



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

FUTURE OF HYBRID PROCEEDINGS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and
House Affairs**

Honourable Bardish Chagger, Chair

**JANUARY 2023
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

has the honour to present its

TWENTIETH REPORT

Pursuant to the order of reference of Tuesday, June 21, 2022 and its mandate under Standing Order 108(3)(a)(iii), the committee has studied hybrid proceedings in the House of Commons and has agreed to report the following:

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

That hybrid Parliament, including the voting application, be continued and that all necessary changes to the Standing Orders be made to allow for its use, and that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs must review these measures within the first year of the 45th Parliament. 69

Recommendation 2

That the House administration investigate the use of simultaneous interpretation in other parliaments and international democratic institutions that have a low injury rate amongst interpreters; and that what is learned be applied in the House of Commons. 69

Recommendation 3

That the Minister for Public Services and Procurement Canada promote the recruitment and retention of interpreters as a career and promote the educational programs available to achieve this..... 69

Recommendation 4

That the Translation Bureau examine the health and safety supports currently available to interpreters, whether employed full-time or on contract, and look at areas of improvement, and that they continue to work collaboratively with the House of Commons administration and the International Association of Conference Interpreters to ensure their concerns are immediately addressed in a transparent manner..... 69

Recommendation 5

That the House of Commons ensure the sustainability of parliamentary services and resources through the application of stringent measures to protect the health and safety of interpreters by creating a new Standing Order to ensure the following:

- 1. that, when appearing virtually, witnesses called to appear before a parliamentary committee must wear a superior-quality headset with a built-in microphone that meets ISO standards or the equivalent, to be provided or approved by the House of Commons administration;**
- 2. that, failing to use such a headset their appearance be rescheduled, where permitted;**
- 3. that, when circumstances permit, parliamentary committees give at least one week’s notice to witnesses in order to ensure that connectivity testing can be conducted and equipment can be sent so that they can participate fully in committee proceedings. If such a deadline is not met, that witnesses be invited to testify in a videoconferencing studio arranged by the House administration;**
- 4. that, should a witness fail to have an adequate sound test involving House of Commons interpreters before appearing before a parliamentary committee, their appearance be rescheduled, where permitted; and**
- 5. that an alert process for technical difficulties affecting sound quality be implemented: that, in the event of a failure of the sound system and/or technical difficulties that impede the safe performance of the interpretation or compromise its quality, the interpreter shall immediately notify the Speaker of the House or the Chair of the Committee. In such a case, the Chair shall suspend business until the technical support team of the House of Commons has resolved the technical problems;**

That the House of Commons administration provide support in all applicable matters related to this recommendation, and ensure the safe, efficient and orderly conduct of proceedings. 69

Recommendation 6

That it be a best practice for members of Cabinet to be present in person to answer questions during question period and to testify before committees..... 70

Recommendation 7

That chairs and vice-chairs of committees must be present in person for all committee meetings. 71

Recommendation 8

That the House of Commons administration, after consultation with the whips of each of the recognized parties in the House, ensure appropriate and adequate audio-visual equipment be provided for both virtual participants and interpreters..... 71



THE FUTURE OF HYBRID PROCEEDINGS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

INTRODUCTION

On 23 June 2022, the House of Commons adopted the motion entitled “Government Business No. 19 – Order respecting the business of the House and its committees.” Contained within this motion was an order of reference for the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (the Committee). That part of the motion read:

That the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to undertake a study on hybrid proceedings and the aforementioned changes to the Standing Orders and the usual practice of the House.¹

The motion Government Business No. 19 provided the House and its committees with the authority to conduct hybrid proceedings. This authority expires on 23 June 2023.

On 22 September 2022, the Committee unanimously agreed to adopt a work plan that contained the following motion:

That the committee proceed immediately to a study on hybrid proceedings, pursuant to the House order of Thursday, June 23, 2022, and not continue beyond Monday, October 31, 2022.²

Also, the Committee has previously undertaken two studies whose evidence and findings may help to provide further context for this current study on hybrid proceedings. These were:

- a study undertaken during the 42nd Parliament entitled “[Initiatives toward a family-friendly House of Commons](#),” and

1 House of Commons, *Journals*, 23 June 2022.

2 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (PROC), *Minutes of Proceedings*, 1st session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 29, 22 September 2022.



- a study undertaken during the first session of the 43rd Parliament entitled "[Parliamentary Duties and the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)."³

The Committee began its study on hybrid proceedings on 4 October 2022. During the course of its study, the Committee heard from 39 witnesses over 5 meetings. The Committee wishes to sincerely thank all the witnesses who participated in this study for their valuable contribution.

Please note that the report discusses topics that can be disturbing to some readers, including suicide, loss and mental health. If in need of help, call Talk Suicide Canada at 1-833-456-4566 (text 45645).

BACKGROUND

A. Summary of House of Commons motions adopted regarding the format of sittings during the COVID-19 pandemic

On 13 March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the House of Commons unanimously adopted a motion that cancelled its scheduled sittings until 20 April 2020. On the same date, the Senate adjourned until 21 April 2020.

However, on 24 March 2020, the House was recalled and unanimously adopted a motion that empowered the Standing Committee on Health and the Standing Committee on Finance to meet by teleconference or videoconference. On 11 April 2020, the House was again recalled and unanimously adopted a motion to empower four further standing committees, including the Committee, to hold meetings by teleconference or videoconference.

On April 20, 2020, the House unanimously adopted a motion to create a Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic (COVI). COVI was composed of all the members of the House and chaired by the Speaker. It met by videoconference on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and in-person on Wednesdays. This motion expired on 25 May 2020.

On 26 May 2020, the House adopted a motion that adjourned the House until 17 June 2020. It also extended temporary measures put in place in previous months, dealt with the business of supply, and empowered certain standing committees to meet by teleconference or videoconference.

3 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 31, 4 October 2022.

On 8 July 2020, the House held its first ever “hybrid” sitting, during which members participated both in-person and by videoconference. Two large screens were installed on either side of the Speaker’s chair to allow members in the chamber to see those participating virtually.

Subsequent motions to extend the temporary measures related to hybrid sittings and committee meetings were adopted on:

- 23 September 2020;
- 25 January 2021;
- 25 November 2021; and
- 23 June 2022.

B. Temporary modifications to the Standing Orders adopted on 23 June 2022

The most recent motion that the House of Commons adopted to temporarily modify its procedures and practices to provide for hybrid sittings occurred on 23 June 2022. The section below provides a summary of the components of that motion, some of which were originally adopted with a view to observing COVID-19 precautions within the Chamber.

1. Quorum

Currently, Standing Order 29(1) sets out that the presence of at least 20 members of the House, including the Speaker, are necessary to constitute a meeting of the House for the exercise of its powers.

The motion passed on 23 June 2022 modifies this requirement, allowing members who participate remotely in a sitting of the House to be counted for the purpose of quorum.

2. Members rising to be recognized

The Standing Orders require members to, on certain occasions, rise or be in their place. Further, they contain references to the chair, the table or the chamber. The motion passed on 23 June 2022 states that these matters must be interpreted in a manner consistent with the virtual nature of proceedings.



Further, the following Standing Orders were temporarily amended or suspended by the 23 June 2022 motion:

- Standing Order 17 (rising to be recognized) was suspended;
- Standing Order 26(2), when 15 members rise to oppose a motion moved by a member to continue or extend a sitting was amended to lower the number of members to five;
- Standing Order 53(4), when 10 members rise to oppose a motion of an urgent nature presented without notice by a minister was amended to lower the number of members to five;
- Standing Order 56.1(3), when 25 members rise to oppose a “routine motion” moved by a minister during Routine Proceedings, following the denial of unanimous consent, was amended to lower the number of members to five;
- Standing Order 56.2(2), when 10 members rise to oppose a motion that concerns committee travel was amended to lower the number of members to five; and
- The application of Standing Order 62 (motion that a member “be now heard”) was suspended for members participating remotely.

3. Presenting documents to the House or laying them before the House

The 23 June 2022 motion temporarily amended the Standing Orders to permit the presentation and/or tabling of electronic documents. Documents may be laid before the House or presented to the House electronically, provided that:

- (i) documents deposited pursuant to Standing Order 32(1) must be deposited with the Clerk of the House electronically;
- (ii) documents must be transmitted to the clerk by members prior to their intervention;
- (iii) any petition presented pursuant to Standing Order 36(5) may be filed with the clerk electronically; and

(iv) responses to questions on the Order Paper deposited pursuant to Standing Order 39 may be tabled electronically.

4. Permitting the Chair to preside from the Speaker's Chair during Committee of the Whole

Currently, the usual practices of the House see the Chair occupant presiding over a committee of the whole from the Table in the Clerk's chair, while the Speaker's chair remains vacant. The motion adopted by the House on 23 June 2022 temporarily modified this practice.

5. Call for a recorded division, the timing of votes and the process of voting

There are numerous Standing Orders that currently prescribe the process for calling for a recorded division, establishing when the vote will take place and the process for voting. The motion adopted by the House on 23 June 2022 contains seven sections ("i" to "o") that deal with the topic of voting in-person and electronic remote voting.

C. Electronic voting in the House of Commons

After the House began sitting in hybrid format, it became clear that recorded divisions required significantly more time, in hybrid format, than they do during regular sittings. Each recorded division in hybrid format took about 45 minutes, while recorded divisions during regular sittings took about 10 minutes.

On 23 September 2020, the House adopted a motion tasking its administration to create an electronic voting application. In February 2021, further to the development of the application, the Speaker of the House indicated he had received written notice from the leaders of the recognized parties indicating that they were satisfied with the implementation of the application. The first recorded division using the new application took place on 8 March 2021. The application remained in use until the dissolution of the 43rd Parliament and was implemented again during the 44th Parliament.

During each recorded division, members can choose to vote by standing up in the House, or by using the electronic voting application. The final tally compiles the votes cast using both methods. If a member votes using both ways, only the in-person vote is recorded.



In order to use the electronic voting application, members must use a mobile device provided by the House of Commons and be connected to a cellular or Wi-Fi network in Canada. The device must also be enrolled on the House's mobile device management platform, and members must be registered within the electronic voting system.

A member voting electronically during a recorded division has 10 minutes to do so. As soon as voting starts, the application displays a countdown to indicate the remaining time. Members can modify their vote during the voting period; afterward, the unanimous consent of the House is required in order to change a vote.

There are three steps in the electronic voting process: members of parliament first select "Yea," "Nay" or "Abstain" and then confirm their selection. They must then confirm their identity using facial recognition technology. The final step is submitting their vote.

A live vote web page, which is accessible to the public, allows the results of the electronic vote to be displayed in real time.

EVIDENCE AND BRIEFS

A. Appearance of the Honourable Anthony Rota, Speaker of the House of Commons, and House Administration senior officials

The Honourable Anthony Rota, Speaker of the House of Commons, appeared before the Committee on 4 October 2022.⁴ He was joined by senior officials of the House of Commons administration: Charles Robert, Clerk of the House of Commons;⁵ Eric Janse, Deputy Clerk, Procedure;⁶ Michel Patrice, Deputy Clerk, Administration;⁷ and Stéphan Aubé, Chief Information Officer, Digital Services and Real Property.⁸

4 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 31, 4 October 2022 (The Hon. Anthony Rota, M.P., Speaker of the House of Commons).

5 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 31, 4 October 2022 (Charles Robert, Clerk of the House of Commons).

6 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 31, 4 October 2022 (Eric Janse, Deputy Clerk, Procedure).

7 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 31, 4 October 2022 (Michel Patrice, Deputy Clerk, Administration).

8 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 31, 4 October 2022 (Stéphan Aubé, Chief Information Officer, Digital Services and Real Property).

1. General observations

Mr. Rota began by stating that the hybrid model's temporary changes to the practices and *Standing Orders of the House of Commons* allowed parliamentary business to continue all while respecting health restrictions. Now that public health measures have been lifted, he indicated that it would be worthwhile to reflect on what parts of hybrid proceedings may be retained, taking into account lessons learned during the pandemic.⁹ Mr. Rota said it's critical to ensure that Parliament can work in the best capacity possible. In his view, the Committee's role was to find the best way of proceeding so that Canadians get good democracy.¹⁰

According to Mr. Rota, should the hybrid model continue, the Committee may wish to recommend additional changes to the Standing Orders to address certain challenges. For example, matters of decorum, dress code and backgrounds when members are participating remotely could be examined. Further, the Committee could also review how the House should proceed when members, witnesses or interpreters face connectivity issues.¹¹

Asked about current use of the hybrid format, Mr. Aubé stated that, on average, 30% of members participate in meetings remotely during sitting weeks, compared to 70% who attend in person. According to information subsequently provided to the Committee by the Speaker, 97% of interventions during Chamber proceedings are made by those participating in person.¹² He also noted an increase in the use of the hybrid model during weeks when the House is not sitting. As for committee witnesses, about 70% take part in meetings remotely.¹³

Mr. Rota stated that the House of Commons was a world leader in the early implementation of a hybrid model. Discussions took place with similar institutions, including the legislatures of New Zealand, Australia, France and the United Kingdom, to learn from their mistakes and successes.¹⁴ Responding to a question, Mr. Rota stated that he was not aware of any provincial legislatures that still used a hybrid format. He

9 Ibid., 1100 (Rota).

10 Ibid., 1110.

11 Ibid., 1100.

12 *Letter addressed to the Chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs from the Speaker of the House of Commons*, 27 October 2022, p. 6.

13 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 31, 4 October 2022, 1125 (Aubé).

14 Ibid., 1130 (Rota).



also indicated that he was in constant communication with his provincial counterparts during the pandemic.¹⁵

2. Limits and parameters of the hybrid model

Mr. Rota raised a series of general questions that the Committee may wish to explore as part of its study. For example:

- Should the House continue to allow remote participation for all members in any situation at any time?
- Should the House allow remote participation only under specific circumstances that the House will define?
- If parameters for remote participation are defined, will they apply differently in the chamber, in committee or in other parliamentary activities?

He stated that the Committee's viewpoints were important to help provide clarity and direction. Should there be agreement about the continued use of the electronic voting application, it would be important to know whether the videoconferencing system could be maintained and used as a back-up in case of technical problems.¹⁶

Mr. Rota stated that, over the past few years, his experience has been that certain roles ought to require in-person participation, such as Speaker and House leaders. In his view, face-to-face exchanges and meetings allow members to have longer discussions and get to know each other better than would be the case using remote participation. He noted that, should the Committee recommend retaining the hybrid model, limits and parameters will need to be determined. He told the Committee that people should not, at the last minute, decide to participate remotely, stating:

What we don't want to see is someone getting up one morning and saying, "I'm not going to fly across the country" or, "I'm not going to drive into Parliament. I'll just participate", and it's willy-nilly. I think there have to be parameters for each and every participant in the chamber regarding when they can go for hybrid—whether it's illness, or special occasions that we'll have to decide on as a Parliament.¹⁷

15 Ibid., 1135.

16 Ibid., 1105.

17 Ibid., 1110 and 1125.

Mr. Rota also stated that the Committee had an important role to play in monitoring issues that may arise should the hybrid model be retained. He noted that safeguards ought to be established to ensure that details of members' personal lives that may justify remote participation are not made public.¹⁸

3. Security and technological issues

Mr. Rota praised the energy and determination of the House of Commons administration, stating that their work was "out of this world" in respect of keeping Parliament working during the pandemic.¹⁹ He stated that, whenever a technical problem was reported, the information technology team fixed it immediately.²⁰

Mr. Rota noted that, in recent years, the House of Commons has made "significant technological advances," including implementing a new videoconferencing system for members and witnesses. This system has higher capacity and better quality, and benefits from a new webcasting standard for committee meetings. Mr. Rota stated that members now seem to prefer either televised or webcast meetings, and that the old standard of audio-only committee meetings was now rarely used.²¹

Asked about security concerns regarding the electronic voting application, Mr. Aubé stated that IT security had to be "remodelled" in the context of a virtual Parliament. As a result, major steps to secure members' devices were taken. As the Committee had learned in one of its previous studies, Parliament's security posture was validated by national security partners, and these relationships are still in play.

Mr. Aubé clarified that IT security threats were not caused by the hybrid model. Rather, his team faces IT threats every day. He noted that these are handled through a proactive approach.²² Further, Mr. Aubé indicated that it was impossible to guarantee that an in camera meeting remains secret because he cannot "control the end person." Instead, he can only guarantee the security of the infrastructure that the House provides.²³ Similarly, Mr. Rota stated that it was not possible to ensure that a member, who participates in an in camera meeting, does not reveal confidential information, even should the meeting

18 *Ibid.*, 1130.

19 *Ibid.*, 1115.

20 *Ibid.*, 1130.

21 *Ibid.*, 1105.

22 *Ibid.*, 1140 (Aubé).

