphones are shut down. All the Speaker has to do is stand up. He has different orders to keep...I won't call it "peace" again, because Mr. Guimond would like it, but he has all the powers to keep everybody civilized.

My impression is that our present Speaker does not want to be more strict. He does not want to penalize people. He sees himself—and I think he's right 99.9% of the time—as a facilitator for all the MPs to express themselves in the House.

If you were to compare...and we have members here who have had experiences elsewhere, Madame Robillard has been in the National Assembly in Quebec, some of you gentlemen have been in provincial legislatures—speakers have powers. They have the tools to keep everybody quiet to a certain level. My main concern is that the Speaker currently hesitates to use some of his powers because he sees himself, as I was saying, as a facilitator. If we give him powers that will be even more "damaging", let me say, to the reputations of MPs, he won't use them. He will stay away from them even more than he does now.

So it is all a question of attitude. It's a question of us asking the Speaker to please use his powers, and for us, as parties, to discipline our people within our own ranks.

The Chair: Colleagues, I have three more names on the list—I'm still watching for hands—and then I think we're pretty much ready to wrap this up.

Monsieur Guimond is next, and then Mr. Hill, and then Mr. Lukiwski.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: I would like to make a suggestion to committee members. I do not know whether my colleagues would agree with asking Mr. Walsh, the House law clerk and parliamentary counsel, to give us a brief legal opinion about the Speaker's authority to prevent a member who has been expelled from the House from having access to the parliamentary precinct. I do not know whether that violates any rules.

Mr. Godin remembers that Mr. Marleau said that this was done in London. Let us assume that a member of Parliament did something that meant he could not sit in the House for the rest of the day. The member must continue to do his or her work as an elected representative from his or her office on Parliament Hill.

I would like the law clerk and parliamentary counsel to give us an opinion on this matter. He doesn't need to write a book on it, because we will not have time to read it. He could simply tell us whether changing the Standing Orders would violate a member's privilege. I would like his opinion on the matter, despite the fact that this is the practice in England. If he wants to check on the reasons why this is done in England, he could do so. That is my first suggestion.

I would also like to inform my colleagues that when we do study the report, we should talk about decorum, something some parties use more than others. I don't want us to get into a game where people say things like "my dad is stronger than your dad" or "I am a nice guy and you are not". I don't want to get into games of that type.

As you know, in the past I compiled some statistics. I stopped doing that, because with my colleague, the deputy whip, I found I was getting in too bad a mood, and that my blood pressure was rising. I kept some statistics on members of Parliament who stood to applaud a minister's answer or a member's question. This meant the House wasted 8, 10, 12 or even 20 seconds.

I would like to tell my colleagues, the other whips, who are present here that I have doubts about our real desire to regulate ourselves, because when I raised this issue, it led to a rather heated exchange with Mr. Hill. We said we would raise the issue with the members of our caucus. But what happened was that after question period, after the caucus meetings that morning, when I had raised the issue the Tuesday before, the Conservatives stood to applaud eight times and the Liberals six times. That was a Guinness record for this nonsensical practice of standing to applaud. People laugh at us for doing this. The Minister of the Environment yaps and his colleagues stand and applaud him for putting down the questioner. The questioner who was put down, fires the question back at him, and once again the colleagues rise to applaud the effort. We look ridiculous, this becomes a real circus.

In the report, I hope there would be reference to having the Speaker use his discretion to cut off planted questions from Conservatives. I said this to Mr. Hill, who said to me, quite honestly, right in my face: "Michel, I don't give a damn whether he cuts off planted questions. Let them be penalized for the planted questions."

A member who planned to ask planted questions of a minister and who has informed his local media and community to watch because he would be asking a question about the Pont de Québec in Quebec City the next day might not find it amusing to have the Speaker prevent him from asking his question.

Under this government, the only things that can be cut off are not ministers' answers, but rather the three planted questions. If we in the other parties—the Liberals, the New Democrats and the Bloc Québécois—are too demonstrative, the Speaker cuts off one of the questions scheduled on the list.

According to my statistics, the two parties that were penalized—and this is why Mr. Godin is angry and why I am starting to get hot under the collar—that had questions taken away, were the Bloc Québécois and the NDP.

• (1220)

We said that we were not in a church or at a wake. It is true that people get carried away at the caucus meeting on Wednesday morning and arrive all pumped up for question period. That is human nature, but there must be consequences for certain behaviours. The amount of time for question period is limited: it is from 2:25 to 3:00 p.m. from Monday to Thursday. If in the end we were to decide to give the Speaker the discretion to extend question period until 3:10 or 3:15 p.m., then I will no longer have any problem.

