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—
Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): I call the meeting to order. It's meeting 14, and it is in public today.

First we'll cover item two, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a) (iii), review of the Standing Orders 153—list of reports—and 156—editorial corrections.

We have with us today the Speaker and the clerk, and our law clerk, Mr. Walsh. We will first of all try to clear this piece up.

Mr. Speaker, if you could remind us what it is you'd like us to do with this, we'll move forward.

Hon. Peter Milliken (Speaker of the House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

There were two suggested changes in the Standing Orders, one to allow for the list of reports and returns to be sent out in electronic form instead of printed form. It was sent out in electronic form at the beginning of this Parliament and created no problems, apparently—not that I ever read it, but it's there, I guess, if you want to look.

Then we were suggesting a further amendment to Standing Order 156, to permit the law clerk to make non-substantive corrections to a bill. In the suggested standing order we list the kinds of corrections that he'd be allowed to make. This is so we don't have to move technical amendments to put a comma in, or correct the spelling of a word, or some fairly minor corrections that are listed in the suggested standing order.

The Chair: Since they are simply that, a request to put in grammatical changes, or, as needed, simple wordsmithing, are there any questions from any of the members on these changes to Standing Orders?

Seeing none, shall I report these recommendations on changes to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Then that is done and done.

We'll move on to the second reason for being here today, and that is, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the main estimates 2009-10, vote 5 of the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker, I welcome you and the clerk here for that reason today. I believe you have a few opening remarks.

Hon. Peter Milliken: Pages and pages.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Today I'll be presenting the House of Commons main estimates for 2009-10, which demonstrate that sound resource management is a key institutional priority for the House of Commons.

[Translation]

The House Administration strives to deliver and continuously improve the services that we - as Members - need to carry out our parliamentary functions and to develop and sustain a sound infrastructure to support our institution.

[English]

These activities are consistently carried out within a sound financial management framework. Specifically, in light of the current fiscal situation, an even more stringent review of requirements was conducted in preparation for the 2009-10 main estimates.

The 2009-10 main estimates were approved by the Board of Internal Economy on December 8, 2008, in the amount of \$426,540,950. This represents an increase of only 0.4%, or \$1,488,551, over fiscal year 2008-09. For reference purposes, you will have received a document outlining the year-over-year changes from 2008-09 to 2009-10.

[Translation]

To help facilitate today's discussion, I will provide an overview of the budget increases and reductions along six major themes: Budgets for Members, House Officers and Presiding Officers; Security; Services to Members; Infrastructure; Salaries; and Committees and Parliamentary Associations.

I will begin with an overview of the adjustments to the budgets for Members, House Officers and Presiding Officers.

• (1110)

[English]

In December 2008, the Board of Internal Economy approved a 1.5% increase in members' office budgets, including supplements; the House officers' budgets; the presiding officers' budgets; and the members' travel status expenses account. This increase, which became effective on April 1, 2009, represents additional funding of \$2 million. This increase is also in line with the Expenditure Restraint Act.

The main estimates also show a reduction of \$565,000 for an adjustment to House officers' budgets. The budgets were established for the 40th Parliament based on the election results for all parties, using the formula that was recommended by the political parties and approved by the Board of Internal Economy. Additionally, the estimates reflect a reduction in funding for the former Prime Minister. The board had previously approved an annual budget of \$140,000, plus employee benefit plans, for the former Prime Minister for the duration of the 39th Parliament.

I will now move to the funding allotted to security. In December 2008, the board approved funding of \$787,000 to establish a dedicated information technology security unit, and to provide IT support for security services in new House of Commons buildings and facilities.

[Translation]

This funding is necessary because of a significant increase in the number and sophistication of IT security threats. We have also experienced many ongoing changes to our business environment, such as additional committees, additional facilities/locations, greater user mobility and the increased reliance on secure IT services.

[English]

By establishing a dedicated IT security unit, the House administration will be able to continue improving its security practices by reducing common IT security issues, while also increasing its ability to identify quickly and respond to more serious cyber incidents.

