



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

PROC • NUMBER 035 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, May 3, 2012

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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

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•(1135)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

This is meeting number 35 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Pursuant to the order of reference of Thursday, March 15, we are examining the question of privilege relating to the free movement of members within the parliamentary precinct.

This morning we have Madam O'Brien and Kevin Vickers. We're happy to have you both. It's always a great day when you come to visit our committee.

Do you have an opening statement or anything you'd like to share with us before we start? This is a study this committee has done before. Mr. Vickers, you have appeared here on this issue before, too.

[Translation]

Ms. Audrey O'Brien (Clerk of the House of Commons, House of Commons): Mr. Chair, I would first like to thank the committee for inviting us.

[English]

I just want to say that it's an issue that has arisen before. It's one we're familiar with—all too familiar with. Though we try to make sure these incidents don't repeat themselves, human nature being what it is and human error being what it is and Murphy's Law being what it is, there are these repetitions.

Basically, they usually happen when we are playing host to distinguished visitors here on Parliament Hill. Before the distinguished visitors arrive, invariably a threat assessment is done and the security posture is adjusted accordingly. When there are visitors of very high profile—I think of President George W. Bush, I think of Prime Minister Netanyahu—the security procedures can seem rather cumbersome.

Members will remember that on May 1, Speaker Scheer wrote to all members and their staff alerting them to the fact that, by virtue of the visit of His Excellency Shimon Peres, the President of Israel, on Monday, May 7, again special security measures will be in place.

Again, we will try to mitigate those.

[Translation]

However, sometimes there are glitches, and the RCMP, for example, might not recognize a member of Parliament.

We are here to answer your questions.

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Let's start off, then.

Mr. Lukiwski, you have a seven-minute round to start us today.

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

Thank you, Madam O'Brien and Monsieur Vickers, for being here.

I'll try to leave almost all the time for your commentary on this, because it's a bit of a *Groundhog Day* experience, since we're going through this again.

Mr. Vickers, perhaps you could start off by telling us what happened, in your opinion, on March 2, and why it occurred. More importantly, do you have any opinions on what we might be able to do to try to prevent this kind of situation from occurring again?

Mr. Kevin Vickers (Sergeant-at-Arms, House of Commons): Mr. Chair, prior to these visits, extensive planning and meetings take place with all the security partners—the RCMP, the House, the Senate. We meet, and we come up with all the contingency plans we can think of to avoid these types of incidents.

One of the things, for example, that we always do is make sure that every RCMP officer has one of the member photo books. If a member of Parliament comes up and is not wearing his identification pin or his card, the officer can refer to the booklet.

In this case, my understanding from speaking with Mr. Stoffer is that he came up to the entrance point, spoke with the RCMP officer, and was challenged. He essentially agreed with the RCMP that he should have worn his pin. He went back to his office, got his pin, and then came back and was allowed onto the precinct.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Could you expand on that a little with respect to the difference between the security forces inside the House of Commons and those outside but still on the parliamentary precinct?

Then, further to that, do you have any suggestions on how we can make sure the situation doesn't occur again? As Madam O'Brien has said, we have the President of Israel coming shortly. We'd like to make sure this situation doesn't arise when that visit occurs.

Mr. Kevin Vickers: Depending on our resourcing levels and the status of the thing, there have been occasions in the past when our security people have gone out, because they are in contact with you every day. Our expectation with the RCMP, is of course—that area outside being their jurisdiction—that we count on and rely on them, through the use of the booklet, to be able to recognize or be able to ensure unfettered access for all members of Parliament.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Do you have any suggestions as to what we might be able to do? This isn't.... I jokingly referred to it as *Groundhog Day* because we've had several of these occasions in the past. Since it seems to be a recurring situation, do you have, Madam O'Brien, any suggestions?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: There have been, of course, various suggestions made through many years about the amalgamation of security forces and so forth. I think that is a very ambitious plan, which might eventually bear fruit.

Frankly speaking, though, I think the number of these incidents—though as you say, there is a sort of *Groundhog Day* aspect to this—is really very small relative to the number of visitors we have and the special events that we have on the Hill. In that sense, I think we're controlling it quite well.

In the presentation that was made in the House, there was reference made to there being not only one MP stopped, but several others too. Looking into it, we did not actually find evidence that there was anybody but the one person involved.

I think the notion of giving the RCMP the booklet.... Again, it's a confluence of circumstances. If it happens to be a day when there are constables or RCMP personnel who have been here on the Hill for a number of months and are familiar with it, there are less likely to be incidents. As the sergeant says, if our personnel are there to accompany them and make sure they recognize people, then things can be better.

• (1140)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'm just curious. I think it's a good idea. We talked about this, actually, at committee—whether or not the RCMP had the booklet with all of the....

Did the RCMP in this particular case consult the book before Mr. Stoffer was turned away?

Mr. Kevin Vickers: It's my understanding, sir, that at that particular point, for whatever reason, those particular RCMP officers did not have that book.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: All right.

Finally, are there any other procedures or precautions you're taking prior to the arrival of the Israeli Prime Minister?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Certainly, by virtue of the committee being seized of this particular question, I've asked the sergeant and the director of security to make sure that the RCMP is especially vigilant.