23 *Ibid.*, 1150.



be held in person. He noted that the system relies on the honour of the members. It was also noted that the potential existed for online “eavesdropping” to in camera meetings.²⁴

Mr. Aubé indicated that mobility enabling requirements, such as having proper Internet and a proper cloud service provider, are key elements for offering a hybrid model. He stated that Internet service outages, while rare, do happen, and that the problem can be either with the House or with the member who is participating remotely. He noted that a recent Internet outage interrupted the business of the House.²⁵

As to members participating in House proceedings from outside Canada, Mr. Rota indicated that members need to know the rules, which currently require that participation be from within Canada; once the rule is known, it is up to the honour of the individual member. He noted he was sure that Canadians do not elect dishonourable people. Mr. Aubé also stated that his team has the technical capabilities to know if a member is participating from outside Canada.²⁶

4. Impact of the hybrid model on interpreters and human resources

Mr. Rota stated that interpretation services encountered challenges in carrying out their work in hybrid mode. He noted that committee meeting times had to be adapted because of the limited number of interpreters and to accommodate multiple time zones. Further, the lack of interpretation resources had a major impact on regional caucuses and parliamentary association meetings, whose activities had to be curtailed. Mr. Rota indicated that this was a critical aspect for consideration in this study and that the search for solutions with the Translation Bureau must continue.²⁷

Asked about the medical problems interpreters have faced since the hybrid system was put in place, Mr. Rota said that it was a very important issue and that he wants interpreters to be comfortable when they work. He also noted that the House wants to retain its interpreters, given the importance to Canadians of having both official languages in Parliament.²⁸ Further, he recognized the consequences of shrinking

24 Ibid., 1155 (Rota).

25 Ibid., 1150 (Aubé).

26 Ibid., 1155 (Rota, Aubé).

27 Ibid., 1105 (Rota).

28 Ibid., 1120.

numbers of interpreters, commenting: “[w]e do not want them to leave, because that is not good for the other employees.”²⁹

Mr. Rota noted that changes are regularly made to the audio system and that, as soon as a problem is perceived or reported, everything is done to ensure the quality of the service. He also noted that the problems similar to those affecting interpreters at Parliament have arisen at other organizations and that the working conditions in Parliament, while they must continue to be improved, are “quite good.”³⁰

Mr. Aubé added that, together with the Translation Bureau, a continuous improvement plan was developed to protect people’s hearing and offer the same quality of sound to all participants. Millions of dollars have been invested in this area, mainly to protect interpreters. For example, volume limiters have been installed in all interpreting booths.³¹

Mr. Aubé confirmed that, in the summer of 2022, an audio system performance review was conducted at the request of the House of Commons administration. The purpose of the review was to test the systems and measure their performance, because there was doubt about their compliance with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Mr. Aubé stated that, according to the report prepared following the review, the systems in use meet ISO standards on audio quality. However, he noted that discussions were currently underway with the Translation Bureau to validate the review. Mr. Aubé also indicated that his preference was to wait until the report was validated by all partners before sharing its findings with the Committee. Additional meetings and tests were scheduled for the week following their appearance before the Committee.³²

In response to a question about a pilot project to determine whether external or remote interpretation services could be used in addition to current services, Mr. Rota stated that serious concerns were raised about the quality of interpretation services in those circumstances. The results of the pilot project, which were reported to the Board of Internal Economy, were not conclusive and it was recommended that Translation Bureau interpreters be used exclusively. On that point, Mr. Aubé noted that the qualification requirements for interpreters would be the same as those of the Translation Bureau.³³

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 1120 (Rota, Aubé).

32 Ibid., 1130 (Aubé).

33 Ibid., 1145 and 1150 (Rota, Aubé).



A member asked about the staffing levels that would be required should the hybrid model be adopted on a permanent basis. Mr. Robert stated that these levels would depend on the parameters of the hybrid model. He indicated that the Committee and the House needed to decide which model to adopt before a staffing needs assessment could be done.³⁴

5. Impact of the hybrid model on the conduct of business

While changes were initially adopted to comply with public health measures like physical distancing, Mr. Rota said that some of these changes led to more flexibility in the House of Commons' proceedings. Counting video conference participants for quorum, adjusting the number of members required for certain procedural activities, amending the procedure for determining unanimous consent, allowing members to speak and vote from any seat, and enabling the electronic tabling of documents all contributed to this increased flexibility.³⁵

As for parliamentary committees, Mr. Rota said that changes made during the pandemic made it easier for members and witnesses to participate in committee work, hold portions of meetings in camera and substitute committee members when necessary.³⁶

Mr. Rota noted that, in his view, there was greater decorum during hybrid proceedings because remote participants were less likely to heckle, speak loudly or cut people off. He indicated that when there was a "dull roar" in the Chamber it is difficult to identify who was interrupting. In virtual mode, a heckling member appears on the screen, making it easy to quickly identify them.³⁷

Mr. Aubé indicated that conflicts still arose in scheduling committee meetings but that these were becoming fewer. At the time of their appearance, there were approximately 57 committee meetings per week, compared to 67 before the pandemic.³⁸ Mr. Janse stated that the determination about how the 57 slots were used was left with the party whips. Should meetings conflict or should a meeting go beyond its allotted time, it was the party whips who decided which meetings were rescheduled or cancelled.³⁹ On the

34 Ibid., 1135 (Robert).

35 Ibid., 1100 (Rota).

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 1115.

38 Ibid., 1125 (Aubé).

39 Ibid.

same point, Mr. Rota noted that he must respect the decisions of the various House leaders as to what work gets priority, and that it would be inappropriate to impose different priorities on them.⁴⁰

In response to a question about whether a hybrid or virtual format could maintain the same operational tempo as in 2019, Mr. Janse responded that this was not quite possible. He indicated that the House administration continues to receive requests for additional caucus and committee meetings, but that these requests could not be supported at this time.⁴¹

6. Impact of the hybrid model on the democratic process and decision-making

Mr. Patrice was asked by a member whether consultations were held on the quality of virtual versus in-person decision-making. In response, he indicated consultations on that topic had not occurred. Mr. Rota stated that the Committee had an important role to play in ensuring that the best system was put in place, and that, should the need arise, an impartial third party could examine the matter.⁴²

Mr. Rota stated that, in his view, the Canadian democratic system has worked under a hybrid Parliament. He indicated that Canadians can be proud of their democratic system, which continued to work despite the challenges caused by the pandemic. To that end, even during the most dire times of pandemic, all members were given the opportunity to speak and share their opinions in Parliament, within the limitations and parameters that were put in place.⁴³

B. Appearance of current and former members of the House of Commons

Several current and former members of the House of Commons appeared before the Committee to provide their perspectives on hybrid proceedings. Eight current members testified:

40 Ibid., 1135 (Rota).

41 Ibid., 1155 (Janse).

42 Ibid. (Patrice, Rota).

43 Ibid., 1140 (Rota).



- The Honourable Mark Holland, P.C., M.P. for Ajax, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons;⁴⁴
- Parm Bains, M.P. for Steveston—Richmond East;⁴⁵
- Laurel Collins, M.P. for Victoria;⁴⁶
- Carol Hughes, M.P. for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing;⁴⁷
- Yvonne Jones, M.P. for Labrador;⁴⁸
- Tom Kmiec, M.P. for Calgary Shepard;⁴⁹
- Andréanne Larouche, M.P. for Shefford;⁵⁰ and
- Jean Yip, M.P. for Scarborough—Agincourt.⁵¹

In addition, two former members appeared: Dona Cadman, former member for Surrey North,⁵² and Léo Duguay, former member for Saint Boniface and current president of the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians.⁵³

Several current and former members indicated their support to the Committee for maintaining hybrid proceedings. They envisaged a role for hybrid proceedings when it

44 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 35, 25 October 2022 (The Hon. Mark Holland, P.C., M.P., Leader of the Government in the House of Commons).

45 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 31, 4 October 2022 (Parm Bains, Steveston—Richmond-Est).

46 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 31, 4 October 2022 (Laurel Collins, Victoria).

47 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 33, 18 October 2022 (Carol Hughes, Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing).

48 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 33, 18 October 2022 (Yvonne Jones, Labrador).

49 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 33, 18 October 2022 (Tom Kmiec, Calgary Shepard).

50 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 33, 18 October 2022 (Andréanne Larouche, Shefford).

51 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 33, 18 October 2022 (Jean Yip, Scarborough—Agincourt).

52 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 31, 4 October 2022 (Dona Cadman, former M.P.).

53 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 31, 4 October 2022 (Léo Duguay, President, Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians).

came to matters related to health, pregnancy, parenthood, transportation and bereavement.

However, other members voiced concerns about hybrid sittings and indicated that they did not support its continuation. In doing so, they proposed alternatives that would allow members to be absent from the House in the event of personal difficulties, but still make Parliament more inviting and family friendly.

1. Appearance of the Honourable Mark Holland, P.C., M.P., Leader of the Government in the House of Commons

The Honourable Mark Holland, P.C., M.P., Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, provided the Committee with his perspective on hybrid proceedings in the House.

Mr. Holland's testimony began with his account of his career as a member of the House of Commons. He indicated that he viewed his time as a member of the House as being divided into two periods: the three terms he served prior to the 2011 federal general election, at which time he lost his seat, and the three terms he served after the 2011 election.

Mr. Holland noted that his interest in serving his community as an elected representative was, to him, a calling that he took extremely seriously from an early age. He stated that during his first three terms as a member, he was obsessed with being the best member that he could be. However, as a result of this obsession, he stated that he put his career ahead of everything in his life. As such, his marriage failed, he was not the father he should have been, and he did not maintain his personal relationships.⁵⁴ Upon losing his seat in the 2011 election, he found himself in a very desperate spot. He stated that politics had been his passion and the purpose of his life but that it all lay in ashes at his feet. At that time, he made an attempt on his life.⁵⁵

Mr. Holland indicated that, from that point on, he viewed the choices that he had made in his life very differently, and made efforts to understand the mistakes he had made. In the three terms he has served following his defeat in the 2011 election, he indicated that

54 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 35, 25 October 2022, 1155 (Holland).

55 Ibid.



he has attempted to “do things differently.”⁵⁶ He stated that, in his view, the House of Commons, as a workplace, needs to be more humane and compassionate.

a) Hybrid proceedings

Mr. Holland told the Committee that he favoured retaining the option of hybrid proceedings in the House of Commons. He stated that “hybrid isn't an answer, but I submit that it's a start.”⁵⁷ His reasons for his assertion that hybrid proceedings of the House ought be retained included that:⁵⁸

- they allow for flexibility for members in carrying out their work. With hybrid proceedings, members can be home during critical moments in their family's life, and yet still carry out the duties they were elected to do;
- members of the House are not best suited to make sound decisions should they find themselves in a state of depletion. Rather, a member who is well has a good work-life balance and support from friends and family are better prepared to “make sacrifices and lift and do hard things;”
- members of the House have demonstrated that they can appropriately and effectively make use of the provisions for hybrid proceedings without undermining accountability. Members ought to show their colleagues compassion and have faith in one another that they will use those tools judiciously;
- members of the House and staff who are treated well are going to be more productive, will achieve more, and get better results. In the long run, this may attract the best and brightest to serve as members;
- the provisions for hybrid proceedings were important to maintain flexibility in the event of another public health crisis; and

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., 1200.

58 Ibid., 1200, 1210, 1215 and 1235.

- members of the House do not have a problem whereby they do not work hard enough. Rather, the opposite is true.

Mr. Holland stated that, in his view, employees who have their needs met and have a good relationship with their family, are going to be fundamentally more productive, more creative, more resilient and less corruptible.⁵⁹ Mr. Holland also acknowledged, in response to a question on compartmentalizing different considerations of hybrid proceeding, including the importance of ministers' physical presence with respect to government accountability, "[y]ou are absolutely right."⁶⁰

b) Simultaneous interpreters

Mr. Holland stated that it was essential that the House find a solution for the health and safety issues encountered by the interpretation service. He told the Committee that the Board of Internal Economy had made a lot of progress in this regard.⁶¹ However, he noted that a challenge for the House was that there is a shortage of interpreters. He noted that there are many interpreters who live in different parts of the country who are capable of interpreting into Canada's official languages. As such, he indicated that a solution could be to explore remote interpretation, whereby interpreters work virtually from their homes. He indicated that this approach was being examined, irrespective of any decision that the House would make about hybrid proceedings.⁶² He also stated:

Witnesses have already explained there are more interpreters than before. I think there are now more than 30. Since interpreters can work remotely, I believe we can add as many interpreters as are needed to provide a quality of service acceptable to you, to me and to the House of Commons.⁶³

59 Ibid., 1200.

60 Ibid., 1220.

61 Ibid., 1215.

62 Ibid., 1225.

63 Ibid., 1240.



c) Pairing during decisions of the House of Commons

Mr. Holland told the Committee that, in his view, pairing⁶⁴ provided inadequate flexibility for members, as compared to participation in hybrid proceedings.

He stated that, in his experience, members who, for example, were facing an end-of-life circumstance, will not avail themselves of pairing. Instead, they will force themselves to appear in Ottawa because they do not want another member to represent them and do not want to neglect their duties and responsibilities as members.⁶⁵

2. Appearance of Parm Bains, M.P. for Steveston—Richmond East

Mr. Bains told the Committee about his personal medical circumstances and how these affected his assessment of the hybrid mode of participation. Mr. Bains told the Committee that he found out in his 30s that he was born with a solitary kidney and that, someday, he would need a replacement. In 2021, shortly after his election to the House, he was informed that his kidney was deteriorating faster than was expected and that he required dialysis and an immediate transplant.⁶⁶

To avoid scheduling conflicts with his parliamentary responsibilities, Mr. Bains told the Committee that he trained himself to self-administer the dialysis treatment three nights a week at the nocturnal dialysis unit at Vancouver General Hospital. While waiting for a transplant, Mr. Bains had to avoid contracting COVID-19 so that he could receive his operation. He stated that, had it not been for hybrid proceedings, he would not have been able to safeguard his health while keeping his commitment to represent his constituents in Parliament. Mr. Bains indicated that he was able to speak to bills, provide statements in the House, participate in his party's caucus meetings and share his constituents' stories and priorities.⁶⁷

Mr. Bains indicated that because he was undergoing dialysis treatment at night, he was able to work during the day and meet with stakeholders in his community. He stated

64 Standing Order 44.1 allows a government or opposition member of the House, who is unable to attend a recorded division, to find a member from across the aisle who agrees to also not take part in the same recorded division and, with the consent of their whips, to have that fact noted as part of the record of the vote, thereby cancelling out each other's vote.

65 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 35, 25 October 2022, 1205 and 1210 (Holland).

66 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 31, 4 October 2022, 1210 (Bains).

67 Ibid.

that this schedule benefitted his constituents and allowed him to address his riding's priorities.⁶⁸

Mr. Bains noted that he missed his colleagues and in-person work but that the hybrid option allowed him to develop strong relationships with them. Asked whether the hybrid model caused him to work more while addressing his health issues, Mr. Bains stated that this was a tough question and that the matter was difficult to measure. However, he noted that being accessible allowed him to be more productive.⁶⁹

In response to a question about parliamentary committee work, Mr. Bains stated that he was unsure whether he witnessed any resource limitations. However, he stated that he understood that there were sometimes challenges in ensuring that interpreters were available.⁷⁰

3. Appearance of Laurel Collins, M.P. for Victoria

Ms. Collins provided four examples of how hybrid proceedings gave her the opportunity to keep working when it would otherwise have been impossible: pregnancy, maternity, illness and bereavement. She contrasted her ability to continue working during these times with the criticism members have heard about working less under the hybrid model. She noted that the hybrid Parliament gave members flexibility when personal circumstances prevented them from being in Ottawa.⁷¹

Ms. Collins indicated that during her pregnancy she was advised not to travel. The hybrid model allowed Ms. Collins to continue her work in the House and in committee into her ninth month of pregnancy. In addition, as a parent of a young infant, she was able to work remotely when needed, even when child care issues arose.⁷²

Ms. Collins stated that more women need to be encouraged to run for office and that, in her experience, it was "incredibly hard" to convince them to do so. The major barriers to recruitment included long commutes and time away from children. Ms. Collins indicated that, in her view, women's political participation would increase if Parliament were made more family-friendly. She referred to a study that found the "absence of family-friendly

68 *Ibid.*, 1230.

69 *Ibid.*, 1235 and 1240.

70 *Ibid.*, 1225.

71 *Ibid.*, 1210 (Collins).

72 *Ibid.*



and gender-sensitive workplaces” as a barrier to women’s political participation. She also noted the need to “open that up” for single parents.⁷³

Ms. Collins indicated that the hybrid proceedings allowed her to continue working when she contracted COVID-19. Further, she was able to fly home to see her father prior to him passing away, and be with him in his final moments, while continuing to work.⁷⁴

Ms. Collins also indicated that the hybrid model opened up the possibility for people with disabilities to run for office even though their health or disability might have prevented them from doing so in the past. She considered it to be critical to work towards a more equitable and accessible Parliament.⁷⁵

Ms. Collins stated that hybrid proceedings ought to be made permanent, as they made the institution more accessible for future members, especially women, young parents and people with disabilities. However, she hopes that the hybrid Parliament is “strengthened” to include more stringent participation requirements for the government and ministers. When asked about the general lack of committee resources, Ms. Collins commented, “I think the work that we do in committee is vital.”⁷⁶ Further, she hoped that the capacity issue for interpreters gets resolved and that policies get put in place to deal with technical difficulties, so as to ensure their health, while maintaining members’ participation in both official languages.⁷⁷

Asked about the impact of the hybrid model on her day-to-day life, Ms. Collins stated that she found it “transformational.” The ability to vote electronically allowed her to spend more time with her daughter, especially in her daughter’s early months. Ms. Collins also stated that hybrid voting allowed her to spend more time carrying out her parliamentary duties and be more responsive to her constituents. She indicated that she was committed to running again in the next election, but that she did not know if she would run again after that, should hybrid proceedings no longer be an option. She stated that she had spoken with other members across party lines who felt the same way.⁷⁸

73 Ibid., 1245 and 1250.

74 Ibid., 1210.

75 Ibid., 1245.

76 Ibid., 1225.

77 Ibid., 1210.

78 Ibid., 1245.

Ms. Collins told the Committee that working while sick should not be normalized; however, she stated that this was an issue even when proceedings are held in person.⁷⁹

4. Appearance of Carol Hughes, M.P. for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing

In her appearance before the Committee, Ms. Hughes expressed support for hybrid arrangements, but stated that guidelines for participation in hybrid proceedings should be developed.

Ms. Hughes noted that since the remote participation of committee witnesses predates the pandemic, she finds that this is an approach that works well. However, in her role as Assistant Deputy Speaker of the House, she acknowledged that the hybrid model has had issues, even in committee. She stated that technicians were working to improve connectivity, but that she believed that it was the government's responsibility to ensure that all Canadians have a good enough Internet connection.⁸⁰

Ms. Hughes stated that she had already undergone several ankle surgeries and that she anticipates further ankle surgeries in the future. These operations make travel to attend a sitting very difficult for her, whether by air or car. She stated that she should not be "penalized" for wanting to properly recover. Moreover, in her view, incidents that are beyond a member's control, such as the death of a loved one, injury, illness or flight issues, should not prevent the member from participating in the business of the House.⁸¹

Ms. Hughes stated that whips' offices, committees and Parliament should establish guidelines to determine acceptable ways for virtual participation. She noted that she expected members would need to get approval from their whip's office to participate remotely. Her expectation was also that members ought to participate in person, unless there were specific reasons for remote participation that are approved by their whip.⁸²

Asked whether Canadians should know which members are participating virtually and which are participating in person, Ms. Hughes indicated that the public "is able to see it

79 Ibid.

80 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 33, 18 October 2022, 1100 (Hughes).