• (1225)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Hill, please, and then Mr. Lukiwski. Then I think we'll wrap this up.

Hon. Jay Hill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I really don't want to prolong this too much, but I do want to correct the record on a couple of issues.

First of all, when Mr. Godin says some people here are saying that it's good, I never said that. I think if you check the transcript, I never said that things were good. I said that from time to time we see improvements. I'm not trying to indicate that the whips can take any credit for that. It would be nice if we could think that all our words to our caucus colleagues weren't falling on deaf ears, but I certainly didn't want to leave the impression that I or anyone else around this table would suggest that decorum in the House is good.

I will say—and this came up as well, because we've aired this pretty extensively over the last while—having looked around the world at other parliaments, I would far sooner that MPs vent their frustrations by raising their voices than by using their fists. During the last 13 years in which I have had the privilege of being a member of Parliament, I have seen newscasts from time to time about Korea, Japan, Italy, and, I believe, India, showing full-blown melees in the middle of their parliamentary floor.

Why is that? I mean, are they more hot-blooded than we are? Perhaps, or perhaps it's that they don't feel they have the ability to vent their frustrations. I say that whether you're in opposition or whether you're in government, we all suffer frustrations. We all believe that, from time to time, someone on the other side has said

something that is unfair, or unkind, or unjust, and so we react, and normally we react with our voices.

So I'm not suggesting for a moment that it's good. I'm not suggesting for a moment that it can't be improved. As I've said, as long as I continue to be whip of any party, I will continue to do what I can in terms of suggestions.

In fairness, sometimes I'm a culprit on given days—and Mr. Godin, through the chair to you, I suggest that some days you as well get a little hot under the collar.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, but during *my* questions.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jay Hill: Exactly.

I'm convinced that Mr. Godin has never heckled in his entire career. We've just had his word on that, of course.

No, what I'm suggesting is that we're all aware of the problem. If we can work together to find ways to improve it, so much the better.

The other issue that I just want to quickly address is this whole business about.... Mr. Godin again leaves the impression that there at two parties that are penalized. We went through all of that. We had the statistics compiled. The Speaker addressed the point that it is on very rare occasions that he does not get through the entire set list.

So what we're talking about here is whether, when there are standing ovations, or when he has to stand to try to restore order and it takes some time—anywhere from a few seconds to potentially a minute or two—we lose extra questions at the end. We all agree that's the case. But I think it is erroneous to suggest that there are two parties penalized, that somehow the Bloc and the NDP are losing questions, because we agreed before Parliament started that there was going to be a certain round of questions. We can go back and check it again, but I think most days we get through the entire list of designated questions, or whatever you call them. I pay attention to that myself, and I think everyone else does, in particular the whips.

I just wanted to potentially correct those suggestions, that's all.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hill.

Mr. Lukiwski, please.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Quickly, I just want to lend my support to Monsieur Proulx, and Karen, and Jay, and everyone who says...that I think that the current situation as it stands now is sufficient. What we have to do—and I totally agree with Mr. Proulx—is to ensure that the Speaker uses the levers at his disposal. I think that's where some of the problems are. If he were able to discipline members more effectively...or perhaps “effectively” in not the right word, but more frequently, then I think a lot of these situations might disappear.

With all due respect to Monsieur Godin, the problems I see in his recommendations are threefold. And the Speaker when he appeared before us illuminated some of these potential problems. First, and we all know this, in all our parties we have what I would suggest are chronic offenders who are the...without naming names. But the problem is that if we put in a procedure in which the Speaker could expel someone, I think it would almost increase the problems, because some people would want to be expelled so they could get the media attention. So the chronic offenders would see this as an opportunity rather than as a penalty, and I don't think that's a good thing.

Secondly, the problem is that, again, if they're expelled from the parliamentary precinct, what happens in times of votes? I know that Monsieur Godin and others here have been desperately trying to say we have to increase everyone's ability to be represented. What would happen if somebody were to be expelled from the parliamentary precinct? Would you put a special exemption in so that they could come back for a vote? I think that's a bit of a problem.

• (1230)

Mr. Scott Reid: They have to be able to get back within half an hour. So if you could have them expelled but stay within a half an hour of the....

Actually, it's quite complicated.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes, get off the precincts but be close.

Finally, Mr. Chair, I would just suggest that if we take Mr. Godin's recommendations as such, as I mentioned earlier, it could be creating more problems than we currently have. I like the suggestion that the whips, on a fairly regular basis, meet with the Speaker. If we're all concerned that the Speaker is not disciplining members frequently enough, or effectively enough, or stringently enough, then I think that's something the whips should be dealing with at the Speaker level to maybe ensure that the Speaker does his or her job.