One would hope that members in turn would be particularly attentive to the memos they receive. We'll perhaps send out a reminder on Monday morning of the Speaker's note, just to remind people that when they come back from their constituencies this is

what's happening. Members very often have so much on their minds that it's perhaps not top of mind.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Do I understand correctly that short of having a common security force both inside and outside the House, you don't believe there is anything further that can be done to prevent this situation from occurring in the future?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Frankly speaking—perhaps I'm just getting old or have too much of a pessimistic nature, with the glass always being half empty, in my view—I think that even with an amalgamated force you might run into this kind of thing. It's certainly not in any way malicious or systemic; it's basically accidental. It's unfortunate, and we're very sorry about it, I have to say.

The Chair: Great. And I don't find you at all to be pessimistic—

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Ah, bless you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: —or old. I was not even going to bring that word up.

Mr. Comartin, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): I'm going to challenge Madam O'Brien.

I'll go through the three incidents that have really bothered me because I think there were some systemic problems here outside the building.

When Peter Stoffer approached the RCMP they knew who he was. They called him by his first name and still told him he had to go back to his office. Peter didn't object. Peter quite frankly is prepared to do anything to cooperate with the security forces, I want to be clear on that, that's his position.

That was the situation with him.

Then Madame Laverdière approached security and was challenged. She presented her card and then was required to go back—this was on the east side—through the East Block and through the tunnel. My understanding is that other members of our caucus were also treated the same way. So even though they had their identification and presented it, which I don't believe they should have to, they still were required to go back and several of them were late for the start of Parliament that morning as a result of those extra few minutes it took them to do that.

When I was leaving the Hill that day, coming out of Centre Block carrying a piece of luggage because I was leaving to go back to the riding, a bunch of RCMP officers were out in front of the tower. I was planning on walking down that way to go get a cab. There was nothing going on at that time on the Hill. The Prime Minister of Israel had already left the Hill. There was nothing going on in front of the flame. There was literally nobody there. The RCMP recognized me, and I was still required to go around the east side and go down that way, an extra number of minutes in terms of getting to my cab.

Those are too many incidents, in particular the part with Madame Laverdière, because I quite strongly believe that more than one of our members was told—I think there were five or six of them—but I haven't been able to identify them.

I'd like your comments. But maybe before you do that, in terms of some of the briefing we had, it is the NDP position that we should not have to produce identification once we come on the Hill property, not just the buildings, not just the Centre Block, but on the Hill.

I sat in on part of the hearings when President Bush was here and we had all the problems with Bill Blaikie in particular. That was my understanding of what the procedure was to be—that as long as the MPs were on the Hill they did not have to produce identification. It was the requirement of the security forces, whoever they were, to allow us to have unimpeded access to the buildings.

• (1145)

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: First of all let me apologize through you, Mr. Chairman, to Mr. Comartin. The incidents he raises—particularly the troubling one with Madame Laverdière, never mind the one with his luggage—there are absolutely no reasons for that. I mean that's just—dare one use the word—bullying, but certainly it's zealotry of the first water and there's no reason that should have occurred. I'll ask the sergeant to follow up with the RCMP and perhaps he can comment on that, because we were under the impression that there was the case with Mr. Stoffer.

I confess I didn't review in great detail the transcription of the committee's hearings on what happened during the Bush visit, to your point specifically about members not having to carry any kind of identification once they're on the Hill.

I can understand members feeling very strongly that they have privileged access to the Parliament Buildings and to the parliamentary precinct. At the same time, certainly we hope that the business of providing the booklet of photographs ought to suffice for the RCMP in order to be able to identify members.

I guess I'm of two minds in the sense that it makes things easier for people if members are wearing their pins and if members have identification on them—not to be challenged certainly by our security people who are supposed to know them on sight. But I think in instances where there are special visitors and special security arrangements are called into play, I suspect—and I'll let the sergeant speak to this, he's much more knowledgeable about police operations.... Now that doesn't excuse in any way the kind of treatment you tell me—through you, Mr. Chairman—that Mr. Comartin says Madame Laverdière experienced, or his own experience leaving the building. But I think there may be a sort of a heightened vigilance on the part of the RCMP people who are out there worrying that something will happen to the visitor.

Now the visitor has long left. I don't understand what they were doing milling about in front of the Centre Block to begin with. That's another question we might ask.

I'll let the sergeant handle this and doubtless there will be some, how shall we say, interesting conversations between the sergeant and his counterparts at the RCMP following these revelations.

Mr. Kevin Vickers: Mr. Chair to Mr. Comartin, on the day in question I met with both Mr. Stoffer and Mr. Pat Martin, and in fact I believe I had a conversation with Mr. Comartin that day as well in the lobby to try to find out and to get any information on any other MPs that may have run into difficulty outside. But to be totally

honest with you, this is the first time Mr. Comartin, that I understand there was another MP from your caucus that ran into difficulty.

