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## **Board of Internal Economy**

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TRANSCRIPT

**Thursday, March 22, 2018**

—  
**Chair**

**The Honourable Geoff Regan**



## Board of Internal Economy

Thursday, March 22, 2018

• (1120)

[English]

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Speaker of the House of Commons):** Colleagues, this meeting of the Board of Internal Economy will come to order.

We will begin with the minutes of the previous meeting. Are there any concerns about the minutes of the previous meeting?

Hearing none, we'll go on to the next item, which is business arising from the previous meeting. Is there any business arising from the previous meeting?

I'm not hearing any. We'll go on to number three: the parliamentary precinct long-term vision and plan.

Presenting this morning we have Stéphan Aubé, Chief Information Officer, and Susan Kulba, Senior Director, Architecture and Long-term Vision Plan Program Management Directorate.

They'll tell us who else is with them.

Go ahead, Monsieur Aubé.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll go directly to Susan, who is going to be leading the presentation. I'll be leading the second part.

[Translation]

**Ms. Susan Kulba (Senior Director, A&LTVP Program Management Directorate, House of Commons):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We are here today to present you with an update on the vision and the long-term plan, specifically for the West Block.

[English]

As you recall, we were here in October to provide an update on the progress of the West Block and the visitor welcome centre for phase one. We had agreed to come back in March to update you again and give you an overview of the readiness for occupancy.

Today we'll talk a little bit about the context, give you the status update, address some key risks and mitigations, present a high-level move strategy, and conclude with a summary and recommendations.

Essentially the transition of parliamentary operations for the Centre Block to the West Block is a historic milestone and it's a complex web of moving pieces. The objective is to move for the fall

session of 2018, and a decision on that must be really looked at, given the context of risk. We want to ensure that parliamentary operations are continuous and that there is no interruption.

The House of Commons is working very closely with PSPC and their construction manager to maintain momentum and to address risks as they arise. There is still a lot of work to be done. Work is progressing very well, though.

We need to always understand that we need sufficient time for testing and for building familiarization once that construction progresses, and time for some IT integration and other systems integration. We have a robust governance with the parliamentary partners and other key stakeholders, and that's helping us to stay focused and to resolve issues as they come.

In terms of the status, significant progress has been made. The chamber is nearing completion. You'll see that the carpeting is going in, the chamber gallery seating is going in, construction of committee rooms 1 and 2 is pretty much complete, and IT integration has started there.

We have begun the long review process on deficiencies, so that's very good, and you'll see that a number of the offices are progressing to the point where furniture is being moved in.

We hope that all major construction will be completed before the rise of Parliament; however, this doesn't mean that the project is finished. We need to address and integrate all the IT and security systems, continue to move furniture in, and correct deficiencies. There is a lot of work and effort associated with that.

There are key risks. The chamber remains still the most significant risk at this point. It's a complex room and it has a lot of integration that has to happen. We need to do a lot of testing and simulations to make sure that it will be ready and operational and support the work that you do in the chamber.

Other high-risk areas still remain, including committee rooms 3 and 4 some of the smaller meeting rooms, and full integration of doors and posts and security.

Lower-risk areas in the building at this point are the offices, the cafeteria, and the visitor welcome centre. They're progressing very well.

We're monitoring a couple of other key features, such as the temporary loading dock.

We're working very closely, as mentioned, with PSPC to mitigate the risks, and some of that strategy involves prioritization. They're working with us as we identify the key areas where we have a lot of IT integration and security integration, and they're prioritizing those to be delivered such that we can do some overlapping and continue to work and progress quickly.

The ongoing monitoring of risk is really important, and we're watching the key milestones. The chamber is scheduled to be delivered and complete on April 3. If risks arise, we're trying to mitigate them; however, as time progresses, it's important that we have the time to do that.

The next slide indicates a high-level view of the move. You'll see that starting in July is when we would start moving the desks from the current chamber in Centre Block into the West Block, progressing over the summer, with MPs being ready to move in late August or early September, in time for the fall session.

In conclusion, essentially the West Block is a really exciting project, a significant historic renovation, and it will be a fully operational building, a good home for the chamber and the House of Commons over the next 10 years as an interim facility. Everyone is working very hard and doing a fantastic job; however, at this point we're not in a position to recommend a go or no go, as work is still progressing.

We would like to recommend that we return to the board before the House rises this summer with a further progress status and make a decision at that time for the go or no go.

The other recommendation that we'd like to table is to defer a few items in terms of completion for the fall. Those would be committee room 4, the temporary loading facility, and a few of the small meeting rooms.