Finally, and I don't think the situation would ever come to force but there is a potential, if we take the recommendations of Monsieur Godin and allow the Speaker then to start expelling members, somewhere down the line, since we elect Speakers, you might have a Machiavellian, or conspiratorial, attempt where the plan will be, let's elect a Speaker who will purposely eject someone to make sure that party is short one vote at confidence time. I would like to think that no one would do this, but it's a possibility and I don't think that is in the best interest of anyone, certainly not Canadians.

So for all those reasons, I would suggest that we stick with the current system but make sure that the whips communicate to the Speaker if we collectively feel that he's not enforcing the laws stringently enough, and that they do this on a more frequent basis. We should just leave the situation where it is now.

The Chair: All right. We have heard from just about everybody.

Mr. Godin has raised his hand. Since this is his time here, and it's his report, although I did just say that we would wrap this up, I'm going to allow Mr. Godin to have the final word.

Mr. Godin, could you clarify for the chair if this is just a letter of recommendation or a motion you've put on the floor that the

committee will then have to vote on or defer? If you could clarify that in your comments, I would appreciate it.

Thank you.

Mr. Yvon Godin: First of all, I want to say that if Mr. Lukiwski is worried about the vote, a member who has broken the rules of the House of Commons will apologize on the floor of the House. Normally the Speaker of the House doesn't throw somebody out of the House when he recognizes the mistake he made.

When we come to the noise in the House, recognizing that when the level of the noise is high and the other party loses questions, we're saying that because he said he cannot skip the vote lists, we'll give him the power to do it.

He's the one who said he cannot skip it. He said parties come in with a list and he cannot deviate from it. If a member is out of order, the only thing he can do is say he'll switch to another one. He's using that power already. One thing that he's not doing is taking a question away.

To answer Mr. Hill, yes, it's true, I think we have 20 or 21 questions plus subs. But if you look at the record, where we're losing is at the other end, which was a bonus in that we could ask some questions. You can check the record.

It happened before, when I had to go and see the Speaker, and I think Monsieur Guimond did too, to say, look, it's not fair. Even on our third question, when we'd have a question and a sub, he would cut us on the question and not give us the sub. I said, well, they're the ones making the noise, just keep it going, and get us to raise the sub question. I think maybe he has done that lately, when we look at the log. It's a power he has.

Mr. Chair, it's not a motion I've put here but a public recommendation. I'm telling you I'm very serious about it. Our party is very serious about it. When we write the report, we'll see how the report is. I will reserve having a dissenting report going to Parliament.

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Monsieur Godin. I appreciate your work on this file.

Colleagues, to summarize the discussion I'm hearing, we have a suggestion from Monsieur Guimond to ask for a legal opinion on this issue. I don't remember the specifics of the request, but we did take notes.

I suggest we write a letter to Mr. Walsh and ask him to offer a legal opinion. Following our getting that opinion, perhaps we could bring this up again.

I am also hearing from members that the report you have before you is the 19th report. We would probably redraft the report to reflect some of the discussion we've had here today, as well as Mr. Walsh's opinion when that comes in.

Then perhaps, Mr. Godin, we can bring the issue back and can deal with it—as I've said three or four times—one last time. It's fair, and it's absolutely your right.

I do have my own concerns, based on my experiences in my riding of Cambridge. I will take this moment to brag about the good work I do, most of which never ends up in the newspapers; I'm sure that's the experience of all colleagues. However, a member in a different level of government did get thrown out of Parliament, and that was on the front page of the newspaper. That certainly caused me to reflect that maybe it's the way to get on the front page of the newspapers. However, as you well know, I have not taken that approach, although I have tried....

No, just kidding.

If that's acceptable to the committee, then I suggest we proceed that way. We'll get the legal opinion from Mr. Walsh, redraft the report reflecting some of the discussion here today, and bring it back at some point in the near future.

Is that acceptable to the members?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: It's carried. So that's what we'll do with it.

Before we move on to any other business, colleagues, I know you were handed out the draft letter. We don't need to go in camera on this, and we can stay in public. You have the draft letter to the parliamentary press gallery in front of you. It was handed out 20 minutes or so ago.

Are there any objections to the letter? Can I get the committee's approval to send the letter out?

I have one member who wants to have a quick look at it, and that's obviously okay....

Is everybody now in agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: It's so carried. The letter will go out to the press gallery.

Is there any other business?