I can't stress enough—Mr. Janusz, my director of security, is sitting in the room here today—the number of meetings we have with the RCMP prior to these events. We stress over and over again the importance of parliamentary privilege, the importance of these books, and the importance of making sure members are not interfered with coming up out of the precinct.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I don't know if I may be so bold, Mr. Chairman, in light of this sort of heightened vigilance turning itself into a certain zealotry, the committee might want to consider calling the RCMP to have explanations for this. Because as the sergeant says—and I know this for a fact because I get regularly briefed on this—there are very close communications between the RCMP and the security forces, so that the RCMP ought to be perfectly prepared to deal with this situation.

• (1150)

The Chair: Alright. Thank you.

Mr. Garneau, seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Obviously when two potentially conflicting requirements—the security, and obviously, access for parliamentarians—come into play on the same occasion, it's difficult to make everything work perfectly. You've said yourself that there have been many incidents and we were provided with this by the clerk.

I just want to make sure I'm one hundred per cent—and I have some sympathy for the security side of things. If something goes wrong, then we can all be too quick to jump on security. Why weren't you doing your job? So yes, my privilege as a parliamentarian is important, but at the same time I recognize that security is very important.

I just want to be clear whether I have the right assumption at the moment, if I wander into the precinct while on my way to work and I happen to have either my pin or my I.D. card, that should be sufficient for me to access.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Absolutely.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Okay, I just need one or the other.

If somebody was told that he had to go through the East Block tunnel to get into the building, that is not really a requirement.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No.

Mr. Marc Garneau: I just wanted to be clear on that. Many of the questions that I was going to ask have already been asked.

On special days, such as the upcoming visit of the President of Israel, there is a requirement for security. Has there ever been consideration given to having one or two access points into the parliamentary area, so that it's clear to everybody that you either go here or there? You would have staff there who are not going to get confused because they've been briefed on allowing parliamentary access to members of Parliament. You say this keeps happening every seven or eight years.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I'll ask the sergeant to confirm this. My understanding is that we reduce the number of points to which staff have access, but we don't want to reduce the number of points to which members have access. We want to give them freedom of movement so that they can come in one way or another. We don't want what appears to have happened with Madame Laverdière—being told to go through the tunnel. She's a member of Parliament, and she ought to be able to walk unhindered.

Sergeant, am I correct in this?

Mr. Kevin Vickers: Absolutely. Madam Clerk, you're absolutely correct. There should never be any interference to a member of Parliament coming onto the Hill. We do have, during these visits, points where the RCMP check ID and facilitate people's access, but there's no real reduction in the number of points you can access.

Mr. Marc Garneau: If we stick to the principle that an MP can come in anywhere she likes, then is this all just boiling down to the fact that the RCMP were not aware of what constituted providing ID?

Mr. Kevin Vickers: Yes, though it's frustrating to say. If MP Garneau comes up and he's not wearing his pin or his card, I'm not sure how much more simple it can be than opening the book and checking to see if that's you.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: We haven't restricted the access of members to a single point. We err on the side of cooperation by members, who have a pin or an ID. Failing that, there's the booklet. In this case, there were officers who were not sufficiently briefed, or they were briefed and decided to be more zealous than....

• (1155)

[Translation]

and to be holier than the Pope. So we find ourselves...

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Kerr.

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my thanks to the witnesses for being here today.

It would concern me very much if a member had showed her ID and was not allowed to go into the normal entrance. Being sent around the East Block would be a major concern.

Generally, when we have these unusual circumstances where we have special visits, members ought to be prepared to show their ID. I think it's a bit over the top to suggest that everybody should know who I am. I can walk off this Hill and nobody knows who I am.

When we are advised that it's a special event, I think the onus is on us to be prepared for some interference, some confusion. But if a person shows his ID and is sent somewhere else, I think that's either plain ignorance or abuse of authority. I'd separate those issues, but

I'm always curious. I know the difference in the security responsibilities. When we run into RCMP officers stationed outside, is there any reason why they can't at least let the person go to the House and be greeted by House security?

I'm talking about common sense. If I as a police officer have a concern, isn't the next level the House security people? Is there no way to bring those two together? The officer outside could always say he had a question and wanted to make sure that, before allowing a person in, he'd need to go through the House authority people.

That would be my first question.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Perhaps the sergeant can respond.

Mr. Kevin Vickers: It certainly would be an option, Mr. Kerr, through Mr. Preston. Certainly, something that we can consider is, if the RCMP were to stop somebody to call for our assistance in identification, that would be something we could consider.

Mr. Greg Kerr: We get frustrated over the levels and numbers of security activity, and I'm sure it must be a frustration for those who work in it. I agree that will not solve every problem, but is there something the committee can do through the parliamentary process to perhaps try to insist that it take place?

It seems like it's a missing gap. Obviously, we'd never have a problem if we ran into one of the House officers. They all know who we are, and they are very polite and all that sort of thing. But it's possible that some members of the RCMP, even though they should be briefed, may arrive as a fill-in or whatever takes place, and they may not take the seriousness of that process. It seems to me, as one further step, to have a lock-in with the House security would take care of a lot of difficulties.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Certainly that is a very interesting suggestion, and it is something that the sergeant, the director of security, and I will look at perhaps so that there's even a kind of emergency number where you could send somebody who can identify the person who's being held up.