Additionally, allocating funds to expand the IT infrastructure will enable the House administration to provide critical IT support to security services and new facilities throughout the parliamentary precinct and in satellite buildings. This is in keeping with the long-term vision and plan for the maintenance of the parliamentary precinct.

Given the essential work that members and the House administration carry out using our IT infrastructure, the board recognized the importance of continuing to protect it against emerging threats.

[Translation]

I will turn now to the funding that is attributed to services to Members.

[English]

In December 2008, the board approved \$335,000 in funding to purchase and integrate an additional module for the House's financial management system that will automate procurement and contract management. The implementation of the new module will reinforce sound financial management practices and strong stewardship of public resources; support competitive processes that maximize the suitability of goods or services being purchased and give the best value for money; and enhance the quality and accessibility of procurement information, resulting in more effective planning and service delivery.

[Translation]

Furthermore, the Main Estimates reflect the importance of maintaining and sustaining the investments made in the technological infrastructure.

[English]

To this end, the board has approved \$617,000 in funding for the ongoing maintenance, replacement, and support costs required for the management of audio and video assets in digital format. This is part of the overall migration from analog to digital broadcasting services that is being implemented within the long-term vision and plan for the parliamentary precinct. This migration will ensure that we are meeting broadcasting industry and House information technology and management standards, while also supporting access to audio and video recordings of parliamentary proceedings in digital formats.

The main estimates also reflect a reduction in funding of \$75,000 for information technology requirements. This temporary funding had been approved in 2008-09 to replace the contact centre program implemented in 1995 with a newer version that would expand the support channel for members on the Hill and in their constituencies. This temporary funding is no longer required.

Before moving on to the salary adjustments that are accounted for in the main estimates, I'd like to touch briefly on the implications of the Budget Implementation Act, 2009. As you know, the Expenditure Restraint Act contains provisions that limit increases in salaries to 1.5% in 2008-09, 2009-10, and 2010-11. The act applies to members, members' staff, as well as House administration. However, it's important to note that the act will not be applied retroactively, and any agreements that were reached prior to the royal assent of the act will be respected. Salary adjustments after royal assent will respect the act and will be included in future funding requests.

As reflected in the main estimates, the Board of Internal Economy previously approved \$3.9 million to cover economic and step increases for House administration employees prior to April 1, 2008.

● (1115)

[Translation]

This includes funding for: the collective agreements for the Operational Group, the Technical Group, the Procedural Clerks and Analysis and Reference Group, and the Reporting and Text Processing Sub-group; salary step increases for employees who are not at their maximum salary level; and salary increases for senior managers that are in keeping with the Treasury Board economic increase.

[English]

Furthermore, in accordance with the Parliament of Canada Act, members' salaries and allowances are adjusted each year on April 1. The adjustment is based on the index of the average percentage increase and base rate wages in Canada resulting from major settlements in the private sector. Using that formula, salaries have been increased by 3.1%. The main estimates allocate \$1.4 million to cover the increase as of April 1, 2008.

I should also note that while the main estimates we are discussing today are not affected, the Parliament of Canada Act will also be amended so that future salary increases comply with the Expenditure Restraint Act.

Furthermore, the estimates provide \$819,000 for budget increases related to other personnel costs. These non-discretionary expenditures are due to a rising number of maternity and parental leave claims and payments related to severance and vacation pay resulting from an increase in employee retirements. The main estimates also reflect Treasury Board's adjustment to the annual rate of employer contributions to employee benefit plans. For 2009-10 the annual rate has been adjusted from 17.5% to 17%, which represents a reduction of \$995,680 in required funding.

The main estimates also include pension adjustments to the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Account and the Retirement Compensation Arrangements Account. As per Treasury Board policy, the House of Commons' contributions to these accounts are based on estimates determined by the Chief Actuary of the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions. The reduction of \$6.3 million represents the difference between temporary funding that had been required to cover an estimated deficit and a cumulative increase in the estimated employer contributions.