Mr. Godin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to put forward a motion. Copies of it are being distributed at the moment.

It reads as follows:

The committee asks that the current Speaker respects former Speaker John Fraser's initiative to reduce pollution by asking ministers not to idle their cars while on Parliament Hill and to provide a waiting area for the ministers' drivers so they can wait for ministers inside on inclement days.

I think this is an important matter, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Do we have any discussion on the motion?

We'll have Mr. Hill and then Monsieur Proulx.

Hon. Jay Hill: I certainly have no problem suggesting that the Speaker take a look at this issue. It came up in question period yesterday. I think everybody was there, probably, or is aware of it.

The way the motion is worded, it could potentially be problematic. I guess it depends on what is meant by "not to idle their cars". Does that mean that as soon as you turn the key on, you immediately put it in gear, or do you mean that they not idle their cars for more than 15 minutes? When it's -30 degrees outside, for example, and I drive my personal car here and I park off to the side—I have a 400 parking pass, as I think most of the whips do—I go out and start my car and let it warm up a little bit. It's not because I want to pollute the air. It's because I'm a little bit tender—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Jay Hill: —and I like to have at least a reasonably warm vehicle to crawl into.

So would I be breaking the rule, then, by having my personal car? Or is it only ministers that Mr. Godin wants to pick on, or only chauffeurs? I don't know. But the motion, as it's worded, I think, is problematic, because it's not only ministers' cars that are idling on the Hill from time to time when the weather is cold. I guess that's the point I'm trying to make.

I have no problem with it being referred to the Speaker so he can have a look at the situation. I didn't realize that John Fraser, for example, had made a ruling or something in the past. So if there's something that can be done about it, I'm certainly not opposed to that. But as I said, I think it's not just ministers' cars that potentially idle from time to time on the Hill.

● (1240)

The Chair: Is this a motion that the committee send a letter or a report, Mr. Godin?

Mr. Yvon Godin: It can be either. It's just that we want to bring to his attention that there is a rule that exists, and we want the Speaker to respect the rule. I'm open to specifying that it is somebody sitting in his car just waiting for somebody else. The warming up of a car, I mean, we understand that. It's just that we don't want somebody to be an hour just sitting there waiting for someone. Let's be reasonable about it. Right now, it's not reasonable. They could stay there for three hours or four hours just waiting.

The Chair: Again, the intent of the motion—

Hon. Jay Hill: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'll just raise another issue. As whips, all of us have the ability to write a letter and raise it with the BOIE, as the agency or the board that actually manages things on the Hill. I just wonder if that wouldn't be more appropriate than involving this committee, although I don't have a problem with the committee writing a letter or whatever.

The Chair: Monsieur Proulx is next.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Very briefly, I think this has to be refined, and I think maybe we could use a guideline. There is a municipal bylaw here in the city of Ottawa with regard to cars idling. I forget if it's five minutes or ten minutes or whatever, but that would reach the point Mr. Hill was making.

Second, on the question of providing a waiting area for the ministers' drivers, I remind everybody that all these ministers have offices on the Hill. These drivers are employees of the ministers, so they can go and sit in their minister's offices and twiddle their thumbs if they have no other use. But space is so rare on the Hill, let them use their bosses' offices.

The Chair: Mrs. Redman, Mr. Reid, and then Monsieur Guimond.

Hon. Karen Redman: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was going to make the same point. I know that when I was a municipal politician there were bylaws that regulated idling, and that certainly is worth looking at.

The other thing that isn't clear for me is whether it's the lack of somewhere to go that contributes to those cars idling and the drivers being in them. Is there some other reason that we don't know about? It seems to me there's a presumption that there is a lack of a place for these drivers to go and that is indeed why they're idling their cars and sitting in them. I don't know that this is the case.

It would seem to me that it's a legitimate issue. I have sympathy for it. I don't like to see those cars idling. So I think the intent of it, to stop cars from idling, is a very good one, but I don't know that necessarily providing the drivers with a room will stop that from happening if there are other reasons contributing to it. So I think it's worth pursuing but maybe not in this way.

The Chair: Mr. Reid, Monsieur Guimond, and then Mr. Godin.

Mr. Scott Reid: I thought Mr. Proulx's first comment was very good, about looking at the municipal bylaw that deals with that particular problem. I think his second suggestion, about ministers' offices, isn't that practical. Ministerial offices, of course, are scattered all over the city; and as for MP offices of the ministers, they're scattered all over Parliament Hill, in the justice building and so on.