To your point about wearing pins and ID, I have to say that members have been very cooperative. Mr. Comartin cited earlier the example of the very amiable Mr. Stoffer and we, generally speaking, have had very excellent cooperation by members who understand this sort of dilemma. But sometimes there are very young officers, who are very inexperienced. It's their first experience on the Hill, and basically they come with the idea that under no set of circumstances is something bad going to happen that could be pinned on them. You have a certain degree of sympathy for them, but at the same time, you do kind of want to whop them upside the head when they do stuff like this.

Mr. Greg Kerr: That seems like a good point.

The Chair: It's obviously a technical term.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Please go ahead, Madame Latendresse.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Thank you very much.

I would like to go back to Ms. Laverdière's situation and to that of other MPs who might have encountered the same type of problem. In my view, what we really have to understand is that Mr. Stoffer and Mr. Martin's first reaction will obviously be to go see you or that they will understand there is a problem.

Perhaps that happens more to the new MPs who are younger. It still often happens to me; I go into one of the parliamentary buildings and they ask me who I am, and I have to tell them that I am an MP. I am used to that. That is why I got used to always wearing my pin. Otherwise, everyone is uncomfortable when they find out that I am actually an MP. People say they are really sorry. I show some sympathy, because, if I were in their place, I also would not have thought that I was an MP. I understand perfectly well that it is important to identify yourself in those sorts of situations for security reasons.

In cases where we are told to go another way and to take a detour, many will just agree without realizing that there is a problem because they don't necessarily need to do that. If I understand correctly, the MPs did not have to pass through the tunnel in the East Block that day.

• (1200)

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No.

I understand and you are really kind to accept the fact that, given the age of many of the members of your caucus, people are sometimes surprised to see an MP instead of a staffer, for example.

You are quite right to say that new MPs in particular don't necessarily know that they don't have the right to insist like that. If it helps, we can perhaps come to meet with you at some point. The sergeant-at-arms and the director of security could hold an information session for the caucus or even just for interested MPs so that they are aware of the context we work in and their rights in similar situations.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Okay.

[*English*]

The Chair: You know you have time, if you have more.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: That's fine.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Thank you, Madam.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): If there are a couple of minutes I just have a brief—

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I guess I'm trying to understand. I see there are different points of view as to what members should have on them on these special occasions that happen.

Underneath this is watching, when certain dignitaries come, it almost subsume our own Canadian security, because they are

special. The American security officials say if they are coming to visit, then we are essentially going to use their security system and that's how it's going to be, otherwise they aren't coming. They use their own protocols and their own people and that's what the President expects. So there's a bit of that in me as a Canadian that says it's interesting, I guess that's the real politics of our world, with those particular high-level, under-threat leaders.

On the piece around what we should carry and what we shouldn't, I guess here's the concern I have. One can understand that on a high-profile visit from Israel or from the United States, these are special conditions. We've all talked about these special moments. Should MPs not just adapt to those special moments? The concern I have is that there's some encroachment. There are other things that are designated as special moments too, and further and further. The tradition of our accessibility, particularly to Centre Block and to the chamber, is not a casual thing. This is not something that was just invented for no reason. It's very particular.

I'm not impugning the motive on this particular government, but some future government could decide that other things are special moments and that we're going to have everybody running back and forth to their offices. The rules are such as they are and they're based on tradition, and those traditions are there for a reason. I guess this is less a question, perhaps, for our witnesses but more of a wanting to just name what the concern actually is. From my point of view, at least, my concern is that we start to make this more of a pattern and lose that important tradition. Some folks say, well, it's just a tradition and it means nothing. That's not the case. It does mean something and it is important. I think all of us have had different experiences with it, but when I go in through the Senate doors we have a conversation every time, every single time—with the pin on or not sometimes. For me, I'll keep having the conversation so that they understand they can't stop me. There's a reason they can't stop me and it is because I might be on my way to an important vote, and in some Parliaments one vote makes a difference.

I just want committee members to understand, and for my own understanding, that longer historical perspective and what this means, because it's important. And we shouldn't just casually say, well, we're going to start to name more and more special circumstances where you are no longer able to just access a place that you need to access as an elected person in this country.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: If I may, Mr. Chairman, through you to Mr. Cullen, I wouldn't want anything we've said to suggest that we are in any way insisting on, or in any way running counter to that tradition that I think you rightly cite as having very serious origins and being something that needs to be respected.

In the memo, for example, from the Speaker about next Monday's situation with President Peres, I think we take for granted that most members wear pins and most members will carry an ID or whatever, but if members don't have that for some reason they should not be stopped. They should still be able to have access, which is why the booklets....

I think you're right. We can't have a situation where we're saying there are special circumstances or there are special hoops that members have to go through in order to access what is basically their chamber. That's something that I wanted to make very clear.

• (1205)

The Chair: Excellent.

Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thanks, Chair.

I'm just trying to get my head around this as well, even though I've come here, obviously, and I haven't had a problem with visiting dignitaries being on the Hill.