81 Ibid., 1105.

82 Ibid., 1105 and 1120.



for themselves.” She stated that it was up to the Committee to determine whether the House should keep track of remote or in-person participation.⁸³

Ms. Hughes told the Committee that she believes that the hybrid model has a place in the long term and hopes that no member was abusing it. She also stated that there should be better child care resources on Parliament Hill.⁸⁴

5. Appearance of Yvonne Jones, M.P. for Labrador

Ms. Jones told the Committee that, in her view, hybrid proceedings have been a success. However, she stated that the system, which was quickly put in place in difficult conditions, could be improved in a number of ways.⁸⁵

Ms. Jones showed the Committee a map of her riding, which covers 300,000 km² and is home to 30,000 people. The area is equivalent to the combined size of the island of Newfoundland and the provinces of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, which are served by a combined 31 members.⁸⁶

To serve such a large riding, Ms. Jones must travel 1200 km between the most remote communities. Forty percent of the territory of this district is isolated and accessible only by air.⁸⁷

Ms. Jones recounted to the Committee that when she leaves Ottawa on Friday, she cannot reach her riding until Saturday. To return to Ottawa, she has to leave on Sunday. The hybrid Parliament was the first opportunity she had to land in St. John’s on Friday morning, participate in House business and then spend the rest of the day in her riding.⁸⁸

Ms. Jones indicated that she understood the viewpoint that she ran for federal office knowing the conditions of work. However, at that time, two airlines flew into her riding every day. Meanwhile today, there is only one airline operating three flights per week.⁸⁹

83 *Ibid.*, 1120.

84 *Ibid.*, 1120 and 1245.

85 *Ibid.*, 1105 (Jones).

86 *Ibid.*

87 *Ibid.*

88 *Ibid.*, 1105 and 1155.

89 *Ibid.*

Ms. Jones told the Committee that her brother passed away during the pandemic. She said that she found the hybrid arrangement to be important because it allowed her to be with her family during that difficult time. She stated that her privileges as a member would have been compromised without this option.⁹⁰

Ms. Jones stated that she “loves” participating in parliamentary business in person. However, she also acknowledged that, realistically, there are circumstances that do not allow members to participate in person. She agreed that not all legislators’ duties can be done over a screen, but she stated that it was possible to accommodate a member who has just had a child, has family issues, is ill or has lost a loved one. She stated that, in her view, this type of accommodation will attract better candidates to politics.⁹¹

6. Appearance of Tom Kmiec, M.P. for Calgary Shepard

Mr. Kmiec told the Committee that he opposes continuing the hybrid Parliament. He indicated that he agrees that it works well for witnesses appearing before committees, but stated that virtual participation does not build camaraderie and morale within a caucus.⁹² He also stated that the hybrid Parliament makes it hard to build relationships between political parties, as these are based on trust.⁹³ Mr. Kmiec indicated that extending the hybrid arrangement will eventually erode the distinction between sessional weeks, when members are supposed to be in Ottawa carrying out parliamentary work, and constituency weeks.⁹⁴

Mr. Kmiec told the Committee that he served as national caucus chair of the Conservative Party from 2019 to 2021. At the start of the pandemic, the caucus held three virtual meetings without interpretation, as, at that time, the House was not able to provide these services. Further, Mr. Kmiec stated that work-life balance does not, in his view, exist with hybrid proceedings. He recalled his attempts to watch over his children all while chairing caucus meetings. Mr. Kmiec also stated that it was impossible to build relationships in virtual meetings with “150-plus boxes on a screen.”⁹⁵

90 Ibid., 1140.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid., 1110 (Kmiec).

93 Ibid., 1150 and 1110.

94 Ibid., 1145.

95 Ibid., 1110 and 1145.



A father of four, Mr. Kmiec told the Committee that he lost his youngest daughter on 13 August 2018. In order to grieve, he took time off away from work. During his absence, he was able to pair with a colleague for votes, including important votes. He acknowledged to the Committee that he returned to Parliament too soon, which affected his marriage. His support for increased pairing opportunities between members is based on this experience that he underwent.⁹⁶

Standing Order 44.1 recognizes the practice of pairing and provides for a registry of paired members, whereby any member of the government party and any member of an opposition party may have their names entered together by their respective whips. However, Mr. Kmiec indicated that, in his view, members should be able to enter a pairing in the register without consulting their respective whip.⁹⁷ He suggested that these individual agreements between members could be facilitated through personal relationships built over time through in-person interactions.⁹⁸

Mr. Kmiec told the Committee that in the United Kingdom's Parliament, pairing of members is done using an honour system. Members there may determine the length of time they need the pairing for and they then inform their whip. In Canada's Parliament, this practice was routinely used until the early 1990s, when Standing Order 44.1 was amended to explicitly include the participation of whips.

Mr. Kmiec stated that he would like the House to move away from the electronic voting application and toward pairing. He indicated that pairing encourages interaction between members across party lines, and from other provinces. As for proxy voting, he stated that he was open to it.⁹⁹

7. Appearance of Andréanne Larouche, M.P. for Shefford

Ms. Larouche told the Committee that, recently, she had participated in the 145th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which focused on creating gender-sensitive parliaments. Ms. Larouche participated in the forum as a new mother, as she had given birth to a baby girl on 13 February 2022.¹⁰⁰

96 *Ibid.*, 1110.

97 *Ibid.*

98 *Ibid.*, 1150.

99 *Ibid.*, 1110 and 1150.

100 *Ibid.*, 1115 (Larouche).

Ms. Larouche stated that in-person participation was a democratic issue and that it was hard to hold government accountable in hybrid Parliament because ministers can “easily cut and run.” Ms. Larouche stated that it was better for members to represent their constituents by being physically present in the chamber, and stressed the importance of face-to-face meetings. She also stated that the hybrid proceedings limited opportunity for discussions between members and ministers.¹⁰¹

Further, Ms. Larouche stated that voters expected parties to find common ground, especially in a minority government. She indicated that such agreements cannot occur “from a computer screen.”¹⁰²

Ms. Larouche noted that networking is a challenge for many women, who find themselves easily isolated when they become mothers, and that this hurt their chances for career advancement. In her view, without networking, opportunities for promotion or to engage with stakeholders were limited. She stated that work time needed to be kept separate from personal time, and that the ease for which virtual meetings can fill a member’s calendar can make this difficult.¹⁰³

Ms. Larouche decried the lack of resources on the Hill for members with young children. She stated that she would like to see a daycare on the Hill for children under 18 months and large rooms for use by young families, because having a safe place to leave your child is critical for women in their return to work following childbirth. Further, she stated that a nanny service could also be considered. Ms. Larouche added that having to telework and manage children at home had a “huge impact” on women’s mental health during the pandemic.¹⁰⁴

She stated that all political parties have a role to play in supporting women members as mothers by providing access to physical resources such as family lounges or by being more flexible and allowing occasional replacements, including in committee.¹⁰⁵

Ms. Larouche stated that there was no incompatibility between her role as a mother and her role as a member. She indicated that promoting a virtual workplace implied that the two roles were incompatible and that such a message ought to be avoided. Instead, she indicated that it was possible to be a mother and a member of Parliament with “dignity.”

101 *Ibid.*, 1115, 1135 and 1155.

102 *Ibid.*

103 *Ibid.*, 1115 and 1135.

104 *Ibid.*

105 *Ibid.*, 1115.



She stated that the House of Commons needs to be modernized by offering a more flexible schedule and more physical resources, which would encourage more women to enter politics.¹⁰⁶

8. Appearance of Jean Yip, M.P. for Scarborough—Agincourt

Ms. Yip stated that she saw the Committee's study as an opportunity to create a "more compassionate and more practical" path for members. She told the Committee about her late husband, Arnold Chan, who developed cancer while serving as the member of Parliament for Scarborough-Agincourt. Mr. Chan died of cancer in 2017.¹⁰⁷

Ms. Yip's husband, who was deputy government House Leader, continued to travel in spite of his illness between Toronto and Ottawa. His travel proved to be exhausting. According to Ms. Yip, Mr. Chan was determined to continue his parliamentary work in Ottawa "right to the end," not wanting to let down his constituents or colleagues.¹⁰⁸

Ms. Yip said that Mr. Chan should have saved his energy rather than travel between Ottawa and his riding, and that this could have been accomplished with remote participation in House proceedings. According to Ms. Yip, their children could also have spent more time with their father if he could have participated remotely.¹⁰⁹

Ms. Yip stated that being a single parent "makes any job tougher," and that she, as a member of Parliament, felt like she missed out on important moments in her sons' lives, as she has tried to combine family life and politics.¹¹⁰

Ms. Yip stated that all members can benefit from having the option of hybrid proceedings. She indicated that remote participation would, in her view, help members maintain good physical and mental health, due to the added flexibility. It could offer greater possibilities for potential candidates, and help to attract young people into politics.¹¹¹

With respect to pairing, Ms. Yip stated that this procedure may work for some circumstances, but not for longer-term issues. She indicated that it was difficult enough

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid., 1115 (Yip).

108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid., 1125.

to find a pair in the short term, let alone coordinate such a process in the longer term. She said that this is where having a hybrid option provided the necessary flexibility.¹¹²

9. Appearance of Dona Cadman, former M.P. for Surrey North (2008-2011)

Ms. Cadman told the Committee about her experience in politics, and why she believes the hybrid Parliament would have been beneficial to her and her late husband, Chuck Cadman. Mr. Cadman was the member of Parliament for Surrey North. Ms. Cadman was elected in the same riding three years after the passing of her husband, and she served until 2011.¹¹³

While a member of Parliament, Mr. Cadman was diagnosed with cancer in 2004. He required numerous doctor appointments, surgery, chemotherapy and drugs. Between his diagnosis and his death in July 2005, it became harder and harder for him to travel back and forth between Ottawa and British Columbia.¹¹⁴

Ms. Cadman said that the period of her husband's illness was "very hard." After his surgery in 2004, he could not travel, and he bemoaned not being able to work. She believes that if he had been able to see his colleagues virtually, it would have given him "a little more oomph," "a little more hope." She stated that the frequent trips back and forth across the country exacerbated his health decline. Asked if she would have had more quality time with her husband if he did not have to travel to and from Ottawa, she said that she "definitely" would have.¹¹⁵

Ms. Cadman stated that coming to Ottawa does members no favours, as they are first and foremost elected to be the voice of their community. When members are working in the capital, they hear very little about what is happening elsewhere in the country, outside of Ontario and Quebec. Ms. Cadman stated that this was especially true in British Columbia, or regions located distantly from the centre of Canada. Instead of spending on average three weeks in Parliament and one week in their constituencies, she stated that members should spend one week in Ottawa and three at home.¹¹⁶

112 Ibid., 1115.

113 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 31, 4 October 2022, 1210 (Cadman).

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid., 1300.

116 Ibid., 1210, 1235.



As for committee work, Ms. Cadman stressed the importance of committees, but stated that they can meet virtually.¹¹⁷

10. Appearance of Léo Duguay, former M.P. for Saint Boniface (1984–1988) and current president of the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians

Mr. Duguay stated that, in the 1980s, he was a member of the special committee on House of Commons reform, chaired by member James McGrath. Mr. Duguay indicated that, as a member of that committee, he quickly learned that modernizing the procedures and practices of the House would not be easy.¹¹⁸

At the time, Mr. Duguay wanted to look at electronic voting and improve question period, which he said “has been and is a show that takes away from [the magnificent work of] committees.” He stated that the best work in Parliament gets done in the various committees. As such, he stated that everything should be done to make sure that committees are fully resourced.¹¹⁹

Mr. Duguay supported hybrid proceedings. He noted that at the time of his appearance before the Committee, he was in Charlottetown, and that he would not have been able to appear without remote proceedings. He indicated that safeguards already existed to ensure that members behave honourably in a hybrid setting, including the electorate, whips and the Speaker of the House. Mr. Duguay said that an “overwhelming majority” of former members believe that, had there been a hybrid Parliament in their day, they would have been able to participate in its work much more often, and therefore support it. He also stated that, in his view, the Chamber and committees should have the same options for participation.¹²⁰

Mr. Duguay offered to the Committee the expertise of former parliamentarians to assist with this study. He stated that the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians would be pleased to put together a special committee to look at the renewal of Parliament, including hybrid proceedings.¹²¹

117 *Ibid.*, 1225.

118 *Ibid.*, 1220 (Duguay).

119 *Ibid.*

120 *Ibid.*, 1220, 1235 and 1240.

121 *Ibid.*, 1220.

C. Simultaneous interpretation

1. Current language interpretation capacity for Parliament

Caroline Corneau, Acting Vice-President, Translation Bureau, told the Committee that currently, the Translation Bureau has the capacity required to provide service to cover the 57 House of Commons committee events per week.¹²² In a written submission provided to the Committee following their appearance, the Translation Bureau clarified that, for interpretation during the pandemic, 57 event slots represents 96 interpreter-days per week. Further, if all parliamentary events are taken into account (i.e., Senate and House of Commons Chambers, caucus meetings, committees, Cabinet committees and press conferences) the number of interpreter-days per week rises to 274.¹²³

The Translation Bureau, a branch within the federal public service, employs about 70 professional interpreters for English and French assignments. These interpreters are represented by the Canadian Association of Professional Employees (CAPE). In addition to these interpreters, the Translation Bureau can draw on a pool of about 60 private sector freelance interpreters.¹²⁴ Freelance interpreters have the option to become members of the International Association of Conference Interpreters - Canada Region (AIIC).

2. Future capacity of language interpretation for Parliament

The Committee heard from Matthew Ball, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Translation Bureau, that the hiring pool for the position of simultaneous interpreter has “always been a shortage group, even before the pandemic.”¹²⁵ In Canada, there are only two master of conference interpreting programs: at the University of Ottawa, and at Glendon College at York University.

Mr. Ball stated that the Translation Bureau hired ten new interpreters in 2021, as well as ten new interpreters in 2022. In November 2022, they are planning to hold their annual

122 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 32, 6 October 2022, 1235 (Caroline Corneau, Acting Vice-President, Service to Parliament and Interpretation, Translation Bureau).

123 The Translation Bureau, “A written response to questions from the Translation Bureau,” Written submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, 31 October 2022.

124 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 32, 6 October 2022, 1215 (Matthew Ball, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Public Services and Procurement Canada, Translation Bureau).

125 *Ibid.*, 1225.



accreditation exam for official languages. He indicated that this exam would allow the Translation Bureau to add several new interpreters to our pool of qualified suppliers.¹²⁶

However, Mr. Ball noted that the Translation Bureau has 20 fewer freelance interpreters in 2022, compared to 2021. He indicated that he did not know the reason for this shortage.¹²⁷ Mr. Ball noted that the bureau had about 70 staff interpreters in a pool of approximately 60 freelance interpreters.¹²⁸

Linda Ballantyne, President, AIIC,¹²⁹ stated that there were “big challenges” to increasing the number of qualified interpreters. She indicated that the AIIC believes that in a bilingual country, there needs to be “a much bigger investment to be able to train interpreters.”¹³⁰ She added that, at present, the implications for bilingualism in Parliament were that “English has predominated and French has been snuffed out.”¹³¹

Jim Thompson, Communication and Parliamentary Advisor, AIIC, told the Committee that his organization had conducted a survey of Canadian accredited freelance interpreters in July 2022. The AIIC found that half of respondents (80% of freelancers participated) said that they were planning to retire in the next five years.¹³²

3. Pandemic working conditions for interpreters

Mr. Ball told the Committee that working during the pandemic was a challenge for interpreters. As an essential service, interpreters came in person to the parliamentary precinct. At that time, interpretation booths measured four feet by four feet, and were shared among three people during an airborne pandemic.¹³³

126 Ibid., 1215.

127 Ibid., 1225.

128 Ibid., 1215.

129 Please note that for the purposes of this report, and as noted in “Evidence and Briefs,” section C. Simultaneous interpretation, the acronym AIIC represents the term International Association of Conference Interpreters - Canada Region.

130 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 32, 6 October 2022, 1225 (Linda Ballantyne, President International Association of Conference Interpreters - Canada Region).

131 Ibid., 1250.

132 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 32, 6 October 2022, 1255 (Jim Thompson, Communication and Parliamentary Advisor, International Association of Conference Interpreters - Canada Region).

133 Ibid., 1225 (Ball).

Mr. Ball noted that the Translation Bureau is not responsible for the technical environment in which the interpreters work.¹³⁴ However, they worked in close collaboration with House administration, which eventually installed individual interpretation booths. Further, he noted that the Translation Bureau collaborated closely with CAPE and AIIC to ensure that interpreters working in the precinct felt safe.

However, several witnesses told the Committee that the varying quality of the audio produced by teleconference and videoconference platforms used by Parliament during the pandemic made the interpreters' work more difficult and caused injuries.

Ms. Ballantyne stated:

Interpreting remote intervention is what has generated many problems. The science is not sufficiently advanced to have definite answers to the causes, but empirically, given the number of injuries we've witnessed since virtual Parliament in Canada, we know that there is a serious problem.