Finally, under the theme of committees and parliamentary associations, you'll note there's been a reduction in funding of \$268,000.

[Translation]

This funding had been approved by the Board in June 2007 to host the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's meetings in Toronto. Since the meetings were held in September 2008, this funding is no longer required for fiscal year 2009-2010.

[English]

I've now provided you with a brief overview of the 2009-10 main estimates that were approved by the board. I am confident that you will agree that these estimates are fiscally responsible, while at the same time being attentive to and reflective of our needs and concerns as members of the House of Commons.

[Translation]

I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have, with the help of my colleagues who are here with me today.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Let's start, then.

Mr. Cuzner, would you like to lead us off?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): I have just one question.

And thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to listen to your sob story.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: You were right on your game yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

With regard to the anticipated move of some of the committee hearing rooms outside the precinct and the fact that we would anticipate additional security costs, are they factored into this?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien (Clerk of the House of Commons, House of Commons): No, they are not factored in at the present time. This is anticipated for once the West Block closes down, when there are obviously going to be issues, both in terms of security and transportation. We're in the process of working that out. They will be featured in future main estimates.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I know that the Board of Internal Economy is dealing with this now. Do we anticipate additional costs in this fiscal year?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No.

Hon. Peter Milliken: They are not going to close the West Block until next year.

• (1120)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Okay.

That's it.

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski.

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

Thank you, Speaker, and Ms. O'Brien for being here.

Number one, congratulations on keeping the budget to a less than half of one per cent increase from the last fiscal year.

I know this has been vetted through the Board of Internal Economy, and there's nothing in here that I see that raises any red flags or alarm bells. My one question is rather open-ended. That is, has there been any kind of a wish list that you had, either for this year or previous years, that you'd like to see budget allocations for that you haven't received?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I didn't realize it was time to write to Santa. I would have been a bit more creative.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: There are no guarantees you'd get anything, Audrey.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: We were very aware, in coming before the Board of Internal Economy, given the economic situation and the difficulties being faced worldwide, that we had to be extremely frugal in our requests.

I think our priorities would be in two areas.

On the one hand, our priority would be that we continue to invest in the maintenance and development of the infrastructure technology, which is serving members extremely well, and for which a lot of the front-end money for investment has come from a long-term vision and plan. Over time, it is going to require considerable investment to maintain the very high standard that we've now achieved, which allows us to continue to serve members with the best tools available. In that respect, we've been very fortunate in that the board has been sympathetic to the various constraints we have suggested. We need a consistent approach in which the support services offered to members for their technological issues is very robust. That would be on the technological side.

On the other side, one of the things that we're going to have to start looking at is the retention of our new hires. We have already started preparing a strategy for succession planning and leadership development. A lot of new hires come in, particularly on the corporate side of things, in human resources or finance. Often very well qualified, they'll take a junior post, occupy it for a year or 18 months, and then, armed with this work experience, look for jobs in the public service where, by virtue of sheer size, there's more room for accelerated advancement. This is already posing some retention difficulties for us.

One of the things that works well for us in this respect in, say, procedural services, is the possibility of having people rotate through different jobs. Over time, you can actually have quite a varied career here. We do various things like the family-friendly flexible time, maternity leave, and parental leave. These things are very attractive to young people. But in coming years, I think we are going to have to pay some serious attention to how we compare with the public service in retention and compensation.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: We're talking budget issues. So besides all of the other benefits and work environment that you provide for your hires, it will come down to budget issue in a lot of cases. On both the infrastructure technology and on hires, you've tried to toe the line this year, and I applaud you for that.

When would this become something that would have to be dealt with? No one knows how long this recession will last. The current economic environment may last six months, or it may last a few years. Do you have any timeline when you might be coming back to the BOIE and then this committee with budget asks for those two categories?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Without revealing the secrets of the sanctum sanctorum of the Board of Internal Economy, I wouldn't like to suggest that we've been rebuffed in our requests. We have tried to be strategic about when we come forward with an ask. This was our approach this year on information technology security. We held back, however, on more funds for human resources development. I think that might be something that we will be coming forward with next year. The information technology requires a continual investment.