You talk about not wanting to restrict members who come from various locations to the Hill. Explain to me, if you will, exactly where the checkpoints are. When would MPs first encounter a member of an outside security force if they're walking to work in the morning? They are not funnelled through particular checkpoints. If I was walking off Wellington Street by the East Block, or any place else, for an example, when would I first encounter security?

Mr. Kevin Vickers: If you were in a vehicle, sir, obviously, the entrance off Wellington—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Sure. But what if I'm walking?

Mr. Kevin Vickers: You're not really going to encounter or have face to face contact with the RCMP. As you know, they are stationed in their vehicles at different perimeters.

There's actually a system in place. It may look, from time to time, like they're scattered about the precinct in a haphazard way, but there is a purpose behind the stationing of the vehicles at different points and they do have a system of coverage of each car being responsible for a certain geographical area here on the Hill.

My sense is that if you were walking up to the building here, unless there was something amiss, the likelihood of your being stopped or being challenged by an RCMP officer would be remote.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Where was Mr. Peter Stoffer? I was assuming he was coming up by the Confederation Building, by the main checkpoint?

Mr. Kevin Vickers: On that day, if I'm not mistaken, he had advised me that he had gone down to the bank. I believe he was walking up Metcalfe Street, so he would have come in—I believe on that particular visit, the RCMP had a small tent down by the gate. That's where he would have encountered the RCMP, had the conversation, and then gone back to get his pin at his office.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: So you are saying that the majority of problems—if we want to phrase it as such—would more than likely occur if one were driving and coming in through the main checkpoint? But if you're walking, you say it's unlikely that one would—in Mr. Stoffer's case, obviously he encountered a problem, but in other cases, it's unlikely that if you were walking you would have a problem? By that, I mean, no security running across the front lawn to stop somebody who is walking up to Centre Block?

Mr. Kevin Vickers: I take it, Mr. Chair, you are talking about during these visits?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes.

Mr. Kevin Vickers: During the visit, there are places where you would probably run into—especially the upper drive here. You see the steel fence gates. Usually RCMP officers are stationed there. That would probably be one of the places where they would be looking for you.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That's what I'm getting at. In that case, you are down to two entrances, right? They are funnelled along the perimeter lines. If there are only two places where you would have occasion to run into outside security, would there then be the opportunity for House security people to be out there to assist the RCMP?

• (1210)

Mr. Kevin Vickers: There have been occasions. Since 2000, I think there have been something like 55 visits. For four of those visits, we have had House security out there. Our jurisdiction or mandate as security people end at the doors of Parliament.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Understood.

Mr. Kevin Vickers: Once we walk outside this building, we're civilians.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Understood. This wouldn't be in a security fashion. You would have no authority or no jurisdiction obviously—we understand the RCMP takes over outside the doors. This would merely be to assist. I don't know if that's the relationship between the RCMP and the security forces inside the House of Commons or the Parliament Buildings, but one would think that if it was just a simple offer to assist on those special occasions, do you anticipate any resistance from the RCMP? Couldn't that be a standard operating procedure to try to alleviate any potential problems?

Mr. Kevin Vickers: This coming Monday, because of a request from the RCMP, we will have our House of Commons security people out there to assist in ensuring the identification of members of Parliament. We have an expectation, just as we do of all of our staff, that the RCMP take their responsibility on their jurisdiction seriously. We're somewhat concerned about going out there and doing their work for them. That's their jurisdiction. They have a mandate on the outside. We have a mandate on the inside. I'm always preaching to them that yes, if opportunities come we can assist. We certainly expect the RCMP to have trained people out there to do the job. They know your people; they have the booklets.

The Chair: Sorry, you're way over. I was being very kind to you.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: You were being kind, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Zimmer, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): This is more of a question for our internal security, Kevin. We've had conversations where I have had—I hate to call them run-ins, but I guess they are—restricted access to the chamber and other places, probably because I'm a new guy. Is there a directive to security whereby they are mandated to learn our faces, or is it optional? Often, I will go by—again, 90% of them are great, they will let you in, and it's fine. Some will still require our pins and ID. Then often when I'm leaving, I see them looking at Facebook; they have a lot of spare time.

Mr. Kevin Vickers: It's a mandated thing. During their training they all have to recognize members of Parliament by face. We even have programs on the computer. You just hit the space bar and you can practice seeing the member and associating the name to the member of Parliament.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Do they have to perform a test where they're tested on their knowledge of our face recognition? Or is there a time, as in within three months or six months when they're tested on our recognition?

Mr. Kevin Vickers: All our new people coming through our training have to pass that. Before they get out on the floor they have to be able to identify all members of Parliament.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Like Madam Latendresse, I still run into the odd person who wants to see my ID or my pin. I don't have an ego. I just think, well guys, you should know this by now. I'll still do it and I'll produce my identification, but I still think...

So the onus is on me when it's their job to know our faces.