Ms. Ballantyne told the Committee that with hybrid proceedings, there is a marked variance in the volume and texture of sound between the sound produced by those in the room and those participating online.¹³⁵ Additionally, Paule Antonelli, Local 900 Acting President, CAPE, told the Committee that it should be noted that the sound that comes through when using the telephone is "about as bad as it gets for interpreters." When comparing the sound heard over a telephone to that heard over Zoom, she stated that the sound through the Zoom video platform is better.¹³⁶

4. Injuries suffered by interpreters who are employees of the Translation Bureau

Ms. Corneau told the Committee that from March 2020 to September 2022, the Translation Bureau received about 90 incident reports. This figure contrasts starkly with a single disabling injury reported during the five years preceding the pandemic.¹³⁷ Of the 90 incidents, about 70% were "simply incident reports," while 30% reported a disabling

134 Ibid., 1215.

135 Ibid., 1245 (Ballantyne).

136 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 32, 6 October 2022, 1230 (Paule Antonelli, Local 900 Acting President, Interpreters' Representative on Local 900 Council (TR), CAPE).

137 Reference for that would be page 2 of annex A of Translation Bureau's follow-up documentation.



injury that required an absence for the interpreter ranging from a few hours to a longer period as specified by a doctor.¹³⁸

According to André Picotte, Acting President, CAPE, interpreters' work during the pandemic has been "dogged by technical issues and the failure of certain participants to comply with technical standards."¹³⁹ He reported that since 2020, hearing issues resulted in 33 of 70 official language interpreters taking 349 sick leave days.

Mr. Picotte stated that on 1 February 2022, CAPE filed a *Canada Labour Code* complaint with Employment and Social Development Canada. The latter concluded that the Translation Bureau had failed in its duty to protect the health and safety of interpreters with respect to new technological risks.¹⁴⁰

5. Injuries suffered by freelance interpreters

Ms. Ballantyne told the Committee that AIIC does not have the capacity to track injury reports. Similarly, Mr. Thompson told the Committee that freelance interpreters, who he noted contribute to 45% of all interpreting assignments on Parliament Hill, work on contract and are not employees of the Translation Bureau. As such, they do not file health and safety incident reports, nor do freelance interpreters have the same benefits as employees.¹⁴¹

Nonetheless, Ms. Ballantyne stated that she had heard some very disturbing and upsetting anecdotes from freelance interpreters. She was aware of cases where they suffered audio injuries, during meetings where participants participated remotely, and today are unable to work and will not be able to again.¹⁴²

138 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 32, 6 October 2022, 1235 (Corneau).

139 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 32, 6 October 2022, 1205 (André Picotte, Acting President, CAPE).

140 Ibid.

141 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 32, 6 October 2022, 1230 (Jim Thompson, Communication and Parliamentary Advisor, International Association of Conference Interpreters - Canada Region).

142 Ibid., 1245 (Ballantyne).

6. Initiatives undertaken to protect interpreters since the start of the pandemic

Mr. Ball told the Committee of the measures taken over the past two years by the Translation Bureau, in collaboration with House administration, CAPE and AIIC, to help to protect interpreters' health, safety and well-being. These included:

- shortening the assignment length from six hours at the microphone to four hours;
- having the House administration provide headsets equipped with a unidirectional microphone to all members and witnesses. Remote participants who speak during virtual meetings into an appropriate microphone decreases the risk of sound issues;
- requiring sound tests before committee meetings to improve sound quality and to minimize disruptions;
- developing and implementing an interpreter hearing protection program. This program involves training, research and testing in three areas: acoustics or sound, interpreting function and audiology; and
- sponsoring ongoing research in the House of Commons' facilities to improve the working environment for interpreters. This research is being conducted in collaboration with external partners, such as the National Research Council and the University of Geneva.¹⁴³

Ms. Antonelli told the Committee that members of the House ought to adopt certain practices to help preserve the safety of interpreters when participating in proceedings virtually. These included:

- positioning the headset microphone between their mouth and their nose;
- when the connection is bad, providing notes to the interpreters in advance; and

143 Ibid., 1215 and 1230 (Ball).



- speaking as slowly as possible.¹⁴⁴

7. Audio testing of the House of Commons' audio-visual systems

Mr. Picotte told the Committee that, in May 2021, the National Research Council (NRC) conducted audio quality tests of the audio-visual (AV) systems at the House of Commons and submitted a report of the results to Parliament in October 2021. He stated that, following the outbreak of the pandemic, the House administration “addressed the problems associated with the incompatibilities between the system in place and the Zoom platform.”¹⁴⁵ Further, he stated that it had yet to be confirmed whether interpreters at the House now have access to the full range of frequencies required under International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards. He also stated that no improvement in sound quality has been observed since May 2021.¹⁴⁶

In her testimony, Ms. Ballantyne also raised the matter of AV testing done by the NRC at the House. She stated that the AIIC had not received the NRC’s October 2021 report. Nonetheless, Ms. Ballantyne indicated that the NRC’s tests concluded that the House’s AV systems had problems. She stated that, in her understanding of the matter, the House administration did not agree with the findings of the NRC’s October 2021 report. As a result, the House had brought in its own sound experts to conduct tests, and the NRC was also conducting further tests.¹⁴⁷

Further, Ms. Ballantyne stated that the NRC’s October 2021 report found that the House’s AV system distorts sounds over Zoom, such that the sounds made by remote participants to interpreters is rendered “unintelligible and a serious health hazard.”¹⁴⁸ She also stated that while the report found that the House’s audio system meets ISO standards, this was only for in-person sound.

8. Proposals for improved working conditions for interpreters

The Committee heard several proposals for enhancing the working conditions for simultaneous interpreters working at the House of Commons. Ms. Ballantyne stated that it was widely understood that the best conditions for quality interpretation involved

144 Ibid., 1255 (Antonelli).

145 Ibid., 1205 (Picotte).

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid., 1240 (Ballantyne).

148 Ibid., 1210.

having the interpreter in the same room as those speaking. Meanwhile, “interpreting remote participants over the internet increases cognitive load and has caused auditory disorders and injuries amongst interpreters the world over.”¹⁴⁹ Mr. Thompson went further, stating that “any remote sound is dangerous.”¹⁵⁰

Further, the Committee heard that

- Parliament needs to put in place conditions that are conducive to the high-quality while protecting the health and welfare of interpreters;¹⁵¹
- the quality of sound transmitted by the House’s AV system needs to be improved;¹⁵²
- remote participants need to meet certain basic technical requirements in order to participate in proceedings;¹⁵³ and
- special conditions ought to be implemented for interpreters who work at hybrid meetings. Specifically, should the total number of remote interventions be less than 25 minutes during a working day, the meeting ought to be classified as in-person. Should the total number of remote interventions be between 25 and 50 minutes per day, the meeting ought to be classified as hybrid. For hybrid meetings, the work hours remain the same but interpreters receive extra compensation. Should the total number of remote interventions exceed 50 minutes per day, the meeting ought to be classified as remote. For remote meetings, working hours are shorter and there is greater team support and financial compensation.¹⁵⁴

149 Ibid.

150 Ibid., 1255 (Thompson).

151 Ibid., 1215 (Ballantyne).

152 Ibid., 1205 (Picotte).

153 Ibid.

154 Ibid., 1210 (Ballantyne).



D. Health and safety professionals and experts in audiology

1. Acoustic shock injury: definition and causes

The Committee heard from Philippe Fournier, Assistant Professor, Université Laval, and Darren Tse, Assistant Professor, University of Ottawa that acoustic shock injury (ASI) currently lacks consensus about its definition.

However, it is generally agreed that ASI is the occurrence of auditory and otologic symptoms caused by brief, loud and unexpected exposure to a sound.¹⁵⁵ Examples of sounds capable of causing ASI include feedback loops, sudden changes in volume, acoustic pops, and tapping on the microphone.¹⁵⁶ Symptoms of ASI include:

- tinnitus, which is an intrusive or ringing noise in the ear
- hyperacusis, which is sensitivity to noise;
- oral fullness, which is the feeling of plugging or pressure in the ear; and
- ear pain.

Symptoms of ASI can range from mild to severe, and from temporary to chronic. More severe and chronic cases can have symptoms like:

- headaches;
- nausea;
- dizziness;
- balance dysfunction; and
- psychological distress, including sleep disorders, anxiety and depressive symptoms.¹⁵⁷

155 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 34, 20 October 2022, 1205 (Philippe Fournier, Assistant Professor, Audiologist, Faculty of Medicine, Université Laval).

156 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 34, 20 October 2022, 1205 (Darren Tse, Otolaryngologist and Neuro-Otologist, Assistant Professor, Department of Otolaryngology and Head & Neck Surgery, Faculty of Medicine, University of Ottawa).

157 Ibid.

Dr. Fournier stated that the nature and intensity of ASI symptoms may vary widely from one individual to another, and may appear immediately after an injury or after several days or weeks.¹⁵⁸

Dr. Tse stated that, in his view, ASI patients have noise damage or acoustic trauma. It is likely that medical professionals in different fields have labelled the same medical injury with different names.¹⁵⁹

2. Jobs where acoustic shock injuries typically occur

Dr. Tse stated that ASI injuries occurred among those who do jobs requiring prolonged periods of concentrated hearing and attention, usually through headsets, and who can be subjected to sudden and unexpected loud noise spikes.¹⁶⁰ He noted that these occupations include air traffic control workers, military radio and communication operators, call centre operators, industrial workers, and people who use chainsaws, power tools and firearms.

Dr. Fournier noted that interpreters began reporting a rise in the prevalence of ASI symptoms since the start of the pandemic and the increased use of web conferencing platforms.¹⁶¹

3. Earliest cases of acoustic shock injury

Dr. Tse stated that ASI was first coined by audiologists in Australia in the early 2000s. This medical phenomenon had no publication on its topic until Myriam Westcott published her research on ASI in 2006. Dr. Fournier stated that ASI was first described among call centre operators who reported the appearance of distressing symptoms following acoustic incidents in their listening device system.¹⁶²

Dr. Tse noted to the Committee that Dr. Fournier's research highlighted the high prevalence of ASI in interpreting staff around the world. Indeed, Canada ranked 13th out of 81 countries surveyed in the number of interpreters currently suffering with ASI.¹⁶³

158 ibid. (Fournier).

159 ibid. (Tse).

160 ibid.

161 ibid. (Fournier).

162 ibid.

163 ibid. (Tse).



Dr. Tse indicated that, in ten years of working in medicine, neither he nor any ear specialists at his hospital had met a single interpreter who was suffering from an ASI injury. However, prior to the start of the meeting, he spoke with an interpreter who was suffering from ASI symptoms.¹⁶⁴

4. Cognitive load

The Committee heard from Kilian G. Seeber, Professor, University of Geneva, about cognitive load as it relates to simultaneous conference interpreting. Dr. Seeber told the Committee that the human brain has great capacity for storing long-term information but only a finite amount of space for “cognitive control working memory.”¹⁶⁵ He stated that studies have shown that when cognitive load (i.e., the processing demands on the brain) exceeds cognitive capacity (i.e., the resources the brain can deploy to handle demands), the cognitive process in the brain slows and eventually breaks down.¹⁶⁶

Dr. Seeber stated that, for that reason, training for simultaneous interpretation focuses on acquiring the skills required to allocate resources to accommodate this increased cognitive load, rather than focusing on language training.

He told the Committee of a study conducted at the University of Geneva that examined the relationship between deteriorated sound and cognitive load during simultaneous interpretation. The study showed that interpreters showed significant psychophysiological responses to instances of bad sound, including echoes, distortions, pops, clicks or background noises.¹⁶⁷ In a similar study, researchers artificially deteriorated the sound heard by interpreters. This study found that interpreters showed significant cognitive and emotional response during low-quality sound while interpreting, as opposed to listening passively.¹⁶⁸ The result was that the content provided by interpreters suffered significantly as a result of deteriorated sound.

164 Ibid., 1215.

165 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 34, 20 October 2022, 1210 (Kilian G. Seeber, Professor, University of Geneva).

166 Ibid.

167 Ibid.

168 Ibid.

5. Multiple factors when interpreting

Dr. Seeber described to the Committee the different factors that have an impact on simultaneous interpreters when they are doing their work. These factors included:

- technological factors, such as the Internet, which generally cannot be controlled;
- human resource factors, which cannot be controlled. He cited that interpreters often will continue to interpret even if they are experiencing heavy cognitive load;
- the variable the makeup of the sound signal that interpreters hear;
- the work environment and regulating the sound within a room. However, external sounds can arise that cannot be controlled.¹⁶⁹

Dr. Seeber noted that training may help interpreters mitigate certain external factors that can arise while working. However, he noted that over the past few years, the human brain has not made as great a stride as did technology. To that end, he stated that he cannot suggest “a solution to you, because there are so few factors on which we can have an effect.”¹⁷⁰

6. Reducing harm to interpreters and further study of acoustic shock injuries

Dr. Tse stated that, in his view, hybrid meetings should cease because they expose interpreters to harm. However, he stated that, even without hybrid meetings, interpreters will still be exposed to harm from listening to sound through headsets. He indicated that, nonetheless, their exposure to harm ought to be minimized as much as possible.¹⁷¹ He stated that, “if it’s a matter of convenience versus harm, I always pick no harm with a bit of extra inconvenience.”¹⁷² Dr. Fournier and Dr. Seeber agreed with Dr. Tse’s assessment, with Dr. Seeber commenting:

169 Ibid., 1220, 1230 and 1235.

170 Ibid., 1230.

171 Ibid., 1215 (Tse).

172 Ibid., 1240.



It is not part of my experience or my technical expertise, but from an ethical point of view, the answer is pretty clear.¹⁷³

Dr. Tse also noted that, currently, interpreters were experiencing difficulties in having their symptoms recognized, getting the appropriate treatment for them, and getting compensation through the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board or similar agencies.¹⁷⁴

Dr. Fournier told the Committee that more research was needed about the hearing health of simultaneous interpreters suffering from ASI. He noted that researchers do not have enough data to know the exact cause of ASI. He indicated that, currently, he was collaborating on a research project about symptoms reported by Translation Bureau interpreters.¹⁷⁵ He stated that the interpreters who report symptoms are the ones who know their symptoms best.

Dr. Seeber stated that with further research, it might be possible to control the software and hardware used by participants in hybrid proceedings. However, for the moment, the only solution was to reduce the time that the interpreters are exposed to sound that could cause ASI.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, Dr. Fournier noted that it was currently known that “the length of certain periods of interpretation generate more symptoms.”¹⁷⁷

Dr. Fournier stated that, in his view, it is unlikely that there is a miracle solution for ASI. He stated that more research was needed to ensure that the right adaptations are applied.¹⁷⁸

E. Academic perspectives

1. Reasons for retaining hybrid sittings in the Chamber

During their testimony, Melanee Thomas and Erica Rayment, both of whom are associate professors at the University of Calgary, provided the Committee with several reasons for retaining the option, for members and witnesses, of hybrid participation in

173 Ibid. (Seeber).

174 Ibid., 1225 (Tse).

175 Ibid., 1205 (Fournier).

176 Ibid., 1225 (Seeber).

177 Ibid., 1235 (Fournier).

178 Ibid.

parliamentary proceedings. In their view, the question was not about mode, but rather about the design of the hybrid Parliament system.¹⁷⁹

Dr. Thomas told the Committee that having a hybrid option helps Parliament fulfill its core functions of representation and accountability, stating:

If designed well, hybridity is a relatively straightforward fix for several systematic barriers in Canadian politics. It's not a panacea, but it undeniably could help.¹⁸⁰

In her view, representation is strengthened by a hybrid Parliament, as it enlarges the pool of prospective electoral candidates. These prospective candidates included those with caregiving, parenting and elder care responsibilities, as well as people with illnesses and disabilities, and racialized and Indigenous people.¹⁸¹ In her view, a hybrid option would send an important signal about who Parliament is designed for and who is welcome within the institution.¹⁸²

Similarly, Dr. Rayment stated that empirical evidence about decision-making and representation shows that “who is in the room matters.”¹⁸³ She noted that a person’s experience shapes the issues and positions that they bring forward in political debate, and how these issues are addressed. As an example, she stated that women members of the House of Commons, regardless of political affiliation, were far more likely than men to put women's issues on the political agenda.¹⁸⁴ In her view, a hybrid option would help to make Parliament more inclusive and representative.

With respect to accountability, Dr. Rayment stated that expanding the scope of who is able to participate in parliamentary proceedings increases opportunities for accountability. She noted that the greater the diversity of questions and investigatory approaches among members of the House, the better the scrutiny.¹⁸⁵

Dr. Rayment also noted that, in research she conducted in the summer of 2022 on the family friendliness of parliaments, she found that more than a third of the respondents

179 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 32, 6 October 2022, 1110 (Melanee Thomas, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calgary).

180 Ibid.

181 Ibid.

182 Ibid.

183 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 32, 6 October 2022, 1115 (Erica Rayment, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calgary).

184 Ibid.

185 Ibid., 1130.



indicated that making the hybrid Parliament option permanent was an important tool to help members to balance work and family commitments.¹⁸⁶

Lastly, Dr. Thomas told the Committee that there was a downside to prioritizing in-person sittings for their ability to provide the opportunity for informal meetings among members. The downside was that these informal meetings are rarely documented and do not appear in the *Debates*, and therefore raise questions of accountability to the Canadian public.¹⁸⁷

2. Reasons for ending hybrid sittings in the Chamber

In her appearance before the Committee, Kathy Brock, Professor and Senior Fellow, Queen's University, stated firstly that Parliament ought to be commended for its nimbleness and adaptability during the pandemic. However, she told the Committee that, in her view, the procedural modifications made by the House in response to the pandemic needed to come to a conclusion.¹⁸⁸

Dr. Brock provided numerous reasons for her assertion that hybrid sittings of the House needed to end. These included:

- Policy-making consists of a support role to get the government's legislative agenda through, and an accountability role. Citing a recent study on the functioning of legislatures during the pandemic, Dr. Brock noted that, in her view, both of these roles were adversely affected during the pandemic. Both consultations with the public, and public engagement generally suffered.¹⁸⁹
- In-person meetings help to better build relations across the parties and within parties. To that end, caucus meetings held in person allowed for more frank feedback.¹⁹⁰
- During hybrid sittings, the prime minister and Cabinet were not forced "to stand up and face the opposition," which in her view, meant

186 Ibid., 1125 (Rayment).

187 Ibid., 1135 (Thomas).

188 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 32, 6 October 2022, 1100 (Kathy L. Brock, Professor and Senior Fellow, School of Policy Studies and Department of Political Studies, Queen's University).