I gather that part of the role of the drivers is to be there at the end of cabinet meetings, for example, to take the ministers away from cabinet meetings. It would be impractical—because you don't know when a cabinet meeting is going to end—to expect them to go to the MP's office, come back out, start the car, and so on.

I'm not a minister myself and I haven't been one, but we do have one former minister here. Would she assure us that this would have worked in her case and that her car would never have been idling? We have some experience here, so maybe she could shed some light on this for us.

• (1245)

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): I have to say, my experience is that it's the drivers who like to be together. They are alone. It's very long to wait on ministers sometimes. You have to wait three hours. So they prefer to be three

or four in a car and speaking together. Sometimes they go to the cafeteria together, and they have a lunch and they talk.

My last driver was a man who didn't like to yak with the other ones. He went back all the time to my office, which was on Slater Street, where the Ethics Commissioner is. We made an arrangement that when I finished my committee, I would send an e-mail to my office. He would come five or ten minutes later, and that was it.

So I think you have both here. The minister needs to have his car ready to go when he has to go. He cannot wait a half an hour for a car. Time is so strict for a minister. He has meetings and so on. But at the same time, I think there's the point of view of the drivers, too.

That's my experience.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Guimond, and then Mr. Godin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: I'm not familiar with the initiative of former Speaker John Fraser. Is this a verbal or a written request? Did Mr. Fraser send out a memorandum at the time? We are asking Mr. Milliken to do the same thing. Personally, I would like to know exactly what form this initiative took. Perhaps Mr. Godin could tell me that.

In addition, we are supposed to be having a meeting with the people from the Board of Internal Economy next Monday. Unlike my colleague Jay, I am not sure this matter comes under the board's authority. I am not sure that Mr. Milliken will feel very kindly about implementing these initiatives. This is a suggestion from our committee, which manages—and this may be an overstatement—the parliamentary precinct with respect to matters such as security, the buildings, and so on. I think the committee is the appropriate place to deal with the matter. I am not sure it should be referred to the Board of Internal Economy. In any case, if Jay would like to discuss it on Monday, we will see how the Speaker reacts.

I think this is a serious concern and that Ms. Robillard set us straight on it. Sometimes, drivers' jobs are quite lonely. They may talk with the minister they're driving, but only if the minister is not on the telephone or the BlackBerry. I am not sure that ministers and drivers get into any heart-to-heart conversations. I've never been a minister, and I never will be one here. I may be one some day, but that will be in a different place.

I don't want to make any petty comments, but since I park my car in section 400 as well, I can see, both in the case of the new Suburban used by the Prime Minister, which sometimes prevents me with backing up, as is the case of the limousine used by the RCMP guards, that the engines are idling merrily away.

Since the new government says it is green, it should agree with Mr. Godin's suggestion.

• (1250)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Godin, could we have a final word, please.

Mr. Yvon Godin: This morning's *Ottawa Sun* and *Toronto Sun* reported that the House of Commons Speaker at the time, John Fraser, sent a letter in 1990 to all cabinet ministers formally requesting that they cease idling their cars. The RCMP and the Commons security were asked to enforce the edicts. "It is terribly important that we lead the way on this issue," wrote Fraser in a letter dated June 6, 1990.

There's a letter in existence, and I am asking you to eliminate all unnecessary idling of vehicles. If you idle to warm it up, that's not unnecessary. We're talking about the ones just idling there waiting.

I hope I have the support of the committee, but if Monsieur Guimond would feel better having the information

[*Translation*]

from Mr. Fraser, we can ask James to get that for us. Then we could have a look at it at our next meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Guimond, I'm willing to give you the floor again, but I'm ready to ask the committee if we're ready for the question. Could you keep it short, please?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: You could tell from what I said that I have not yet read the *Ottawa Citizen* this morning. I confess this is true. I

have read *Le Soleil* and *Le Journal de Québec*, because I was in my riding.

Would Mr. Godin agree to reserve his motion until we have read Mr. Fraser's letter? I would not want to scuttle this whole idea today.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is that what the committee wishes to do—that is, to defer the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Jay Hill: Yes, let's get more information. Let's get the Fraser letter and anything else that pertains to that.

The Chair: That's what we will do. We will defer the vote on this motion until we have that letter from Mr. Fraser. We will get that as soon as we can.

Colleagues, before you go, thank you for an incredibly productive meeting. The next meeting is on Tuesday. We're going to be discussing the electoral boundaries. It will be in camera, because it's on a draft report. I would encourage you to review the report over the weekend so that you are very well prepared for Tuesday's meeting. You will get the report.

Thank you.

There being no further business, the meeting is adjourned.

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