So I would just challenge you that maybe there needs to be a three-month period when they're tested regularly on our faces so there is a standard that you uphold. It's not an ego thing. It's more that we're challenged to do a job and we're given access to this place to do a job and I think they have a responsibility to do theirs. I think that's where there can be a conflict. So I would just challenge them, and that standard needs to be high in their job for what they're paid to do and it needs to be a high standard and it needs to be maintained.

• (1215)

Mr. Kevin Vickers: Mr. Chair, and Mr. Zimmer, I think there are some excellent points and that's something the director of security and I can...like a retesting every so many months just to make sure that everybody is up.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: If I may, as well Mr. Chairman, without wanting to get into a kind of culture of tattling, I do think that if this occurs, it's extremely helpful to get the name of the person and to report that back to the sergeant or to somebody at the table who will get the news back.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Yes, and I have. And Kevin, you've been awesome. Every issue that we've had, you've been more than great, apologizing on behalf of them, and it has been much appreciated, but it's usually after the fact.

When you're told “no” to having access to the chamber, you kind of say, “Okay, I don't want to make a scene in front of my guests I have with me, but nevertheless, here we are.”

I appreciate, and you've always been awesome, and again, 90% of them are great—and it's probably even higher—but it's just that standard needs to be maintained.

Thank you.

The Chair: There is a minute left. Mr. Hawn, is that about what you need?

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Yes, a minute, and I don't disagree with anything that's been said. I agree with everything that's been said.

I just want to recount that on February 3, 2006, when I walked into the Peace Tower for the first time, the very first guard I met said, “Good morning, Mr. Hawn, and welcome to Ottawa.” So they are great.

The Chair: Great.

Madam Turmel.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Nicole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): I would like to make a suggestion. I pass through the security point in my car and, until one month ago, whenever there was a new person, they would automatically ask for my ID. Over the past month, I have noticed that there is always an experienced police officer with a new one, but I must admit that that is not always possible. It might help to pass the message along. When someone is in training, there should be at least another person, which would allow them to recognize me. I am seeing this right now. They greet me and say: “It is Ms. Turmel”. I appreciate that.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Thank you very much, Ms. Turmel.

We really appreciate it. It is a good practical suggestion. Everyone can benefit from it.

[*English*]

The Chair: If I can just interject, I had exactly the same experience as Mr. Hawn on my first day here, way back in 2004. Walking in, I was just amazed that someone said, “Welcome, Mr. Preston”, and they knew who I was.

But of late, with the move to Promenade and some of the other areas in the precinct, we now also run into Senate checkpoints and I, honestly, this year had to show my ID to the Senate guard to walk into the Victoria Building. I thought, okay, this is refreshing, but I had it and I didn't feel it was an inconvenience. It was just, okay, great. From then on we wave and laugh and each time I go through.

But I just want to say that I don't find it an inconvenience to have to live within the security realm of this place. My ID card is in my wallet and that's not an inconvenience. It takes the place of whatever. I may not have my Air Miles card because the wallet gets too thick, but come on, it's not that hard for me to have that and it's not that hard to get dressed in the morning and put the pin on. I just want to make sure I said that.

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses who make our lives very easy around this place on a regular basis.

I have a couple of questions. In Mr. Stoffer's case, clearly the mistake that was made was that he was sent away. They should have looked at the book. Instead, they sent him away, and that was a mistake. Is the officer who did that identified?

Mr. Kevin Vickers: I have not been able to do so myself. I've been in contact with senior management of the RCMP, Assistant Commissioner Jim Malizia, who looks after the protective operations, and he assured me that the matter is being looked into and they were going to follow up with the members involved.

Mr. Mike Lake: It sounds to me like a mistake that was made by someone who may have been new, but who knows? And I would assume that when that police member or members are told they've made a mistake, they won't do that again.

In the case of the other member Mr. Comartin referred to, this is the first time you've heard of it so I imagine you obviously haven't gotten to the bottom of that at this point.

I guess I want to make a point. First of all, in regards to Nathan's comments about world leaders coming here, I would think that when our Prime Minister goes somewhere else in the world, certainly our security teams have a specific way they would like security to be handled and would have some say in what the security parameters are for that visit. I would think we would have the same accommodation made here and each situation might be a little bit different.

My second comment is that I think it's completely unrealistic to think that none of us would ever get questioned as we're walking in, regardless of whether security guards have actually memorized what we look like in a book. I get questioned still, after six years, on a somewhat regular basis. Probably since the last election I've been asked for ID five to 10 times already, and it's because I'm wearing jeans and a T-shirt when I walk in and I'm walking quickly when I come up to the door. The security guard kind of quickly whips around and naturally quickly asks me for ID. As soon as I say I'm a member of Parliament, I've never actually been asked to pull out identification. Once in a while they'll ask me who I am, if it's someone new, and usually I don't recognize them either. I say who I am, and usually they don't even look at a book. You can almost see them go back in their head to remember the picture, then say that's right and they let me on through.

I would rather have mistakes made that have me as a member asked for ID, rather than a mistake where somebody who may be a threat is let in because security is afraid to offend someone who might look like an MP.