189 Ibid.

190 Ibid.

accountability suffered. Along the same lines, she noted that Parliament has “subtle checks” built into it that are lost when people do not meet face-to-face.¹⁹¹

- The visual conversion of election results into members of the House of Commons seated as government and opposition parties were, in her view, important for Canadians yet diminished by the hybrid format.¹⁹²
- Hybrid sittings could lead to “policy capture.” Under policy capture, members of the House are influenced too strongly by the interests of their constituents, and lack the tempering effect of the national interest. In her view, members who physically attend Ottawa have the opportunity to learn to moderate their views and build better, more inclusive policy for the country.¹⁹³
- Better political acuity and skills to perform the functions of members of the House are built by interacting face-to-face. In Dr. Brock’s view, when Parliament functions in person, members have a better opportunity to learn from each other.¹⁹⁴
- The institution of Parliament integrates, builds bridges, and has a socialization function. Further, should members not attend Parliament in person, Parliament is not forced to change.¹⁹⁵
- Parliament has a legitimization function. As such, it “not only must work, it must be seen to work for Canadians to understand what government does and why it’s important.”¹⁹⁶
- When members of the House participate in virtually during hybrid proceedings, a certain power dynamic is enforced. Under this power

191 ibid.

192 ibid.

193 ibid.

194 ibid, 1150.

195 ibid.

196 ibid.



dynamic, ministers and shadow ministers are at the forefront, while regular parliamentarians are “left off a bit.”¹⁹⁷

- In her view, Parliament functions better when ministers and members of the governing party see the opposition’s reaction in person. Should the opposition react strongly to a given issue, in her view, the governing party would be more likely to take that issue to caucus for discussion and potential reconsideration.¹⁹⁸

3. Parliamentary reform: general comments

Jonathan Malloy, Professor and Bell Chair in Canadian Parliamentary Democracy, Carleton University, told the Committee that he did not advocate for or against hybrid proceedings. In his view, the discussions about for and against hybrid proceedings are similar to the discussions about in-person and remote working that are going on in any workplace in 2022.¹⁹⁹ That is, remote participation provides certain conveniences, can facilitate better access and reduce inequities. However, it also means less opportunity for informal interaction, and building and maintaining an institutional culture that goes beyond the screen.

According to Dr. Malloy, discussions about the continuance or termination of hybrid proceedings cannot be separated from the larger context of the institution itself. As such, the discussion of hybrid proceedings presents a test of the maturity of the House of Commons and the Parliament of Canada.²⁰⁰

Dr. Malloy stated that reforming aspects of parliamentary work is an exercise in questioning the purposes for which political powers should be used, and how various interests and viewpoints may succeed or fail to influence political choices and outcomes.²⁰¹ He noted the apparent lack of long-term consensus in this House about hybrid proceedings and indicated that, in his view, this betrayed “a larger weakness and immaturity of the institution.”²⁰² To that end, Dr. Malloy stated that the challenge faced

197 Ibid, 1130.

198 Ibid, 1135.

199 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 32, 6 October 2022, 1105 (Jonathan Malloy, Professor, Bell Chair in Canadian Parliamentary Democracy, Department of Political Science, Carleton University).

200 Ibid.

201 Ibid.

202 Ibid.

by the House was to find consensus on the issue of hybrid proceedings, which required give and take from all sides and going beyond immediate interests.

4. Retain certain components of hybrid proceedings

Dr. Thomas and Dr. Rayment told the Committee that they considered it beneficial for Parliament and its members to retain the option of remote participation in proceedings. They suggested remote participation could be used as another tool for parliamentarians to carry out their work. They clarified that they were not proposing that some members be able to participate permanently and solely by video.²⁰³

Dr. Rayment stated that according to her research there was “a very high level of support among MPs for the continuation of at least some aspects of the hybrid parliamentary model.”²⁰⁴ Specifically, women members of the House reported having a harder time reconciling parenthood and political life, and appear to experience a more acute barrier to participation in politics.

Dr. Rayment indicated that in her research, 79% of respondents answered that they either somewhat or strongly agreed that members on parental leave should be able to vote remotely.²⁰⁵

Dr. Brock stated that hybrid format “would be good for committees” because it expanded the number of potential witnesses who could potentially participate.²⁰⁶ In her written submission, Dr. Brock stated that the House should investigate expanding opportunities for members of the House, on recognized leave, to vote by proxy and attend designated committee meetings virtually.²⁰⁷

Dr. Thomas noted that should the House permanently adopt hybrid participation in proceedings, or elements of it, the discretion over who may participate remotely and when ought to belong to the individual member, and not party leadership.²⁰⁸

203 Ibid., 1135 (Thomas).

204 Ibid., 1115 (Rayment).

205 Ibid., 1125.

206 Ibid., 1125 (Brock).

207 Dr. Kathy L. Brock, Queen’s University, “[Retention, Extension or Discontinuance? Considering Virtual House of Commons Hybrid Proceedings for the House and Its Committees](#),” Written submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, 6 October 2022.

208 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 32, 6 October 2022, 1140 (Thomas).



F. Perspectives regarding citizen engagement

1. Equal Voice

Eleanor Fast, Executive Director, Equal Voice and Maggie Patterson, Director of Programs, Equal Voice, recommended to the Committee that Parliament continue to offer hybrid participation.

Ms. Patterson told the Committee that Equal Voice concluded a three-year study in February 2020 that examined making Canadian legislatures a better place to work for women and gender diverse people.²⁰⁹ A major finding of the study was that legislatures needed to modernize. Modernization initiatives included remote participation for members of legislatures “who cannot or should not travel to Ottawa due to illness, pregnancy, caregiving or other circumstances.”²¹⁰

Further, Ms. Patterson stated that Equal Voice surveyed 1,500 young women for their views on politics. The results showed that 67% of respondents thought being an elected representative was one of the most impactful ways to serve their communities. However, only 39% of respondents indicated that politics offered a desirable work-life balance, and 81% of respondents indicated that running for office would be difficult to manage with other responsibilities in their lives.²¹¹

Ms. Patterson told the Committee that, anecdotally, Equal Voice has observed that women often prefer to run for office at the municipal level, rather than the provincial or federal level, in order to stay physically close to their families and communities. Similarly, Ms. Fast stated that Statistics Canada data shows that women are “twice as likely to take on caregiving responsibilities, even if those women are working full-time outside of the home.”²¹²

Ms. Fast made clear that, in her view, the matter continuing with hybrid proceedings was not a question of all in-person participation versus all virtual participation. Rather, hybrid would allow members of the House to take advantage of the opportunities that the

209 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 34, 20 October 2022, 1100 (Maggie Patterson, Director of Programs, Equal Voice).

210 Ibid.

211 Ibid.

212 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 34, 20 October 2022, 1140 (Eleanor Fast, Executive Director, Equal Voice).

technology provides us with.²¹³ She stated that Equal Voice’s research showed that people were more likely to enter politics if they knew that the option of hybrid participation existed for the times when they need it.

Ms. Patterson reminded the Committee that 2021 marked the 100th anniversary of the election of the first female member of the House. Yet, today, still only 30% of members are women, and Canada has yet to elect an openly non-binary member.²¹⁴

2. Honest Talk

Catherine Clark, Co-Founder, Honest Talk, and Jennifer Stewart, Co-Founder, Honest Talk, told the Committee that they firmly supported the continuation of hybrid proceedings in the House of Commons. Ms. Clark stated that giving members the option of participating remotely should be viewed as a non-partisan opportunity to attract to public service “more women, more people from diverse backgrounds and more individuals from various regions of the country.”²¹⁵

Ms. Clark and Ms. Stewart provided the Committee with reasons for maintaining the option of hybrid proceedings. These included that:

- governance structures are enhanced by diversity. As such, increasing the diversity of the membership of the House of Commons strengthens democracy. Further, having a greater diversity of voices representing different lived experiences leads to overall stronger outcomes in boardrooms, classrooms, committee rooms and the seat of Canada’s democracy, the House of Commons;²¹⁶
- hybrid proceedings are an opportunity to not only “talk about diversity, equity and inclusion at the highest levels, but to make it a reality;”²¹⁷ and
- hybrid proceedings can assist the electorate by allowing their member of the House to represent them either from home or from Ottawa.

213 Ibid., 1120 (Fast).

214 Ibid., 1100 (Patterson).

215 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 34, 20 October 2022, 1105 (Catherine Clark, Co-Founder, Honest Talk).

216 Ibid.

217 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 34, 20 October 2022, 1105 (Jennifer Stewart, Co-Founder, Honest Talk).



Providing members with this option gives their electorate the best of both worlds,²¹⁸

- allowing for hybrid proceedings provides the flexibility for members to do their jobs to the very best of their abilities, and helps to create a truly 21st century House of Commons,²¹⁹ and
- prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadian governance structures functioned on “a one size fits all approach” which entailed either meeting in person or no meeting. Such an approach to governance was, in their opinion, the enemy of diversity. Further, a lesson from the pandemic is that doing things a certain way because society has always done things that way is neither efficient nor reflective of the current reality.²²⁰

Ms. Stewart indicated that roadblocks and learning experiences ought to be expected. These included that:

- equal access to broadband internet is not assured in many communities;
- cybersecurity remains an ongoing concern that requires serious thought and attention; and
- members of the House who participate remotely must be assured of the same access and opportunity as those participating in person.²²¹

Ms. Clark told the Committee that she did not hold concerns that members would abuse the option of hybrid proceedings. Rather, she stated that the electorate is intelligent and that members of the House who do not do their job to the satisfaction of the electorate will “swiftly learn the will of the people.”²²²

Ms. Stewart also stressed the importance of not politicizing the issue of hybrid proceedings, stating:

I think it’s incredibly important that we don’t politicize hybrid Parliament. This provides flexibility for women and men to come to Parliament when it works for their

218 Ibid., 1150 (Clark).

219 Ibid., 1105 and 1145.

220 Ibid., 1105.

221 Ibid. (Stewart).

222 Ibid., 1145 (Clark).

professional and personal schedules and, when it absolutely does not, to have the ability to participate in a hybrid environment.²²³

3. Samara Centre for Democracy

Sabreena Delhon, Executive Director, Samara Centre for Democracy, told the Committee that their recommendation was that the House of Commons maintain hybrid proceedings for both the Chamber and its committees. This recommendation was based on the interviews that Samara conducts with members of the House upon vacating their seat. The interviews conducted in 2020 found strong support for a hybrid model of Parliament.²²⁴

Further, Ms. Delhon stated that another finding from Samara's interviews with former members of the House was that the travel schedule is grinding, between constituencies and Ottawa, during sitting weeks. She noted that the sitting schedule can create a barrier for women with families, particularly women who lack the resources for childcare.²²⁵

Ms. Delhon noted that the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) currently ranks Canada 61st in the world for gender representation among national parliaments. The IPU recommends that parliaments allow teleworking as a strategy to increase equity and improve work life-balance.²²⁶

Ms. Delhon stated that a variety of minority communities are currently underrepresented in the House of Commons. These groups include women, people from LGBTQ+ community, Indigenous people, and visible minority communities. Samara's research has shown that members of the House from under-represented groups often alienated in Ottawa. Ms. Delhon stated that if these members had more opportunities to work from and within their communities, it would reduce the feeling of alienation that they may experience in the House. She also noted that, in the long term, offering the option of hybrid participation could encourage members of the House from under-represented groups to not only enter into politics, but also to stay.²²⁷

223 Ibid., 1120 (Stewart).

224 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 34, 20 October 2022, 1110 (Sabreena Delhon, Executive Director, Samara Centre for Democracy).

225 Ibid.

226 Ibid.

227 Ibid.



In her view, hybrid proceedings offered Parliament an opportunity:

- to be more inclusive and representative;
- to demonstrate that Parliament is a flexible, responsive, contemporary work environment that is committed to attracting, retaining and supporting top talent;
- to reduce transit times for members of the House, especially for members of the House whose ridings are located distantly from Ottawa. Samara’s research has shown that constant travel takes a mental and physical toll on members. Members whose overall well-being is cared for in a sustainable manner are more functional and effective people; and
- to reduce the expense incurred by the House for members’ travel and redirect resources back to constituents and back to communities.²²⁸

Ms. Delhon noted that it was possible for the House of Commons to have hybrid proceedings while, at the same time, retaining in-person interactions and informal meetings. She indicated that “hybrid is not just all virtual all the time.”²²⁹ She suggested that parliamentarians operating under a hybrid model could monitor their interactions and be intentional about creating opportunities for informal meetings/get-togethers.

G. Appearance of a former parliamentary clerk, representatives from other legislatures and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Three Speakers of provincial legislatures appeared before the Committee to share their legislature’s approach to hybrid arrangements. They were:

- the Honourable Ted Arnott, MPP, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario;²³⁰

228 Ibid., 1110, 1125 and 1120.

229 Ibid., 1115.

230 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 33, 18 October 2022 (The Hon. Ted Arnott, MPP, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario).

- the Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA, Speaker of the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly;²³¹ and
- the Honourable Nathan Cooper, MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.²³²

The Committee also received a brief from the Honourable Gordon Barnhart, former Clerk of the Senate, and heard from Matthew Hamlyn, CBE, Strategic Director of the United Kingdom Chamber Business Team;²³³ David McGill, Clerk and Chief Executive of the Scottish Parliament;²³⁴ and Siwan Davies, Director of Senedd Business at the Welsh Parliament.²³⁵ Andy Williamson, Senior Researcher at the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Centre for Innovation in Parliament, also submitted a brief to the Committee.

1. Appearance of the Honourable Ted Arnott, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Mr. Arnott briefed the Committee on Queen's Park's approach to hybrid proceedings. He also discussed how to make parliamentary life more appealing to young parents.

In March 2020, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario adjourned until the Government House Leader indicated that it was in the public interest to reconvene. On 12 May 2020, the House adopted a motion allowing committees to meet using electronic means.²³⁶

While committees were allowed to meet virtually, House proceedings remained in person, with some changes to voting procedures and the number of members present in

231 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 33, 18 October 2022 (The Hon. Derek Bennett, MHA, Speaker of the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly).

232 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 35, 25 October 2022 (Nathan Cooper, MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta).

233 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 35, 25 October 2022 (Matthew Hamlyn, Strategic Director, Chamber Business Team, House of Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland).

234 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 35, 25 October 2022 (David McGill, Clerk and Chief Executive, Scottish Parliament).

235 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 35, 25 October 2022 (Siwan Davies, Director of Senedd Business, Welsh Parliament).

236 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 33, 18 October 2022, 1210 (Arnott).



the House. As of 1 March 2022, all committees returned to in-person meetings. Mr. Arnott does not have the authority to allow members to participate virtually.²³⁷

In hybrid committee meetings, the committee chair, vice-chair and clerk were required to be physically present. Meetings were conducted on Zoom, and committee rooms were equipped with televisions and extra cameras to easily view remote participants. Witnesses were required to appear virtually. Each committee held a pre-meeting of 15 minutes before the scheduled start time to confirm the attendance of all Zoom participants and work out any technical issues.²³⁸

Security, connectivity, user experience and ease of use were tested by Assembly staff. Guideline documents and manuals for members, staff and witnesses were also developed. Committees used their SharePoint site to securely distribute relevant documents to members.²³⁹

The order of the House authorizing hybrid committee meetings provided that the chair would ensure that the Standing Orders and regular practices were observed to the greatest extent possible, with adjustments only where necessary to facilitate physical distancing and electronic participation. Members participating remotely had to be in Ontario to be considered part of quorum. According to Mr. Arnott, the primary benefit of virtual meetings was that they made it possible to hear a large number of witnesses from across the province.²⁴⁰

Mr. Arnott emphasized the value of members being able to interact inside and outside the chamber, as well as in the corridors and lobbies. He said that these conversations encourage the exchange of ideas and best practices to make sure that constituents are well represented. Mr. Arnott agreed that participation of members in the legislature is enhanced by their opportunities to speak to each other face-to-face, fostering camaraderie and collegiality and promoting decorum and the ability to conduct meaningful debate.²⁴¹

Asked about the need to establish parameters for remote participation, Mr. Arnott said that developing parameters would be essential. In all cases, parties would have to think about the broader interests of Parliament, without trying to seek partisan advantage

237 Ibid., 1210 and 1220.

238 Ibid., 1210.

239 Ibid.

240 Ibid., 1210, 1215, 1240, and 1255.

241 Ibid., 1220 and 1300.

from hybrid arrangements. In his view, if discussions took place on whether to introduce a hybrid model in the Ontario legislature, the House leaders of the recognized parties should take the lead, with support from the Speaker and Assembly staff to ensure that the discussions were productive.²⁴²

Mr. Arnott said he wasn't sure that the Ontario legislature had done enough to support members with young families, who may find it difficult and stressful to be away from home so much. He thinks the legislature needs to continue to find ways to support members with young children.²⁴³

He also recognized that there are situations where members would like to be present for debates and votes but might not be able to because of a family emergency, health issue, or any number of things. He believes that all parties should be aware of this reality.²⁴⁴

2. Appearance of the Honourable Derek Bennett, Speaker of the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly

Mr. Bennett discussed the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly's approach to virtual proceedings.

Following the initial lockdown in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2020, the Legislative Assembly met twice, once in March and once in May, to deal with urgent legislative matters related to the pandemic. For both sittings, the House met with a quorum of just 10 members, plus table officers and the sergeant-at-arms. No pages were present, the galleries were closed to visitors, and the press gallery was restricted to half its capacity.²⁴⁵

On 5 May 2020, the House passed a motion creating a select committee to govern virtual proceedings, consisting of the members of its standing orders committee, the House leaders and one unaffiliated member. The select committee was authorized to meet virtually to conduct its business. The order of reference provided that the select committee's report be tabled by 1 July 2020.²⁴⁶

242 ibid., 1240.

243 ibid.