With respect to our own responsibility as parliamentary public servants, we understand that we have to decide on priorities. What I don't want is to get into a situation in which an extended period of neglect would cause us to require a massive investment just to catch up. I think we're doing fairly well right now in terms of a balance. If

we play our cards right, we can come forward gradually with investments that will pay off in the long term.

• (1125)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you both.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Paquette, welcome. It's your turn.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Thank you.

I would like to thank the Speaker and the Clerk of the House.

Since I'm taking part in this exercise for the very first time, could you please explain to me the item "temporary funding for the former Prime Minister".

Does a transition measure kick in each time a prime minister leaves office?

The Speaker also mentioned the security threats associated with information technologies. What steps need to be taken to address these threats? Basically, where are we going with new technologies in terms of security? What exactly do you have in mind?

[English]

Hon. Peter Milliken: The normal practice has been that if a Prime Minister resigns and remains a member of Parliament, he or she receives an additional allowance to pay for travel, additional staff, or whatever, compared with other members. That was arranged for Mr. Martin when he left the prime ministership, and he received it as long as he was a member of Parliament. He didn't run in the last election, so the payment is now gone. That's why the estimates were reduced by the amount I indicated. I think it was \$149,000.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Since a former prime minister may be called upon to be a guest speaker at conferences and to travel, is there not a special budget set aside for that purpose for a certain period of time?

I know that for a certain period of time in Quebec, Mr. Parizeau and Mr. Landry received some financial assistance from the Quebec government to help them discharge their duties as former premiers.

Does the federal government provide a similar form of assistance?

Hon. Peter Milliken: No. A budget is available to them for the period of time they remain as members of Parliament. When they leave, the payment stops. That's the way it's always been, as far as I know.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: I see.

Hon. Peter Milliken: As for your other question, the Clerk is far wiser than I am when it comes to giving you an answer.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: We have our very own Colombo.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Certainly, in the ruffled sweepstakes, I would agree with you.

I'd like to invite Louis Bard, Chief Information Officer, to come to the table to give you a more detailed answer to your question.

We continue to check everything that goes on the network to ensure that there are no viruses. This is something we do regularly.

Recently, we have also forged a sound partnership with the government's two security groups, with CSEC. This agency continually scans the environment in order to detect potential attacks. For example, the newspapers recently reported on what had been found several months ago, further to one of these exercises.

Perhaps Louis could continue, since my French vocabulary is somewhat lacking.

Mr. Louis Bard (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Madam Clerk, Mr. Chair.

I would be happy to answer your question, sir.

The concept of the parliamentary precinct, which encompasses the thirty or so buildings downtown that house the offices of Parliament, as well as all constituency offices, was developed to ensure the ongoing integrity and security of each individual MP, as well as respect for the caucuses and respect for communications. Certainly, the intention was to create an environment in which information is protected and in which members can discharge their duties. In that regard, I think we have done a good job.

Ms. O'Brien alluded to the Communications Security Establishment Canada. This agency handles cyber attacks, viruses and threats to Canada. Until now, we have worked closely with CSEC and we have received excellent feedback on our work. CSEC officials have been very impressed by everything we have managed to do in terms of protecting members and by the fact that there has never been a major security incident involving the parliamentary precinct, unlike what we have seen in some areas of the private sector or in other government departments. We are quite well protected.

However, the number of breaches continues to increase. For instance, in 2007, we saw a 468% increase in the kinds of viruses and attacks on the various organizations. That's an increase of over 1.1 million in the space of one year. The parliamentary precinct is certainly a preferred target. During the course of investigations, we often receive calls informing us that we are a preferred target because of our trademark.

We also have a number of projects on the go that increase the mobility of members. We want greater access to your constituency offices. We are developing more strategies to synchronize all of your communications. We want to work more closely with the RCMP, with Senate partners and with other parties outside Parliament. We want the parliamentary precinct to be opened up. Clearly, we need to be even more disciplined.