I wanted to put that on the record. You know, there is a simple answer to this. As MPs, we get a pin. We have a pin here for a reason, and if we remember to wear the pin we avoid all of that.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

I have Mr. Comartin to finish this off today.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Well, I wasn't going to say this, but I mean I simply disagree, Mr. Chair, with both your and Mr. Lake's comments.

We have a long history in the English parliamentary system of protecting this privilege. We have that privilege. I mean, people have literally died for this privilege in England, historically, if you go back. And I think you have to be really careful about making concessions.

Mr. Cullen has already raised the issue of how many more days, or leaders coming in from other countries, where there is minimal security but we decide, the government of the day decides, or officials decide, no, they're taking all that away. This privilege is an individual privilege. It's not a collective privilege. It's an individual privilege of every member in this House, and I think you have to be careful of that.

I want to go back to pursuing this with the RCMP because that's obviously where the problem is. I've had the same experience, Mr. Preston and Mr. Lake, with regards to.... I think I've only been stopped once after my first year here. It was by a new staff member in the West Block and I did have a delegation with me and I was quite offended, and I did make a scene. Fortunately, one of the more senior people was also at the desk and intervened immediately and we resolved it. And again, I'm having the problem, as all of us are, with the Senate staff.

But with regard to the RCMP when we do have these special events, there has to be a better way of doing this. The experience I had this last time.... I've had other ones on other occasions but nothing as severe as this.

So who should this committee be bringing in from the RCMP? In particular, there seemed to have been a decision made to send people through East Block, even if they identified themselves. Who would have made that decision? We need to, at least I need to, find that out.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Mr. Chairman, on the business of sending people through the East Block, I can't begin to understand how that happened. That goes absolutely counter to anything that we would have negotiated. When I say "negotiated", I mean basically going over the arrangements for a particular day.

I look at the notice that the Speaker sent out for next Monday. It does say that barricades will be up for the upper drive, but that's not to say in any way that any member should be stopped there.

My own feeling is that under the circumstances, and given how strongly you feel about this, you may even want to call the commissioner, and not necessarily the assistant commissioner who's in charge of this particular.... Maybe both of them. Because I think that one of the things we struggle with really all the time as the House of Commons, and as representatives of the institution of the House of Commons, is to defend fiercely the independence of the House as an institution, and defend the rights, as you say so eloquently, individually of each member of the House of Commons. Each member has been elected. There are privileges that attend upon that election, and we are dedicated to the protection of those privileges.

I have to say that I've even encountered this in dealing with officials at other levels and in other kinds of conversations, where people tend to think of this as kind of quaint, you know, that it's traditional, and it's really kind of old-fashioned, and it's rather archaic. You think, "No, actually, it's not". It's absolutely central. It's the beating heart of parliamentary democracy. That's not something you toy with.

Again, forgive me for overstepping my bounds, but maybe calling the commissioner and the assistant commissioner to emphasize that at this level of discussion might be helpful.

•(1225)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Okay.

I have a second one, along the same line of decisions made. I think I'm right on this. When Mr. Netanyahu was here that day, they closed off the west side. You couldn't come up the west side. You only could come up through the east side. You couldn't come up through the centre for sure, because the barriers were completely closed off, but I thought they had closed it off to pedestrians on the west side.

If that is the case, who would have made that decision? Or who makes the decision to shut off coming up the stairways or coming up through the two side driveways or laneways?

Mr. Kevin Vickers: The RCMP consults with me and the director of security on security measures.

On that day in question, Mr. Chair, if I'm not mistaken, the upper drive was closed off, but the east and west drives were open, and members of Parliament—or anyone—could come up and walk up the east and west drives.

Mr. Joe Comartin: So really, the question is.... I think you're saying that it's the RCMP that makes the decision as to what's going to be closed off.

Mr. Kevin Vickers: Yes. We're usually consulted. They would ask us if we're okay with whatever proposed measure they wished to implement. Again, it's all based on threat risk assessment, on exactly what the threat risk assessment is, and our security posture would be congruent to whatever that TRA would be.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Would that be the same as what I ran into when I couldn't figure out why the RCMP officers were still there? The Prime Minister had left some time before. In terms of how long the barriers stay up and how long the RCMP stay patrolling the barriers, do they make all those decisions in consultation with your office?

Mr. Kevin Vickers: On the length of time the barriers are up, Mr. Chair, as Mr. Comartin points out, usually once the dignitary or the VIP is a certain distance away, there's no need to continue to have those barriers up. I do know that there's a lot of consultation between the RCMP and Public Works as far as just the economics of getting resources in to take them down and payments are concerned.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: As I understand it, Mr. Chairman, the barrier at the top of the steps is there not only to keep pedestrians out, but the expectation is, as well, that if there are demonstrations or that kind of thing, there's an actual barrier. But as the sergeant was saying, once the dignitary has left, there's a little door that can open in that where people ought to be able to go through.

Mr. Joe Comartin: And it was open, Madam O'Brien.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: And did they still sent you down the east way?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Yes, the gate was open. You know, that little... It's what? It's four or five feet wide.

The Chair: You're taking it personally.

A voice: I think it's personal. This is all about their not liking Joe Comartin.