244 ibid.

245 ibid., 1215 (Bennett).

246 ibid.



The report made nine recommendations, in addition to procedural guidance. The first recommendation states that it is preferred that sittings of the House be conducted with all members physically present. Provisions on hybrid proceedings were in place until December 2020. However, in September 2020, the standing orders were changed to provide for virtual proceedings as circumstances warranted. The decision to hold virtual proceedings is made by the Speaker in consultation with House leaders.²⁴⁷

Mr. Bennett said that, while it was possible for general assemblies to meet in a hybrid format, hybrid procedures were never used in the House. However, hybrid procedures were used by committees of the House and the management commission. He said the daily proceedings of the House had a fluid nature to them, that can not easily be replicated in a virtual setting. The House would have had to move to “much more structured proceedings where everything was scripted.” Mr. Bennett added that it is very challenging as a Speaker to monitor a virtual hybrid setting.²⁴⁸

Since June 2020, favourable epidemiology and sufficient physical space to accommodate physical distancing has allowed the assembly to meet entirely in person, as there are only 40 members and the legislature is large. Other measures to facilitate the return were put in place, including requiring members to remain seated and wear a mask when not speaking, suspending page services, requiring members to be vaccinated, closing the visitors’ gallery, and reducing capacity in the press gallery. A provisional standing order was adopted to provide for deferred voting, but to date has not been used.²⁴⁹

Asked if there was any pressure from members or parties for a hybrid Parliament, Mr. Bennett said that this was not the case. Mr. Bennett added that parliaments have the ability to use new technologies to adapt and make legislatures more user-friendly and family-oriented. He believes that hybrid sittings could “definitely be used” for members with health, family or other challenges.²⁵⁰

Mr. Bennett said that, while the standing orders currently do not allow members to participate in sittings remotely because of health or family reasons, this possibility will be reviewed in the following weeks and months.²⁵¹

247 Ibid.

248 Ibid., 1215, 1255.

249 Ibid., 1215.

250 Ibid., 1225, 1240 and 1250.

251 Ibid., 1250.

3. Appearance of the Honourable Nathan Cooper, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Mr. Cooper described some of the steps the Legislative Assembly of Alberta took to ensure that it could meet safely during the pandemic.

The Alberta legislature did not adopt any hybrid or virtual arrangements during the pandemic, and in fact increased the number of in-person sittings compared to previous years. Mr. Cooper said his legislature was one of the few jurisdictions across Canada that sat regularly during the first wave of the pandemic. However, it did allow members to vote remotely for a brief period of time for recorded divisions.²⁵²

On 16 March 2020 the Alberta government announced the immediate closure of schools and a public health emergency the following day. The assembly took immediate steps to ensure sittings could continue. A temporary standing order amendment was passed to allow for a revised budget process, new chamber protocols to accommodate physical distancing, the ability to extend the period of adjournment to sit past prescribed hours, and the introduction of a revised sessional calendar.²⁵³

According to Mr. Cooper, many Alberta legislators believed they had a duty to be in the chamber to show the public “they were on the job during the emergency and were also governing.” He said this increased the ability of private members, in particular members of the opposition, to hold the government to account.²⁵⁴ The question, he said, was not just whether virtual sittings were possible, but what was the “best opportunity” to expose Albertans to democracy.²⁵⁵

4. Appearance of the Honourable Gordon Barnhart, former Clerk of the Senate

Mr. Barnhart submitted a brief to the Committee.²⁵⁶ In it, he indicated that he had appeared before the Committee during “the midst of the pandemic” (i.e., on 20 April 2020, during the study entitled “Parliamentary Duties and the COVID-19 Pandemic”). Mr. Barnhart recalls that, at that time, he had recommended that the House adopt a

252 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 35, 25 October 2022, 1100 (Cooper).

253 Ibid.

254 Ibid.

255 Ibid., 1145.

256 The Honourable Gordon Barnhart, *Brief presented by Gordon Barnhart C.M., S.O.M., Ph.D, Former Clerk of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly and former Clerk of the Canadian Senate*, 9 October 2022.



hybrid sitting model for the Chamber and its committees. He notes in his brief that this model has worked quite well, “notwithstanding some technical problems and strain for interpretation.”²⁵⁷

However, Mr. Barnhart states that, currently, he recommends a return to in-person sittings, with one exception. With respect to in-person sittings, he notes that these had many advantages, including:

- having better debate and exchange of information;
- giving members the chance to meet informally outside of the House or committee; and
- meeting public expectations that elected members will represent them in Ottawa.

Mr. Barnhart also stated that members can experience exceptional circumstances whereby they cannot travel to Ottawa (e.g., ill health or late stages of pregnancy). In these circumstances, he proposed that the House could pass a motion to allow a member to attend House proceedings virtually for a limited period of time.

5. Appearance of Matthew Hamlyn, Strategic Director, Chamber Business Team, House of Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

This was Mr. Hamlyn’s second appearance before the Committee. In April 2020, he described the hybrid arrangements in place in the U.K. House of Commons to deal with the pandemic. This time, Mr. Hamlyn outlined what has been done since then.²⁵⁸

As of July 2021, U.K. members can no longer participate remotely in the House or in committee meetings. The House of Lords, on the other hand, has continued with remote participation for a small number of members on health or disability grounds.²⁵⁹

According to Mr. Hamlyn, most members agree that the hybrid arrangements ensured that the Commons was able to continue to discharge its key responsibilities during the pandemic, although they did not allow for the same spontaneity in debate. However,

257 Ibid.

258 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 35, 25 October 2022, 1105 (Hamlyn).

259 Ibid.

holding ministers to account seemed more effective in person. In addition, most members preferred in-person sittings, as long as they are considered safe from a public health standpoint. Following the lifting of health measures, there “was no need” to continue hybrid sittings.²⁶⁰

While select committees now sit in person, Mr. Hamlyn has noticed a significant increase in the number of witnesses appearing remotely, often more than half. During the pandemic, this made it easier for people to appear without having to travel to London, and probably increased witness diversity. Mr. Hamlyn said he believes this is a significant legacy of the pandemic.²⁶¹

Mr. Hamlyn said the only other significant change that’s lasted since the pandemic is the way members’ names are recorded in divisions. Traditionally, members were required to vote in division lobbies and their names were recorded by staff members. This practice stopped during the pandemic, and members now record their name on readers using their security pass. The reader captures their name and automatically imports it into the House’s divisions administration system. Apart from this technical change, House proceedings are otherwise “completely back to normal.”²⁶²

Since January 2019, U.K. members who are expecting a child have been able to vote by proxy, with permission. When asked about this, Mr. Hamlyn said members must request it, and don’t need to provide medical evidence. The Speaker issues the member a proxy voting certificate, which is recorded in the House’s formal business papers. The whips play no role in providing the certificate.²⁶³

The U.K. House of Commons Procedure Committee recently undertook an inquiry into the merits of extending proxy voting to members with a long-term illness or injury. Published in 2022, the Committee’s report recommended that the House be given the opportunity to decide on introducing proxy voting on a pilot basis.²⁶⁴

260 Matthew Hamlyn, *Follow-up Responses from Matthew Hamlyn, House of Commons, UK*, 4 November 2022.

261 PROC, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 35, 25 October 2022, 1105 (Hamlyn).

262 Ibid., 1110.

263 Ibid., 1225; Matthew Hamlyn, *Follow-up Responses from Matthew Hamlyn, House of Commons, UK*, 4 November 2022.

264 Ibid.



The proxy voting certificate states that a particular member will vote on behalf of another member for a set period of time. The member is automatically invited to do so in the pass voting system.²⁶⁵

6. Appearance of David McGill, Clerk and Chief Executive of the Scottish Parliament

Mr. McGill described the use of hybrid proceedings in the Scottish Parliament. Since his last appearance before the Committee in 2020, the Scottish Parliament’s procedures committee has conducted an inquiry into the future of hybrid proceedings, which was bookended by two chamber debates.²⁶⁶

The procedures committee heard a range of testimony, but Mr. McGill said that the “vast majority” supported retaining the hybrid system in the longer term for reasons of inclusivity. Just before the recent Scottish Parliament election, several women stood down because they found it difficult to balance family responsibilities with parliamentary work. According to Mr. McGill, this criticism weighed heavily on the procedure committee’s thinking.²⁶⁷

The main findings of the Committee’s report were:

- the hybrid model should be retained indefinitely, partly to ensure the resilience of parliamentary business and partly to allow members to participate when they’re unable to be physically present in the chamber;
- hybrid deliberations should make Parliament more inclusive and encourage a wider diversity of candidates;
- Parliament should commit to continual improvement of hybrid infrastructure and technology to support hybrid meetings and a culture of iterative change and innovation; and
- a pilot of a proxy voting system should be launched.²⁶⁸

265 Ibid.

266 PROC, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 44th Parliament, Meeting 35, 25 October 2022, 1115 (McGill).

267 Ibid., 1130.

268 Ibid., 1115.

Despite support for retaining the hybrid model, the procedures committee noted that it was generally preferable for members, especially ministers, to participate in proceedings in person. As physical participation was already the norm, the procedures committee did not recommend a system for seeking permission to participate remotely based on set criteria. Remote participation is therefore left to the discretion of the member, rather than requiring permission from the whips. The situation could potentially change if abuse occurs.²⁶⁹

While the procedures committee did not recommend any criteria for members to appear remotely, it did outline circumstances that could justify remote participation, including illness, bereavement, parental leave and these kinds of reasons. These circumstances serve only as a guide as the procedures committee expects the very high levels of in-person participation will continue.²⁷⁰

In making its recommendations, the procedures committee felt that Parliament would be out of step with Scottish society if it reverted to pre-pandemic ways of working. The procedures committee also felt that future technology would likely support “more optimal” participation in parliamentary business and that abandoning hybrid arrangements would inhibit development in that direction.²⁷¹

Mr. McGill acknowledged that the procedures committee was fully aware of the downsides of hybrid participation. The hybrid model does not perfectly replicate in-person participation, considering that the dynamic in debate is altered and informal contacts between members are reduced. The procedures committee suggested that the impact of the hybrid model be monitored over the longer term. For his part, Mr. McGill thinks it is “highly likely” that hybrid facilities will be retained in the future.²⁷²

Mr. McGill said that next steps are to roll out a new platform that supports remote participation and to launch a pilot of the proxy voting system. The launch of the new platform was scheduled for the week following Mr. McGill’s appearance. The platform will enable interventions both to and from the physical and virtual space. On proxy voting, the procedures committee is currently consulting on what the system should include, with a view to launching a 12-month pilot in the near future.²⁷³

269 Ibid., 1115 and 1140.

270 Ibid., 1130.

271 Ibid., 1115.

272 Ibid., 1125 and 1130.

273 Ibid., 1115.



Asked if there was a way of recording whether members were participating remotely or in person, Mr. McGill said no. The one exception is when a presiding officer calls a member and says “and the member joins us remotely.” This is the only instance where a member’s remote participation would be on the record.²⁷⁴

7. Appearance of Siwan Davies, Director of Senedd Business, Welsh Parliament

Ms. Davies outlined the experience of the Welsh Parliament, known as the Senedd, with virtual and hybrid proceedings. Chamber proceedings in the Senedd are now permanently hybrid, with voting by a remote voting application that was designed in-house. Each member decides whether to participate physically or virtually, and it’s expected that all members will be treated equally, regardless of how they participate.²⁷⁵

Senedd committees have the choice of holding physical, virtual or hybrid meetings. Ms. Davies said that, generally speaking, when committees undertake scrutiny of ministers and accounting officers, they choose to meet in person.²⁷⁶

The Senedd is a bilingual institution, and all of its business is available in English and Welsh, regardless of the format of the proceedings. The Senedd uses a licensed version of Zoom, which is incorporated into its broadcast and web-based technology. Voting is done electronically, and papers are available electronically. Ms. Davies said there are no legal or procedural barriers to virtual or hybrid participation in the Welsh Parliament.²⁷⁷

According to Ms. Davies, there was general support for hybrid proceedings. The pros were:

- accessibility and inclusivity of virtual proceedings, particularly around diversity of witnesses and parliamentary candidates;
- better work-life balance for members;
- better use of time in constituencies; and

274 Ibid., 1150.

275 Ibid., 1120 and 1145 (Davies).

276 Ibid.

277 Ibid., 1120.

- savings on travel and reducing members' carbon footprint.²⁷⁸

Ms. Davies said that downsides included the impact on the quality of debate, particularly around the ability of committees to scrutinize legislation and question ministers. The issue of virtual or in-person participation by ministers was also debated in the Senedd.²⁷⁹ A review by the Senedd's business committee found that parliamentarians could vote electronically in a hybrid format without having participated in the debate; however, that can also happen with in-person participation.²⁸⁰

Ms. Davies said that, since last year's election, approximately a third of Senedd members are in their first term. These new members have only ever worked virtually or in a hybrid setting. She said this signals the Senedd's future ways of working as "moving forward and learning from the pandemic."²⁸¹

Asked whether any of the Senedd's interpreters or translators have experienced health issues since the implementation of hybrid proceedings, Ms. Davies said she was "pleased" to report they had not. Ms. Davies said that the transition to hybrid was seamless, and that the ability to provide simultaneous interpretation as well as written translation was maintained. For in-person or hybrid meetings, interpreters work from interpretation booths in the chamber and in committee rooms. For fully virtual meetings, translators and interpreters work from home.²⁸²

Ms. Davies added that the Senedd has enough interpreters to do the work and has no resource issues. A recent well-being survey found that the Senedd's translation service came out on top in terms of employee satisfaction and well-being.²⁸³

Asked whether the Senedd had experienced any connectivity issues, Ms. Davies said it had not, although the Internet has dropped out occasionally. All in all, these occurrences have been very rare.²⁸⁴

Ms. Davies said there is currently no record of which members participated remotely and which members were present in the chamber. The Senedd record simply states

278 ibid.

279 ibid., 1130.

280 ibid., 1145.

281 ibid., 1120.

282 ibid., 1125 and 1145.

283 ibid., 1140.

284 ibid., 1145.



whether a member participated, spoke and voted. For committees, the minutes show in what medium the committee met. Ms. Davies pointed out, however, that “anybody who was watching the broadcast or watching our Senedd TV” would be able to identify how each member was participating.²⁸⁵

8. Appearance of Andy Williamson, Senior Researcher, Centre for Innovation in Parliament, Inter-Parliamentary Union

Dr. Andy Williamson, Senior Researcher at the IPU’s Centre for Innovation in Parliament (CIP), submitted a brief to the Committee.²⁸⁶

The CIP is a network of IPU member parliaments focused on “digital methods and innovative practice.” Since the start of the pandemic, the CIP has reported on initiatives undertaken by parliaments around the world, seeking lessons learned. The CIP’s research is published in its *World e-Parliament Report*. The 2022 edition, in press when the brief was submitted, expands on lessons learned from the pandemic, first explored in the 2020 edition.

According to Dr. Williamson’s brief, at the start of the pandemic, IPU member parliaments faced a similar set of problems. In response to these common problems, however, various approaches were taken. For example:

- New Zealand’s Parliament created a virtual committee that could hold the government to account during the emergency;
- Brazil’s Chamber of Deputies adapted an application to give members secure access to video conferencing and remote voting. Parliaments in the Maldives, Chile, Spain and the U.K. quickly followed suit; and
- Latvia created a bespoke virtual chamber platform.

Dr. Williamson said that, in 2021, many parliaments saw the pandemic as a unique opportunity to innovate and modernize. While greater focus was on virtual sittings, many parliaments made administrative changes by adopting new digital methods or new working conditions that offered more flexibility. In addition, information and communications technology (ICT) projects became more agile and user-centred. ICT

285 Ibid.

286 Andy Williamson, *Submission to the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs: Hybrid Proceedings in Parliament*, 18 October 2022.

became an overnight priority for parliaments.²⁸⁷ Years of innovation were said to have been achieved in just a few months.²⁸⁸

According to a CIP study, 8 out of 10 parliaments feel they have become more innovative since the start of the pandemic. However, the CIP also identified a number of barriers to enabling hybrid sittings, namely:

- parliamentary procedures and legislation;
- technology support;
- bandwidth requirements, particularly for members in remote areas; and
- members' confidence in the technology and the overall process.

In terms of procedural and legal issues, 16% of parliaments required constitutional changes to function remotely. In addition, 44% of parliaments had to adopt procedural changes.²⁸⁹

The CIP's research shows that 51% of parliaments have held at least one virtual plenary sitting since the start of the pandemic; this percentage rises to 77% for committee work. Dr. Williamson said that, while it is "clearly preferential" for parliamentary sittings to be held in person, members globally have become more receptive to digital tools and trust in them has increased.²⁹⁰

Dr. Williamson argued that hybrid sittings give members having to travel long distances more flexibility, allowing them to spend more time in their constituency. Hybrid sittings are also very convenient for members who are unable to attend for health or other reasons. Hybrid sittings also offer parliaments the chance to be "more efficient, inclusive and flexible."²⁹¹

On the other hand, Dr. Williamson also noted some drawbacks to virtual sittings. For example, there is a sense that virtual sittings impede spontaneous debate and make it

287 Ibid.

288 Andy Williamson, *Responses to questions from the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, 19 October 2022.

289 Andy Williamson, [*Submission to the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs: Hybrid Proceedings in Parliament*](#), 18 October 2022.