So then, it's not a matter of our having major problems, but rather a matter of our wanting to make the system better and more efficient. Our objective is to ensure that members work in a fully secure environment at all times. That is the main target of our strategies.

• (1130)

[English]

The Chair: Great.

Next on our list is Mr. Comartin.

Welcome to our committee today.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Thank you. I am covering for my whip. I've been told by him not to ask any questions, but I'm going to ask one anyway.

I expect, Mr. Chair, that you'll protect my parliamentary privilege.

I'll declare a bit of a personal conflict. Perhaps Mr. Bard can help with this, as well. On a number of occasions, other members in my caucus have asked to place a webcam on their computers, both in their constituencies and here, in order to be able to communicate, in some cases with family, especially with young children, and in other cases with their constituents so they actually can see their constituents when they're talking to them. That technology is evolving very rapidly in the sense that it's being used more extensively.

The response was that we couldn't do that, even when we offered to pay for the webcams ourselves. It appeared that there was a security issue around it. I'm having some difficulty with the security argument, because this technology is being widely used in the commercial sector.

I'm wondering what the situation is with that, and if there are any plans to allow members to purchase the webcams, put them on, and make them accessible.

The other point that I would make—having done this in my own residence—is that it's much less expensive. We're not charged for long distance, as we are if it's a regular telephone call and we're going outside of the local area.

For those two reasons, both in terms of our ability to communicate better with our constituents and from a cost vantage point, I'm wondering where we're at with that.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I know that the use of webcams is becoming much more common, and I confess to you that I'm really not in a position to explain some of the security issues, because I don't understand them myself.

Louis could, perhaps, enlighten us both.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Bard: Regarding webcams, over the years, a number of pilot projects involving different members have been initiated. Some members do use webcams in exceptional circumstances, either to speak to their children who may be ill or in situations where solutions have been put in place. Certainly webcams can be very educational and this tool does work very well.

At one time, a member wanted to use a webcam for his constituency office. At the same time, he also wanted to benefit from the broadcast quality. The question that arises here is one of service in terms of the interpretation and in terms of the correct service model for a member. There is no question that security remains an issue. Capacity and volume must also be considered, since information is being transferred. The network capacity is enormous.

We have also introduced a number of new services that involve the network and transmission capabilities.

Therefore, if a genuine need arises, or if the need for this service becomes more pressing, I would be willing to review the situation and to come back to the committee with some recommendations.

•(1135)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Is security an issue?

Mr. Louis Bard: There is a difference between being at your office and travelling. That always depends on how it is used and the means of transmission.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Here, on the Hill, is security an issue?

Mr. Louis Bard: In some cases, we have been able to put in place what we call private networks, which do not cause security problems. IT strategies in general will enable us—we were aiming for the fall—to facilitate the mobility of all members and create private networks connected to the parliamentary precinct. That will foster the introduction of all sorts of innovations and possibilities in terms of infrastructure.

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin: I would like it to be looked into, if it can be. It's a major issue for MPs with young families.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: If I may, Mr. Comartin, one of the things that sometimes happens when individual requests come up like this that are eminently reasonable is that we look at them in light of perhaps the emergence of a new type of service to members. It's a question of figuring out how we're going to provide that to everybody. That becomes part of the things we're looking for in the next step in terms of an evolution.

I understand there may be some frustration with people who want to get on with that immediately. In light of that, I think we can certainly make some progress on this. Usually we move on to a pilot project that we set up to see how it will work where you have about 25 or 30 members—those members who are interested in doing this. I think we could make some quick progress on this.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Chair, I forgot to declare my conflict. I became a grandparent for the first time this year, twice. In fact, I'm going to be a grandparent again for the third time. My daughter just announced it a few weeks ago. I got to see my grandson walk for the first time about a month ago—this was from home, obviously—and I wouldn't have been able to do that from Parliament Hill.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: That seems like a worthy goal, then.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Madam Jennings.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): I thank you both very much for your presentation and the answers that you've given to some important questions.