The Chair: I know I said we're done, but what has been said has spurred a couple of other quick questions.

Mr. Hawn has one.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Yes, just really quickly, because I was using Bob's time before, not my own.

I'm just disappointed, and I'm not going to disagree with Joe about the parliamentary privilege, and people have died defending it, and so on, but you know what? Carry your ID. I'd be concerned if somebody died because of the privilege, so carry ID. It's not that tough.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Mr. Lukiwski, go ahead really quickly.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes, just as a quick follow-up. I'm trying to find a solution here more than attach blame, I guess.

We talked about how, when there's a special visitor coming, there will always be a couple of entrance points. You're going to put up perimeter fencing around, so there's only going to be one, or two, or perhaps three at most. It just seems to me that it would make sense as a standard operating procedure to have cooperation between security forces in the House and the RCMP, by having some of the in-house security people out at the checkpoints to assist the RCMP if they couldn't identify a member of Parliament. But I think what I'm hearing here is almost like that old territorial imperative crap that's going on, a.k.a. pissing matches between two security forces, right?

Can't we just find a way that, only on those occasions when we have visiting heads of state or special occurrences, it's just a matter of course to have cooperation between the two security forces, so that they can avoid the problems that we've had? It would seem to me a pretty simple solution.

•(1230)

Mr. Kevin Vickers: Mr. Lukiwski, nothing is easy. We have an association that our security services belong to, and much that we're required to do outside the precinct relies to a great degree on their cooperation, and on their collective agreement, and you also get into issues of health and safety. There are all kinds of other issues that we deal with.

Speaking as a previous senior member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, I would expect these highly trained professionals.... They're educated people, and they have been paid, I think, to the tune of about \$50 million a year to ensure your unfettered access out on the Hill. Without crossing that idea of two competing or two non-speaking forces, I can assure you that the degree of training, the degree of cooperation, between the force and the House of Commons security is incredible, but as I mentioned to you earlier, there is an expectation that, as trained professionals, they have a job to do. They have the jurisdiction, and every time one of these visits comes up, there's an expectation on our part that they're able to recognize you, and make sure that you can enter the building.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: As it stands now, is it the situation that the RCMP would have to invite House security forces to come out before that would happen?

Mr. Kevin Vickers: No. Regarding this Monday's visit, we have received a request, and we will be out there with them this Monday.

Also, there's a tremendous difference in these visits when they take place when Parliament is sitting and Parliament is not sitting. I can speak for my director of security. Just to have enough people here in the precinct looking after our own mandate, and looking after the chamber and all your security, can be very challenging at times. So it's not like we have this luxury or flexibility all the time to be able to respond. As I said, we have our mandate in the building here, and first and foremost is to make sure that the mandate is carried out. Resourcing challenges, as I say, can have a bearing on our flexibility to assist.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Perhaps, Mr. Chairman, if I may, through you to Mr. Lukiwski, from what I've heard today, I can sense there's a certain frustration on the part of members with the tangled, labyrinthine web of security forces, security directives, and so forth. Perhaps I can undertake for the committee to review with the sergeant and the director of security the specific practical arrangements surrounding those limited number of checkpoints to see what we can do, either using the security forces or in some other way, to prevent this particular *Groundhog Day* from recurring.

The Chair: Agreed. We're looking for solutions.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I'm promising to try.

The Chair: Right.

One more one-off question, Mr. Miller, only because I've been mistaken for you.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Other than the hair difference I guess I can understand that.

It's more a comment than anything. Obviously I just subbed in for Mr. Kerr and didn't hear all the discussion. It sounds like Mr. Stoffer

was unable to go someplace where he probably should have been able to, and mistakes happen and that's unfortunate.

There are two observations I have and you can take these for what they are. My personal opinion is that I think there is probably way more security down here than we need, but at the same time you could maybe say that about airports some days too. We all know though it's for our protection so you have to go along with that.

One thing I do find bizarre is all the different security detachments, if I can call them that, here on the Hill. I just find that very bizarre and it doesn't make sense in Parliament or business or whatever. So I just throw that out.

One thing I really do want to get out is that I get asked the odd time as well, and actually I take it almost like a compliment, like going to a bar and getting asked for my ID. But the staff, the security, wherever I go are always very courteous, most of the time a lot of them call me by name and they're certainly professional at the same time, and I appreciate that.

I just wanted to say that.

• (1235)

The Chair: At that point I think we'll end it.

I thank the Clerk and the Sergeant-at-Arms for coming and visiting us today. You shared with us information that will help us write the report on this and hopefully we've shared some ideas that may help also.

Thank you very much for your time today.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the members for their suggestions and observations and their kind remarks.

The Chair: I have a question for the committee and it's on committee business further to this study. I would entertain a motion to go in camera as it's committee business, or not, if the committee is willing to just schedule our day on Tuesday without doing that. It's up to the committee.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Is there anything sensitive on our calendar for Tuesday?

The Chair: It's about what do we do next. Do we write the report or do we now have the witnesses from the RCMP, which was suggested?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let's go in camera.

The Chair: All right, we'll go in camera.

I will suspend for a minute.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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