290 Ibid.

291 Ibid.



harder for opposition parties to hold the government to account. In addition, members feel there is a loss of informal interaction in hybrid sittings.²⁹²

As for committee work, remote participation provides even clearer benefits by giving members greater flexibility and making it easier and more cost effective to hear more witnesses.²⁹³

In response to a question from the Committee, Dr. Williamson said that a survey conducted by the CIP found that 80% of 123 parliaments said digital tools are now more trusted by members and 87% agreed that members are increasingly receptive to new ways of working.²⁹⁴

Dr. Williamson said a key lesson of the pandemic is parliamentary responsiveness, and he believes that amending parliamentary procedures now to be able to respond quickly in the future is vital.²⁹⁵ Dr. Williamson also said that having a business continuity plan (BCP) is vital. Many parliaments found that their BCP was insufficient at the start of the pandemic. Only 59% of parliaments surveyed by the CIP said that their existing BCP supported their operations during the pandemic, and 73% required measures beyond their existing BCP.²⁹⁶

Overall, 78% of the parliaments surveyed said that they are better prepared and more resilient since the pandemic, in part by benefiting from lessons learned. The CIP therefore recommended that all parliaments conduct studies similar to that of the Committee's. The CIP's research also showed that parliaments that did not modernize during the pandemic now risk being "left behind" and are at increased risk.²⁹⁷

292 Ibid.

293 Ibid.

294 Andy Williamson, *Responses to questions from the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, 19 October 2022.

295 Andy Williamson, [*Submission to the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs: Hybrid Proceedings in Parliament*](#), 18 October 2022.

296 Andy Williamson, *Responses to questions from the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs*, 19 October 2022.

297 Ibid.

In his written response to the Committee, Williamson said that when parliaments cannot meet in person, democracy suffers. Virtual sittings are the “only practical option” when travel to meet in person is impossible or difficult.²⁹⁸

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

That hybrid Parliament, including the voting application, be continued and that all necessary changes to the Standing Orders be made to allow for its use, and that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs must review these measures within the first year of the 45th Parliament.

Recommendation 2

That the House administration investigate the use of simultaneous interpretation in other parliaments and international democratic institutions that have a low injury rate amongst interpreters; and that what is learned be applied in the House of Commons.

Recommendation 3

That the Minister for Public Services and Procurement Canada promote the recruitment and retention of interpreters as a career and promote the educational programs available to achieve this.

Recommendation 4

That the Translation Bureau examine the health and safety supports currently available to interpreters, whether employed full-time or on contract, and look at areas of improvement, and that they continue to work collaboratively with the House of Commons administration and the International Association of Conference Interpreters to ensure their concerns are immediately addressed in a transparent manner.

Recommendation 5

That the House of Commons ensure the sustainability of parliamentary services and resources through the application of stringent measures to protect the health and safety of interpreters by creating a new Standing Order to ensure the following:

298 *Ibid.*



- 1. that, when appearing virtually, witnesses called to appear before a parliamentary committee must wear a superior-quality headset with a built-in microphone that meets ISO standards or the equivalent, to be provided or approved by the House of Commons administration;**
- 2. that, failing to use such a headset their appearance be rescheduled, where permitted;**
- 3. that, when circumstances permit, parliamentary committees give at least one week's notice to witnesses in order to ensure that connectivity testing can be conducted and equipment can be sent so that they can participate fully in committee proceedings. If such a deadline is not met, that witnesses be invited to testify in a videoconferencing studio arranged by the House administration;**
- 4. that, should a witness fail to have an adequate sound test involving House of Commons interpreters before appearing before a parliamentary committee, their appearance be rescheduled, where permitted; and**
- 5. that an alert process for technical difficulties affecting sound quality be implemented: that, in the event of a failure of the sound system and/or technical difficulties that impede the safe performance of the interpretation or compromise its quality, the interpreter shall immediately notify the Speaker of the House or the Chair of the Committee. In such a case, the Chair shall suspend business until the technical support team of the House of Commons has resolved the technical problems;**

That the House of Commons administration provide support in all applicable matters related to this recommendation, and ensure the safe, efficient and orderly conduct of proceedings.

Recommendation 6

That it be a best practice for members of Cabinet to be present in person to answer questions during question period and to testify before committees.

Recommendation 7

That chairs and vice-chairs of committees must be present in person for all committee meetings.

Recommendation 8

That the House of Commons administration, after consultation with the whips of each of the recognized parties in the House, ensure appropriate and adequate audio-visual equipment be provided for both virtual participants and interpreters.

APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
As an individual	2022/10/04	31
Parm Bains, M.P., Steveston—Richmond East Laurel Collins, M.P., Victoria		
Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians	2022/10/04	31
Léo Duguay, President		
House of Commons	2022/10/04	31
Hon. Anthony Rota, P.C., M.P., Speaker of the House of Commons Charles Robert, Clerk of the House of Commons Eric Janse, Deputy Clerk, Procedure Michel Patrice, Deputy Clerk, Administration Stéphan Aubé, Chief Information Officer, Digital Services and Real Property		
As an individual	2022/10/04	31
Dona Cadman, Former Member of Parliament		
Canadian Association of Professional Employees	2022/10/06	32
Paule Antonelli, Local 900 Acting President, Interpreters' Representative on Local 900 Council (TR) André Picotte, Acting President		
International Association of Conference Interpreters - Canada Region	2022/10/06	32
Linda Ballantyne, President Jim Thompson, Communication and Parliamentary Advisor		

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Translation Bureau Matthew Ball, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Public Services and Procurement Canada Caroline Corneau, Acting Vice-President, Service to Parliament and Interpretation	2022/10/06	32
As an individual Kathy L. Brock, Professor and Senior Fellow, School of Policy Studies and Department of Political Studies, Queen’s University Jonathan Malloy, Professor, Bell Chair in Canadian Parliamentary Democracy, Department of Political Science, Carleton University Erica Rayment, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calgary Melanee Thomas, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calgary	2022/10/06	32
As an individual Carol Hughes, M.P., Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing Yvonne Jones, M.P., Labrador Tom Kmiec, M.P., Calgary Shepard Andréanne Larouche, M.P., Shefford Jean Yip, M.P., Scarborough—Aginccourt	2022/10/18	33
Legislative Assembly of Ontario Hon. Ted Arnott, M.P.P., Speaker	2022/10/18	33
Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly Hon. Derek Bennett, M.H.A., Speaker	2022/10/18	33
Equal Voice Eleanor Fast, Executive Director Maggie Patterson, Director of Programs	2022/10/20	34
Honest Talk Catherine Clark, Co-Founder Jennifer Stewart, Co-Founder	2022/10/20	34
Samara Centre for Democracy Sabreena Delhon, Executive Director	2022/10/20	34

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>As an individual</p> <p>Philippe Fournier, Assistant Professor, Audiologist, Université Laval</p> <p>Kilian G. Seeber, Professor, University of Geneva</p> <p>Darren Tse, Otolaryngologist and Neuro-Otologist, Assistant Professor, Department of Otolaryngology and Head & Neck Surgery, University of Ottawa</p>	2022/10/20	34
<p>As an individual</p> <p>Hon. Mark Holland, P.C., M.P., Leader of the Government in the House of Commons</p>	2022/10/25	35
<p>House of Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland</p> <p>Matthew Hamlyn, Strategic Director, Chamber Business Team</p>	2022/10/25	35
<p>Legislative Assembly of Alberta</p> <p>Hon. Nathan Cooper, M.L.A., Speaker</p>	2022/10/25	35
<p>Scottish Parliament</p> <p>David McGill, Clerk and Chief Executive</p>	2022/10/25	35
<p>Welsh Parliament</p> <p>Siwan Davies, Director of Senedd Business</p>	2022/10/25	35

APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Barnhart, Gordon

Brock, Kathy L.

Equal Voice

Inter-Parliamentary Union

Samara Centre for Democracy

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 31 to 35 and 42 to 47](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Bardish Chagger
Chair

FUTURE OF HYBRID PROCEEDINGS DISSENTING OPINIONS OF THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Making hybrid proceedings a permanent reality would be one of the single most fundamental reforms to the Canadian House of Commons in its long history. As Carleton University political science professor Jonathan Malloy told us, “Hybrid proceeding are far beyond a technical issue.”¹ We couldn’t agree more.

Conservatives have long held **that major, enduring procedural reforms must be implemented with the support of a consensus of the recognized parties in the House**. Making permanent such a sweeping change to parliamentary life is absolutely the sort of thing which should first be embraced by all sides of politics.

In the interest of consensus, the Official Opposition would have agreed to renew the current hybrid procedures, with some important limitations, subject to being sunset a year into the next Parliament when a further renewal could be considered with proper deliberation.

While we have had a couple years’ experience with hybrid parliament in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are just now starting to experience it in the post-pandemic context. This additional time would have allowed an opportunity to reflect on how well it is working, possibly fine-tune it further, or decide that the trade-offs it brings are not worth it.

Indeed, as University of Calgary political science professor Melanee Thomas told us, hybrid parliament “is not a panacea”.² As much as it offers some advantages and benefits, which the NDP-Liberal majority strives to put forward in the best light possible in the Committee’s report, it also comes with many offsetting shortcomings which these dissenting opinions seek to ensure are placed on the record.

Regrettably, this study felt, to us, to be an exercise in “going through the motions” to secure a pre-ordained outcome decided by the NDP-Liberal coalition which has long been ideologically committed to a hybrid parliament. (It also spoke volumes that the majority of this Committee—which has responsibility for the House’s Standing Orders—recommended changes to the Standing Orders, but couldn’t be bothered to put forward proposals on what these new Standing Orders would be or say.)

While there had been a consensus to make these arrangements at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, through unanimous consent,³ these two parties’ obsession with preserving these measures unaltered, even as the corner was being turned on the pandemic, saw them show a lack of interest in consensus and ram subsequent

¹ Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, October 6, 2022, p. 2.

² *Idem*, p. 3.

³ House of Commons, *Journals*, September 23, 2020, pp. 1-4; January 25, 2021, pp. 421-424.

renewals through the House, under closure, with the votes of just 54% of MPs.⁴ We worry that is what is going to happen again.

Simultaneous interpretation is the biggest issue needing attention, and hope alone won't do the job

While we fully back the recommendations to support our simultaneous interpreters, and to grow their ranks, we are worried that might not be enough to arrest some worrying trends. Hoping for an improvement simply won't cut it.

Conservatives have a long, proud history in building and supporting a bilingual parliament. Under the *British North America Act*, the greatest legacy of Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir George-Étienne Cartier, MPs have been free to speak, since the first sitting of the Parliament of Canada, in whichever official language they desire. The Translation Bureau, which employs our interpreters, was established by R.B. Bennett's government, while John Diefenbaker's government brought simultaneous interpretation into both Houses. Brian Mulroney's government went on to enshrine in the *Official Languages Act* the right to simultaneous interpretation in parliamentary proceedings.

That's why we were alarmed when we heard International Association of Conference Interpreters (Canada Region) President Linda Ballantyne tell us that hybrid parliament has meant "English has predominated and French has been snuffed out."⁵

With the skyrocketing injury rates among staff interpreters—going from a single disabling injury in the five years before the pandemic to 90 incident reports since,⁶ and likely more since the employees' union advises that many more go unreported⁷—it is little wonder that the ranks of simultaneous interpreters have been shrinking. However, the dwindling pool of freelance interpreters, who already contribute to almost half of the interpretation assignments on Parliament Hill,⁸ is nothing new, considering there are just 60 now compared to the 140 freelance interpreters available in 2016-17.⁹

In the face of these trends, it was all the more puzzling to hear Liberal MP Dr. Brendan Hanley's dismissive comments at Committee that:

it's not an issue of whether we should or should not do hybrid based on concerns about the well-being of interpreters. That would be a bit like saying that air traffic controllers should

⁴ *Idem*, November 25, 2021, pp. 25-27, 34-39; June 23, 2022, pp. 1103-1110.

⁵ Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, October 6, 2022, p. 18.

⁶ Translation Bureau, follow-up responses to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, October 2022, Annex A, p. 2.

⁷ Canadian Association of Professional Employees, e-mail to the Clerk of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, November 2022, p. 2.

⁸ Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, October 6, 2022, p. 15 (Jim Thompson, Communications and Parliamentary Advisor, International Association of Conference Interpreters (Canada Region)).

⁹ Steven MacKinnon, M.P., response to Order Paper Question Q-611 (43rd Parliament, Second Session), Annex, p. 2.

perhaps, if they're susceptible to ear shock, stop managing air traffic, get outside and wave their arms around.¹⁰

For these reasons, Conservatives would have recommended **that proceedings in the House of Commons Chamber revert entirely to in-person while maintaining the remote voting application** (with an alternative mechanism consequently developed for Members with voting app technical difficulties to confirm their votes).

Considering that 97% of Chamber interventions are now made in-person,¹¹ this recommendation would have led to little change to the nature of House debates. Yet, with interpreters being scheduled four hours per day for hybrid meetings while traditional meeting assignments were six hours,¹² this change would have reduced some workplace risks while also freeing up interpreters to be available to support many additional hours of committee meetings every week.

We know from direct experience over the past couple years that too many committee meetings have been cut short or outright cancelled owing to a lack of resources, particularly interpreters available to ensure meetings are conducted bilingually. Committees undertake very important work—especially in holding the government to account—and it is our duty to ensure that they can discharge those responsibilities to their utmost. Regrettably, truncated committee work has formed just a portion of a broader pattern of hybrid proceedings eroding government accountability to Parliament.

Accountability and engagement suffer greatly in a hybrid parliament

Queen's University political science professor Kathy Brock explained to the Committee that the pandemic meant that democratic public engagement “greatly suffered” while government “accountability also suffered”.¹³

United Kingdom House of Commons senior official Matthew Hamlyn, C.B.E., meanwhile, shared that, among that House's members, “there is a consensus that, for instance, that scrutiny of ministers in the Chamber is more effective” in person.¹⁴

Even at the Scottish Parliament, where hybrid proceedings are being retained, our Committee's counterpart “supported views that physical participation facilitates better collaboration and better scrutiny,” according to David McGill, the Parliament's Clerk and Chief Executive.¹⁵

¹⁰ Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, October 20, 2022, p. 18.

¹¹ Speaker of the House of Commons, letter to the Chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, October 26, 2022, p. 6.

¹² Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, October 6, 2022, p. 15 (Matthew Ball, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Translation Bureau).

¹³ *Idem*, p. 1.

¹⁴ Matthew Hamlyn, C.B.E., follow-up responses to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, November 4, 2022, p. 3.

¹⁵ Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, October 25, 2022, p. 3.

Our own personal experience as members of the Official Opposition, which bears the responsibility of leading on Parliament's central duty of holding the government to account, is that a government which already has a serious allergy to transparency and accountability has masterfully used hybrid parliament to its advantage on these fronts.

While it might be encouraging that the NDP-Liberal coalition recommends that it be considered a "best practice" for ministers to account to Parliament in person, whether in Question Period or at the committee table, it is simply a fig leaf covering a decay in the core constitutional concept of responsible government: accountability to Parliament.

That is why Conservatives would have recommended **that ministers, along with their senior officials, must testify in person before committees**. Though we would have preferred that all Chamber proceedings be conducted in-person, we would have recommended, given the coalition majority's preference for them to remain hybrid, **that ministers must speak in the House, including answering questions, in person**.

Beyond televised acts of accountability, there are innumerable interactions which help our constituents, advance public policy, and generally contribute to building constructive relationships among colleagues both within caucuses and across party lines. A surprising number of constituents' bureaucratic headaches can be solved with a quick word with a minister while the bells ring for a vote. A briefing from stakeholders in our offices help draw our attention to potential initiatives to make Canadians' lives better or to fix government bills which might do the opposite. The casual word with a colleague bumped into in a hallway goes a long way to building the trust needed that a future agreement struck at committee will be honoured. Those are just some examples of interpersonal dynamics which hybrid parliament absolutely prevents and discourages.

Not only did we hear evidence from a variety of witnesses, especially those with experience in parliaments, about the value and benefits which those dynamics yield, but it is also our own personal experience in the many years we have cumulatively served as Members of the House of Commons. Public administration in Canada will, in our view and based on that personal experience, be weakened—and the quality of decision-making will similarly be diminished—due to a hybrid parliament.

Despite Dr. Thomas's concerns about informal meetings being inadequately documented and published,¹⁶ if every interaction between parliamentarians had to be televised and recorded, Canadians, in our experience, could probably expect to see more of what they already experience when the cameras are on or when social media feeds are scrolled. Whether public life would be enhanced is, in our view, doubtful.

Making Parliament work well ought to be an all-party concern, not just some ideological talking point

¹⁶ Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, October 6, 2022, p. 7.

Jennifer Stewart, *Honest Talk* co-founder, stressed “it’s incredibly important that we don’t politicize hybrid Parliament”,¹⁷ but we fear that that is exactly what the NDP-Liberal coalition is bound to do since the post-pandemic arguments advanced in support of hybrid parliament have their roots in long-held Liberal aspirations.

To understand our concerns, we look back two Parliaments ago. During consideration of the Liberals’ parliamentary reform efforts, measures to facilitate remote participation in proceedings were enquired about. Electronic voting was even proposed in the former Government House Leader’s (and our current Committee Chair’s) heavily disputed discussion paper.¹⁸

In the 2019 election, the Liberal Party committed to reforms, including “working with Parliament to introduce new technology or other institutional changes to better connect Members with their constituents”.¹⁹ This was since transposed into the Prime Minister’s mandate letters to both the Government House Leader following both that election and the 2021 election, along with a more recent direction “to draw from lessons learned on hybrid sittings and develop a plan to both make Parliament a more inclusive place for families and to respond with greater agility in the event of a future national health crisis”.²⁰

With the onset of the pandemic, it would seem that Liberals have been keen students of Rahm Emanuel’s cynical maxim to “never allow a crisis to go to waste”, in bringing about the hybrid parliament and, now, in entrenching it.

Though the pandemic and figuring out how to ensure parliaments continued to function in its midst were worldwide concerns, perpetuating pandemic solutions is something which seems rather unique to the Canadian federal government.

According to Andy Williamson, an Inter-Parliamentary Union researcher, some of the digital and remote working practices at foreign legislatures “will have been temporary as they are no longer felt necessary”; indeed, he advised that just 46% of legislatures will retain remote functionality while “in some cases this might only be for use in exceptional circumstances.”²¹

Even within Canada, no provincial or territorial legislature currently has a full-fledged hybrid system.²²

¹⁷ *Idem*, October 20, 2022, p. 4.

¹⁸ Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, “Modernization of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons”, March 2017.

¹⁹ Liberal Party of Canada, *Forward: A Real Plan for the Middle Class* (2019), p. 54.