I have two questions. The first is just a clarification on page 8, the first paragraph, which comes under the heading of "Salaries", about halfway down. It's speaking about the Expenditure Restraint Act.

The sentence begins as follows:

However, it is important to note that the Act will not be applied retroactively and any agreements that were reached prior to the Royal Assent of the Act will be respected. Salary adjustments after Royal Assent will respect the Act and will be included in future funding requests.

Am I right in believing this means if there are collective agreements in existence at this time that are multiple years, and those multiple years go beyond the date of implementation of the Expenditure Restraint Act, then those collective agreements, if the

wage increases have been agreed to, negotiated, signed, and are now part of a legal document, will not be affected by the Expenditure Restraint Act?

•(1140)

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: My understanding is that you are correct in assuming that. In our case, I don't think we have anybody, any union, to which that would apply, because everybody is at the bargaining table. All of the collective agreements have run out.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Secondly, in response to Monsieur Paquette's question about the \$140,000 reduction with regard to a former Prime Minister, it's my understanding that there is in fact a practice, under some kind of order or something, that when you have a former Prime Minister who's a sitting member of Parliament, there's an additional budget that is allotted to that MP for as long as that former Prime Minister continues to sit as an MP.

Does that mean that former prime ministers who are no longer members of Parliament receive no additional services by virtue of the fact that they were prime ministers? I'm thinking of the United States, for instance. A former President continues to have some kind of security detail provided to him or her. We have six former prime ministers who are not sitting MPs: Joe Clark, John Turner, Brian Mulroney, Kim Campbell, Jean Chrétien, and Paul Martin. I'm assuming that if they don't have anything like that, it's because there have been experts who have evaluated the security risks that may exist to them and have determined that there is no risk beyond what an ordinary Canadian would have. Therefore there is no reason for additional services, whether on the security side or otherwise.

Hon. Peter Milliken: There may be security services provided to them, but not by the House of Commons, and not in our estimates. If they're provided by the RCMP, it's something I don't know about. It may well be provided. In fact, I'm fairly sure that in some cases it would be provided.

But I don't know the details, and they're not part of our estimates. All we had in our estimates was the payment for the member of Parliament. Since the person has ceased to be an MP, we would stop making those payments.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Okay. I understand that. So my question would be best directed to the Minister of Public Safety, possibly.

Hon. Peter Milliken: The RCMP, or the Minister of Public Safety, sure.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Thank you.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: If I may, Mr. Chair, the arrangements for the House to give a special budget to a sitting member who is a former Prime Minister is not under a continuing order. That is done on a case-by-case basis. The board in existence at the time will then look at the needs of the sitting member.

Hon. Peter Milliken: As we did specifically in this case.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: As we did specifically in this case, yes.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Although, that begs the question: has there been a case of a former Prime Minister, a sitting MP, for whom a decision was made not to provide an additional budget?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Not in terms of the precedents that we could find.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: I was going to say, who got blackballed?

Thank you.

The Chair: I have Mr. Reid next. I have three people left on the list, I believe.

Remember that we've made a commitment to the Speaker to let him absent by noon today, because he has another commitment. I'm just asking you to be succinct in your questioning.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): I'll do my best, Mr. Chairman.

This follows up on the theme raised by Mr. Comartin about technologies that could be available but that are limited by the security provisions put in place by technical services. In my own office we have a printer-scanner-photocopier, but we can't hook it up to scan documents into our system. It makes a considerable difference to our efficiency in dealing with documents and our ability to, for example, have them in an electronic format, which could then be used whether I'm here in Ottawa or in the constituency office. Any effort to overcome this particular inefficiency would be appreciated.

I don't want to suggest that the reasons why it is currently prohibited are not reasonable, but it would be nice to see them addressed, if possible, while being respectful of the concerns held by IT.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: We would happy to take that on and see what solution we could come up with for you. Certainly, as you say, the scanning of documents can make a big difference to efficiency.

