

Hon. John Lynch-Staunton (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, before voting on this motion, on behalf of my colleagues — and I am sure I speak for many on the other side of the chamber — I wish to thank Senator Lavoie-Roux for undertaking the chairmanship of the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration for the period that she did. Those of us who have attended meetings of that committee will realize that it is probably the most difficult committee, not only of which to be a member but particularly to chair, since the interests of each senator are involved. Senator Lavoie-Roux carried out her duties with tremendous patience, distinction, and exemplary devotion to the Senate and to each of its members.

Along the way, it was inevitable that Senator Lavoie-Roux would not please everyone, but that is not the purpose of public life; the purpose of public life is to do what one thinks is best for everyone. Certainly, in her case, she did that.

I should like to thank Senator Lavoie-Roux for the many hours she spent working in the interests of this body. I can only hope that her successor will use her example as he or she takes over the reins of that committee.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Hon. Eymard G. Corbin: Honourable senators, I would like to make a few comments on the report with which we are being asked to concur.

I watched the proceedings of the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration, sometimes in person, at other times from a distance. It has tried, and justly so, to reduce some of the operating expenses of the Senate. This is normal. I believe that any good organisation has to look for opportunities to reduce spending.

However, I believe that we could have thought a bit more about the role and the future of the Senate. I think that too many parliamentarians — faced with criticism from the public, and the media in particular — forget that they are only passing through the parliamentary institutions that are the House of Commons and the Senate. Many of our colleagues have left, and we will go too some day, but the institution will stay.

The buildings where we work are from another era. I am not just talking about the neo-gothic style, I am also referring to the facilities which are not always the best, and do not always allow us to perform in the best possible way. Our committee rooms are antiquated. The air-conditioning — when present — leaves much to be desired. Air quality is poor. Water fountains in the hallways are rusty, but we want to save. I believe that we must, first and foremost, provide parliamentarians with the best means to perform their duties in reasonable comfort. It seems to me that there is nothing wrong with wanting to be comfortable while performing our senatorial duties!

I would venture to say that a person performs better when he or she is comfortable. Our committee rooms are horrible, really

horrible! At one point, whips from the previous government even refused to change some chairs, although they were broken. It is not surprising that some of our colleagues have back problems and must leave after half an hour to an hour! I have back problems too, and I like a firm seat when I have to stay seated for any length of time.

It is high time we stopped penny-pinching in the area of parliamentary accommodations. Law-makers are expected to perform efficiently; for that, we require a minimum of tools and a minimum of comfort. Personally, I think that additional meeting rooms are urgently needed. Occasionally, on certain days of the week, committees are lined up at the door, waiting to meet. They are literally queuing up.

This morning, I took part in the setting up of the standing committees of this house; you could already feel the intense pressure to book meeting rooms at reasonable working hours.

Personally, I will confess that I have had it up to here with sitting on committees at mealtime. I am human, just like my father, who used to work with a pick and a shovel for the railway. Human nature does not fundamentally change. When mealtimes approach, we like to relax and eat in peace. One does not work too well on cold sandwiches, if there are any!

Committees have to meet at mealtimes, noon and night; sometimes, even for a breakfast of doughnuts and croissants! Such a diet does not make any sense! I refuse to be subjected to it.

As much as possible, I have deliberately chosen to sit on committees that meet during regular working hours. At night, I like to eat with my family. This situation is largely due to the lack of committee rooms.

I know there are plans for the setting up of new committee rooms, at least one in any case. One new room could possibly be enough to meet the demand, but it remains to be seen. I certainly hope the new committee and its new chairman will make this issue a priority so that we may solve, once and for all, the problem of committee room availability. This is what we need the most now.

I hear no one complaining about the comfort in his or her office or the quality of the secretary's office. Of course, when there are better and larger offices, there is a waiting list, so I think the facilities are probably suitable for all. However, when it comes to the most important part of the senators' task, committee work, we lack the basic necessities. We need new facilities. The existing ones have to be renovated. The air-conditioning system should be adequate, since our noses sometimes object to going into a room where two other meetings have already taken place. The air in that room is polluted, corrupt. It is unacceptable!

No self-respecting unionist in the world outside this chamber would accept such working conditions! Who do we think we are? Let us at least give ourselves the basic facilities we need to do our job well.

We might even see a few more senators doing committee work.