²⁰ Prime Minister, letter to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, December 13, 2019; Prime Minister, letter to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, December 16, 2021.

²¹ Andy Williamson, written responses to Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs questions, October 19, 2022, pp. 2-3.

²² Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Evidence*, October 4, 2022, p. 7 (Hon. Anthony Rota, M.P., Speaker of the House of Commons).

Put simply, no other, comparable legislature has rushed headlong into a permanent embrace of full-fledged hybrid proceedings—or, if it is being entertained, it's with eyes wide open to the potential downsides—which is why we think it is folly for our own House of Commons to do so, especially in the face of evidence which suggests that it will extend or expand some concerning trends.

In closing, Conservatives recognize that while there is potential for some advantages and improvements to parliamentary life through the use of hybrid proceedings, we are equally worried that those benefits might not be worth the cost in interpreters' health, maintenance of bilingualism, government accountability, quality decision-making and political discourse. Time will only tell.

That's why Conservatives would have subjected the renewal of hybrid proceedings to a genuine sunset clause, so that a freshly elected parliament would have to consider the state of these issues, once we are well into a post-pandemic phase, so that they could be weighed and re-assessed in that light. It might even allow the parties in the House to find a consensus “based on honest discussion”, the approach recommended to us by the Honourable Ted Arnott, M.P.P., the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, a veteran parliamentarian now into his fourth decade of elected service.²³

Instead, the future committee review which the majority, instead, recommended might offer lip service to these concerns, but if the NDP-Liberal coalition approaches this next committee study in the same fashion as this one, with a minimum of meetings in service of a pre-ordained outcome to suit an ideological goal, it will simply be yet another box-checking exercise of “going through the motions”, like this one largely turned out to be.

²³ *Idem*, October 18, 2022, p. 18.

Bloc Québécois Dissenting Opinion: Report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on Hybrid Proceedings

The Bloc Québécois would like to begin by thanking witnesses for their openness during the study on hybrid proceedings. The Bloc Québécois is especially grateful to the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) and the Canadian Association of Professional Employees (CAPE) for their very clear testimony before the Committee about the challenges faced by parliamentary interpreters. The Bloc Québécois would also like to acknowledge the interpreters themselves, who had to adapt to the new hybrid model during the pandemic and work in conditions that put their health and safety at risk. Finally, the Bloc Québécois would like to thank all the expert witnesses and the various representatives of provincial legislatures and Westminster-style parliaments in other countries who shared their opinions, experiences and expertise regarding the hybrid model of Parliament.

The Bloc Québécois would like to note from the outset that the hybrid Parliament was put in place as a temporary measure to ensure that Parliament could continue to meet when little was known about COVID-19. All parties worked together to implement this model, which made it possible for the government and Parliament to serve the public and to provide Canadians with the support they needed to get through the public health and economic crisis. We recognize that, although the hybrid Parliament was an imperfect tool, without it the House of Commons likely could not have implemented the emergency measures that Canadians benefited from during the pandemic.

Now that the pandemic is coming to an end, it is time to return to in-person parliamentary proceedings in accordance with the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. Democracy is a balance between holding the government to account, ensuring that the opposition has the tools it needs to properly fulfill its role in Parliament, and giving the media access to elected members and proceedings so that the public can be well informed.

I – Main recommendation adopted by the Committee

The Bloc Québécois strongly opposes the Committee's recommendation to the House that hybrid Parliament be continued without adjustments and that the necessary changes be made to the Standing Orders. In fact, the Committee rejected the recommendations that proposed establishing a framework for hybrid Parliament. In doing so, it also rejected the limits and parameters that should have been put in place in order to sustain House resources and a parliamentary system that supports a healthy democracy.

Given that members and staff can now safely return to the Hill in person, it would have been appropriate for Parliament to return to its traditional way of proceeding, which has a proven track record.

On the one hand, we recognize that the hybrid model was very useful during the pandemic in ensuring that the urgent needs of Canadians were met and that members could fulfill all their legislative duties, although we contend that it falls short when it comes to ensuring the safety of parliamentary interpreters, the ongoing provision of essential services and the legitimacy of the work of Parliament with respect to its linguistic obligations for both official languages in Canada.

On the other hand, we believe that the hybrid model does not meet the standard for a parliamentary system in a country like Canada, which is a model of democracy. Hybrid Parliament, as proposed by the conclusions of this report, could pose a threat to the parliamentary oversight mechanisms in place to protect democratic institutions.

The motions that established (with the help of the NDP) the current hybrid Parliament also contained provisions to muzzle the opposition, namely in Standing Order 81. Examples of the opposition being silenced by the government are found in items (c)(i)(A) and (c)(i)(B) of Motion No. 11,¹ voted on 2 May 2022, and Motion No. 22,² voted on 15 November 2022.

These two small changes eliminate the requirement to read the motions that the House must vote on and give the Speaker of the House the power to combine the said motions for voting purposes. This means that if there are 200 notices of opposition for votes on supplementary estimates, the Speaker can combine them into only 30, 40 or 50 votes rather than 200.

This provision thereby eliminates one of the only means of applying leverage available to the opposition when dealing with a majority government. On 20 March 2019, the House voted 266 times, nearly 260 of which were to concur in votes following notices of opinion to the Interim Estimates and Supplementary Estimates (B). The opposition uses this strategy as a last resort to apply leverage when a majority government barrels ahead and does not take into account the opposition's requests.

¹ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/members/en/votes/44/1/69>

² <https://www.ourcommons.ca/members/en/votes/44/1/215>

(c) **until Thursday, June 23, 2022,**

(i) during consideration of the estimates on the last allotted day, pursuant to Standing Order 81(18), when the Speaker interrupts the proceedings for the purpose of putting forthwith all questions necessary to dispose of the estimates

(A) all remaining motions to concur in the votes **for which a notice of opposition was filed shall be deemed to have been moved and seconded, the questions deemed put and recorded divisions deemed requested,**

(B) the Speaker shall have **the power to combine the said motions** for voting purposes, provided that, in exercising this power, the Speaker be guided by the same principles and practices used at report stage,

(c) **until Friday, June 23, 2023,**

(i) during consideration of the estimates on the last allotted day of each supply period, pursuant to Standing Orders 81(17) and 81(18), when the Speaker interrupts the proceedings for the purpose of putting forthwith all questions necessary to dispose of the estimates,

(A) all remaining motions to concur in the votes **for which a notice of opposition was filed shall be deemed to have been moved and seconded, the questions deemed put and recorded divisions deemed requested,**

(B) the Speaker shall have **the power to combine the said motions** for voting purposes, provided that, in exercising this power, the Speaker be guided by the same principles and practices used at report stage,

II – The health and safety of parliamentary interpreters: the instability of interpretation services in a hybrid Parliament and official languages challenges

(a) Overlooked facts about the health and safety of parliamentary interpreters

From the start of the pandemic, hybrid proceedings have posed a danger to the health and safety of parliamentary interpreters. It is deplorable that the facts provided by all expert witnesses regarding workplace hearing injuries caused by exposure to audio distortion and variations during hybrid or virtual sessions were not adequately considered by Committee members for the purposes of this report.

The testimony given before the Committee by the interpreters' representatives was very conclusive about the fact that interpreters have difficult and dangerous working conditions as a result of the variance in the volume and texture of sound between the sound produced by those in the room and those participating online. According to Ms. Corneau, Translation Bureau representative for the House of Commons, technical difficulties have resulted in various disabling injuries in 30% of the incidents reported by the interpreters during hybrid sittings between March 2020 and September 2022.³ However, it is important to note that 45% of the interpretation assignments on Parliament Hill are contracted out to freelancers, who are not employees of the Translation Bureau. Thus, the percentage of accidents reported (30%) likely represents only a portion of the workplace accidents that take place, given that it reflects only

³ Figures provided by Ms. Corneau, Translation Bureau, Committee report on hybrid proceedings, p. 29.

the number of accidents reported by 55% of the interpreters who provide services to Parliament.⁴

According to the testimony of André Picotte, President of CAPE, the work of interpreters during the pandemic was “dogged by technical issues and the failure of certain participants to comply with technical standards.”⁵ He also reported that, between 2020 and when he appeared before the Committee, almost half of the official language interpreters employed by the Translation Bureau had taken a total of 349 sick leave days because of hearing issues. Mr. Picotte also stated that, on 1 February 2022, CAPE filed a *Canada Labour Code* complaint with Employment and Social Development Canada, which concluded that the Translation Bureau had failed in its duty to protect the health and safety of interpreters with respect to new technological risks.

The Bloc Québécois finds it regrettable that the testimony of experts in health sciences (audiologist, otorhinolaryngologist and neurotologist) and simultaneous interpretation (professors) was not adequately considered when adopting the recommendations of this report. We believe that, had the Committee members properly considered the comments of these experts, the hybrid Parliament model might have included well-considered parameters for its use. According to Dr. Darren Tse and Professor and Audiologist Kilian G. Seeber, Parliament should no longer have hybrid sessions because they expose parliamentary interpreters to harm. Dr. Fournier and Mr. Seeber agreed with Dr. Tse, who stated that, “if it’s a matter of convenience versus harm, I always pick no harm with a bit of extra inconvenience.”⁶

With that in mind, we believe that it would have been more reasonable for the Committee to accept a proposal⁷ by the Speaker of the House of Commons, Mr. Anthony Rota, which sought to restrict the use of remote applications in the House (Zoom).⁸ It also considered the testimony of many stakeholders (elected members as well all representatives of organizations that defend and promote democracy), who indicated that they want to retain hybrid sittings to make it possible for members and various participants in committee meetings to participate in parliamentary proceedings in the event of a death, illness or urgent and exceptional personal circumstances.

(b) Overlooked facts about the challenges of official languages compliance

The Bloc Québécois considers that the untenable working conditions of parliamentary interpreters, which affect their health and safety in many ways, have an impact on the language rights of parliamentarians and Canadians. Unfortunately, this new phenomenon related to the use of technology in a hybrid Parliament is a barrier to the constitutional right of members to use either French or English in their parliamentary work. According to the 15 March 2022

⁴ Report on hybrid proceedings, p. 29.

⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

⁶ Report, p. 35.

⁷ Recommendation made by the Bloc Québécois but not retained by the Committee.

⁸ Report, p. 9.

research paper entitled “Official Languages and Parliament,” the use of new technologies in hybrid or virtual Parliamentary sittings during the pandemic has exposed a new set of challenges for official languages compliance.⁹

It is important to recognize that French members are usually the ones at a disadvantage because of issues with simultaneous interpretation. According to a Library of Parliament study, French was used 26.5% of the time in the House of Commons and only 20% of the time in committee in 2021.¹⁰ On average, 23.25% of interventions in Parliament were in French compared to 76.75% in English. According to Linda Ballantyne, President of AIIIC, the implications for bilingualism in Parliament are greater for francophones because the lack of personnel due to difficult working conditions and workplace injuries sustained by interpreters means that English predominates at the expense of French.¹¹

We would like to reiterate for the Committee members and all members that Canada’s Parliament has fundamental language obligations under the *Official Languages Act* and Canada’s Constitution. Therefore, we regret that the Committee members have decided to minimize both the safety issues faced by parliamentary interpreters and the negative impact on language rights caused by technological issues, most of the time to the detriment of the use of French.

III – Does a hybrid Parliament support a healthy democracy?

The Bloc Québécois believes that the drawbacks of a hybrid Parliament are likely to considerably undermine the existing parliamentary measures and provisions that ensure the Canadian state is a healthy democracy.

(a) Representation in a hybrid Parliament

For example, the work that all members do to represent their constituents is likely to be minimized, or even marginalized, during debates in a hybrid Parliament. On this issue, Kathy Brock, Professor and Senior Fellow at Queen’s University, stated that when members participate virtually in hybrid proceedings, a certain power dynamic is enforced with ministers and shadow ministers at the forefront, while regular members are “left off a bit.”¹²

Andréanne Larouche, MP for Shefford, who gave birth to a daughter on 13 February 2022, said that members can better raise their constituents’ concerns by being on Parliament Hill. Some witnesses expressed reservations about the potential unequal treatment of constituents whose members travel to Ottawa and those whose members participate virtually in Parliament. The

⁹ *Official Languages and Parliament*, Publication No. 2015-131-E, Marie-Ève Hudon, 15 March 2022, p. 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹¹ Report, p. 28.

¹² Report, p. 38.

Bloc Québécois is of the view that members who work on Parliament Hill can better represent their constituents and properly fulfill the vital role of representation that Canadians are entitled to expect.

(b) Collegiality and informal discussions as tools to advance parliamentary work

Some witnesses said that the hybrid format affects the spontaneity of interactions among members of the same political party and those of different parties. Clearly, having members work in the same location results in collegiality and fosters informal discussions. Ms. Larouche stressed the importance of in-person meetings and follow-up, which advance files and thus benefit Canadians. She stated that hybrid proceedings limit the opportunity for discussions between members and ministers. Ms. Larouche also noted that voters expect parties to work together and find common ground, especially in the context of a minority government, and that in her experience such cooperation cannot occur “from a computer screen.” Members’ efforts behind the scenes allow for discussions about important issues that affect their constituents and, in some cases, can facilitate or expedite progress on certain files or work done in committee.

(c) Oversight of government policies

The hybrid model can significantly reduce the effectiveness of parliamentary measures designed to maintain the balance between the powers the government grants itself and its duty to be accountable for its decisions. The experience of the past few years clearly shows that a hybrid Parliament is likely to have an impact on certain parliamentary mechanisms that make ministers accountable for their actions. The fact that ministers are not required to be present in the House of Commons to explain their policies and their planned or actual spending is problematic. Research conducted by Library of Parliament analysts found that parliamentarians in Canada and the UK report that “ministers are making speeches with less oversight and under decreased pressure because parliamentarians cannot read the mood of a parliamentary chamber or a committee room.”¹³

Yet the Committee is recommending that the House of Commons make it “a best practice for members of Cabinet to be present in person to answer questions” asked during parliamentary proceedings.¹⁴ The Bloc Québécois believes that members of Cabinet should be required to be present in order to speak in the House of Commons or testify before parliamentary committees. Ministers should not be able to avoid taking questions from journalists about a contentious issue as they leave the House of Commons. This is about maintaining the full effectiveness of the mechanism for holding the government accountable for its policies and maintaining the public’s trust in Canada’s parliamentary system.

¹³ *Representation and Scrutiny in Canada’s Virtual Parliament*, Library of Parliament, Martin McCallum, 5 April 2022, p. 7.

¹⁴ Recommendation 6, Report on hybrid proceedings.

(d) Members' right to vote and represent their constituents during the House of Commons voting process

The Bloc Québécois is concerned that the Committee is recommending that use of the electronic voting application be continued and made permanent. The Committee should have retained the Bloc Québécois's recommendation 4, to the effect that members be allowed to use electronic voting to vote remotely, except for confidence votes, which must be conducted according to the Standing Orders of the House.

As mentioned above, in certain very specific situations voting in the House of Commons can be an essential tool for opposition parties to apply pressure and negotiate. This balance should be maintained.

For example, confidence votes and supply votes provide opportunities for opposition parties to negotiate with the government. Whether there is a majority or minority government, votes on supplementary and interim estimates enable the opposition to oppose certain items and trigger votes on them, thus forcing the government to ensure enough members are in the House to win these votes and maintain the legitimacy of Parliament. This strategy is sometimes used by opposition parties to show their outrage about a government that refuses to listen. We believe this mechanism maintains the necessary balance between the executive power of the government and the power that opposition parties can exercise to be the voice of their constituents who do not share the government's views.

(e) Avenues for achieving work-life balance parliamentarians and a better balance between parliamentary work and constituency presence

The thinking behind the permanent retention of a system implemented in exceptional circumstances should be expanded to encompass the reform of Parliament in its entirety. For example, changing the schedule and calendar of the House of Commons might provide greater opportunities for striking a balance between parliamentary work and constituency work and providing for better work-life balance for all members, their staff and the employees of the House of Commons, especially interpreters. The National Assembly of Québec and other parliaments conduct their work over three or four days a week, and this could be a model for the Parliament of Canada.

IV – Negating practice and tradition: Lack of a true consensus on the adoption of substantive amendments to House of Commons procedure¹⁵

Finally, the Committee should have recommended to the House of Commons that, if the Standing Orders of the House are to be amended, particularly regarding the presence of members in Ottawa and the functioning of the House, these changes must be made by consensus. Unfortunately, the current Liberal–NDP alliance rejected a recommendation to that effect and is preventing the Procedure and House Affairs Committee from rising above the fray in the name of democracy. The minority Liberal government could act as though it had a majority and, with the assistance of the NDP, muzzle Parliament and make such a fundamental change as instituting a hybrid Parliament. We are reminded of one of the very few times that a substantive amendment to the Standing Orders of the House was adopted without a consensus, when Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s government used time allocation. Once again, tradition may be ignored and history made.¹⁶

¹⁵ According to a February 2002 government publication on the various changes to House of Commons procedure from 1982 to 2001, reforms usually result from negotiations and discussions among all the parties. See [House of Commons Procedure: Its Reform](#) (82-15E, publications.gc.ca). Furthermore, as described in the *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, the different procedural committees created by Parliament between 1964 and 1969 also accepted the universal principle that the Standing Orders of the House of Commons could not be amended without the unanimous consent of members. See “Governing by Time Allocation,” *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Winter 2022, Vol. 44, No. 4, p. 4.

¹⁶ In 1969, Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s then majority government proposed a procedural amendment to provide for three ways to implement time allocation (current Standing Order 78): (1) by agreement of all parties, (2) by agreement of the majority of representatives of the various parties on the proposed time allocation (days or hours), and (3) if unable to come to an agreement, by the government alone through a motion moved by a minister in the House. Although the opposition parties supported the first two means of moving time allocation, the government decided to amend the Standing Orders without their support. Ironically, the highly contentious debate on this third method of time allocation ended as a result of a government closure motion. The amendment was adopted by the House on July 24 at 1:50 a.m. and brought the parliamentary session to a close.