• (1145)

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Monsieur Guimond.

[Translation]

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

I would like to confirm what the Speaker said about security for former prime ministers. Prime Minister Chrétien is accompanied by two RCMP officers. Every year he attends the golf tournament organized by Jackie and Paul Desmarais. This event is held at Manoir Richelieu in my riding. I attend and it costs me \$350. I can tell you that I am the only separatist who attends the reception after the tournament. Last year, he played with Stéphane Quintal, a former Montreal Canadian player, and Vincent Lecavalier, who plays for the Tampa Bay Lightning and is a very good driver.

Mr. Speaker, could you ask the Clerk the date of the Speaker's and the Clerk's last appearance? I will ask the Clerk a question about a commitment she made. My purpose is to prepare her psychologically.

[English]

The Chair: On December 2, 2009.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Hence, they testified in advance! Unless you are referring to December 2008.

[English]

The Chair: Yes; it must be 2008.

I predict that they'll be here on....

Voices: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Therefore, at last December's meeting, I asked the Speaker and the Clerk a question about the opening of the restaurant, Le Parlementaire. We agreed to some extent that because of the hallways and its location on the sixth floor, it would be difficult to open the restaurant to the general public during the summer or the long holiday break.

The situation is quite different at the National Assembly because you access it through a door and then go up a staircase. It is easy to channel traffic. I understand the situation but the fact remains that you seem willing to try to open Le Parlementaire during constituency weeks, at least to our staff who does not have the opportunity to go there.

As a result of my training as a lawyer, I know that when you ask a witness a question, you always know the answer. Did you try to open it?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No, but we conducted a major study on whether or not to open the restaurant. This will soon be on the agenda of the Board of Internal Economy. As you know, the Board meets quite regularly, almost every week. However, the agenda has been very full. That is why we have not been able to add this item.

I must say that I have one main reason for not being optimistic about the restaurant opening. Careful consideration of the situation indicates that, every time someone uses the restaurant, the costs are not covered by the amount paid for the meal. We are talking about the parliamentary restaurant but officially it is the parliamentary dining room reserved for MPs and Parliament. It was designed for use by MPs.

I understand that you would like to open it up to everyone who works for the House of Commons. At certain times of the year, special activities are organized and it is open not only to management but also to employees. At those times, it is rather full.

As for constituency weeks, I decided that I would not go ahead with the pilot project before submitting the matter to the Board of Internal Economy. I wanted to be certain that the Board was aware of all costs involved.

• (1150)

Mr. Michel Guimond: Who will carry out the study?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: It has already been done. At the time, every Board of Internal Economy was kept up to date at an information session specifically on food services for the House. Next October I will be celebrating my fourth anniversary as Clerk, a position I have held through three Parliaments. I have noted that, because of turnover, this matter has not been broached recently at these information sessions. I want to start out on a sound footing and explain the budget for the restaurant and the parliamentary dining room.

On that basis, we can let the Board of Internal Economy decide if it wants to implement the pilot project, as you suggested.

Mr. Michel Guimond: You seem very pessimistic. I might go so far as to say that a decision has been made before the situation has been analysed. That is the impression I have from what you said.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I am not promoting my views over those of the Board of Internal Economy. It may very well decide to move forward with this initiative even though it is not what I would do. If that were the case, I would implement its decision.

However, I must tell you that what I have learned does not make me optimistic. I do not believe that it is very good value for money.

Mr. Michel Guimond: All right. I—

[English]

The Chair: You're well over your time.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Okay. I will come back in another turn.

The Chair: If you have a very quick question, I'll let you go very quickly.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: There are three other points that I did want to raise.

When you go to the parliamentary restaurant, you talk to people. There are rumours circulating at present that the kitchens will be reorganized and there will be a central kitchen. Is that right?

I also wanted to talk to you about disruptions in the computer network. Mr. Bard is here and I would like to take advantage of the Speaker's presence. The situation seems to be less serious now but our staff has talked about lengthy disruptions in the computer network. Furthermore, the problem of spam, pornographic and other e-mail seems to have been curtailed or corrected. I even came over to your desk to have you read one. You blushed with embarrassment.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: That is your interpretation. I must say that what is required is a skin that is somewhat more—

Mr. Michel Guimond: It contained a recipe for a big dick and I was not familiar with that English term.

[English]

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I have no comment to make on that.

[Translation]

However, I really like the French term for spam, that is *pourriel*.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Exactly.

My caucus colleagues, especially my female colleagues, asked me to intervene. I have to say that the problem seems to have been corrected. We no longer receive complaints.

Is it because those who send the spam have decided to give us a reprieve before starting up again or because work has been done on the network?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I will start with that question because it is fairly easy to answer. I spoke to Mr. Bard about the situation and he informed me that artificial limits, if you will, were not placed on MPs' e-mails because some MPs had complained that it led to filtering out of information that had to be forwarded to them.

However, to deal with your complaints, a second attempt was made to activate the filters appropriate for this type of situation. In my opinion, that had a lot to do with solving the problem.

As for the network, I know that there was a major crash at the end of March but I have not heard about a series of long disruptions. Mr. Bard may perhaps be able to clarify that matter.

With regard to the reorganization of the kitchen, I think it has been a great success. We managed to convince Public Works and Government Services that, as part of the parliamentary precinct renovations, the kitchen, which is presently located in the West Block, should be moved when the building is closed. A brand new kitchen is being built. This is known as a production kitchen. I am not sure if we can call it a commercial kitchen. It is located outside the parliamentary precinct and is brand new, even in terms of cooking technology. We are making these changes for two reasons. We are closing the West Block kitchen, where meals are prepared, and we are taking this opportunity to create another space so that when the West Block re-opens, it will be devoted entirely to parliamentary functions. The kitchen is not a parliamentary function.

There will be a new commercial kitchen. Meals will be safely prepared and delivered to the point of sale. Of course that will require a reorganization of the kitchen staff. The Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Vickers, and the Food Services Manager are working very closely with staff to provide training for these new technologies.

We are very pleased with the way things are going. Naturally, there are always some people who feel anxious when they see changes of this magnitude on the horizon. But at the end of the day, they will learn to use the new technology. It may end up being an important step in terms of career advancement. As for the renovation project, it has been a rare success story for us.

•(1155)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I did promise that we'd be able to dismiss the witnesses before noon, so I think that's the route we'll go. Then we'll ask the committee if we're ready for the question on the estimates.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Can Monsieur Bard answer the question about the network?

The Chair: Certainly. I know that Monsieur Bard will be brief.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Bard: Mr. Guimond, I am always impressed by the Clerk's ability to answer questions about technology. I congratulate her.

You are right. There was only one network crash. On that day, we lost contact with the House towards the end of question period. While resolving the problem there was another short disruption at about 7 p.m., at the end of the day. It was actually a mechanical problem.

As for what happened in April, everyone has read in the newspapers about the Conficker worm, which originated in Taiwan and resulted in sites being bombarded by millions of e-mails. During the same time in April, the seal hunt opened. In less than 48 hours, we received almost one million e-mails to be distributed to MPs.

We must always ensure that we provide service to MPs. We place these messages in quarantine and then deliver them intermittently. Some may have felt that service was slower and not the best, but I can assure you that everything has returned to normal.

With regard to infrastructure, important upgrades have been made to the e-mail system, especially with regard to firewalls. Many technological changes have been implemented. I am pleased with the results we see today.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right.

I thank the witnesses for their open and fruitful comments today. I hope the committee has gained all it needs to be ready for the question.

Shall vote 5 for the House of Commons, under Parliament, minus the amount granted in interim supply, carry?

PARLIAMENT

House of Commons

Vote 5—Program expenditures.....\$283,524,000

(Vote 5 agreed to)

The Chair: Shall I report same to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Great.

Is there a motion to adjourn?

An hon. member: Absolutely.

The Chair: Great.

The meeting is adjourned.

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