• (1125)

Thank you.

[Translation]

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Mr. Rodriguez, do you have a question or a comment?

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Chief Government Whip):** Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for this presentation.

It seems to me that there are quite a few things. I'm taking a look at what's left to do, and at the risk factors. These aren't minor issues either.

Someone mentioned that, just because the work is done, doesn't mean that the facilities are ready for use. So, the work might be done, but the facilities might not be ready for use. There could still be security and sound tests to do. As far as acoustics go, I have a hard time hearing people in this room, particularly so today. It's weird, I don't know why it seems worse today. Acoustics are fundamental in our work, because we talk; it's what we do. Sometimes, we talk too much, but we are always talking. We need to be able to understand what our colleagues are saying.

I have a comment and a question.

Even if I want the work to get done as soon as possible, I hope that we will not rush to do it, because we said we would do it, and it will be done if it's doable and done under the best conditions possible. These conditions may not be perfect, but the security conditions will have to be good. I hope that all the sound tests will be done realistically, so that all rooms are adequately prepared for general use. I don't know how you do these tests, but they should be done when people are in the room.

Many elements seem high-risk, especially what is referred to as the integration of all security positions, systems and doors. In my opinion, these elements are absolutely essential.

Let me repeat: I hope that we aren't rushing it, because we said we would do it, but that we will do it because we can do it. If we can't do it, we'll take the necessary steps.

My question concerns the acoustics, especially because of what's going on today. How do you do these tests? How do you do them to ensure that they simulate real-life scenarios? Can you predict the results, when there will be 338 people in the Chamber, all talking a lot?

[English]

**Ms. Susan Kulba:** I'll address the acoustics question first.

Essentially, there are three planned acoustics tests, for various reasons, and they happen at different phases during the project.

The first two have been completed. The first one was successful. We're waiting on results of the second test, and the third one is scheduled for mid-April.

Further on, once all of the IT integration is complete and the furniture is in, we're going to do full dry-run simulations of a chamber sitting, and we will further refine any requirements that aren't being met at that point.

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Mr. Rodriguez, I will add something to your comment.

We have the same objective as you. Our goal, our priority, is to provide functional facilities. We want everything to work well, and we want the facilities to be flawless when we re-open them.

If we see that there are still risks on the scheduled date, we will tell you about them so that you can make a decision. Our goal for these facilities is certainly functionality. I believe that this building will be magnificent, functional, and that it will meet your needs.

Let me add something to Ms. Kulba's comment on acoustics.

We hired world-renowned acoustics experts to test the acoustics of the Chamber. We established better criteria than the ones we currently use, and we are trying to apply them.

Tests were done in the new Chamber space, but not in the committee rooms. These tests revealed that the acoustics were better than in the current House. We'll have to do more tests when the furniture is installed, but we aren't there yet. That is what we're aiming for, Mr. Rodriguez.

•(1130)

[English]

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Go ahead, Mr. Strahl.

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Chief Opposition Whip):** Thank you very much for the update.

I think anyone who has done a renovation of any building—I did one in my home last year—knows that you rarely finish when you think you are going to be finished. I'm a year past my completion date and still putting up baseboards.

I think it is worrying that the go or no-go decision previously was supposed to be this month. The date when we were supposed to be making the decision on whether this was going to happen or not has now been put off until September. I think that's what it says here: "Return to BOIE...and seek 'GO / NO-GO' for September 2018". We've pushed that back six months now.

At Centre Block, obviously things such as routine maintenance and repairs are not being done that otherwise would be done if we weren't leaving the building. However, it's still functional. We are still operating here every day.

What is the risk or what is the cost of simply recognizing this is going to take some more time? We are operating on an electoral cycle; you're operating on a building cycle, and I know it's different, but what is the cost of making the call sooner rather than later that this is going to take longer than we thought, and we should do this at the next election?

My second question is on the slide on page 8 of my document, the move schedule, which looks at starting next Monday. The party whips will start allocating spaces to Centre Block MPs, who will have to move to other buildings. I hope we are not envisioning a scenario of doing this halfway, whereby we're not moved into West Block but we start moving people out of Centre Block into the Confederation Building. I would hope we are ensuring that the go or no-go decision includes those members of Parliament and cabinet ministers who will be displaced so that they are not displaced in advance of the opening of the new chamber.

If I could just get some reassurance on that point, then maybe we can talk about the risk, if any, to simply giving you more time.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Before we go to the presenters, I just want to point out two things.

The first is that if you look at the recommendations at the bottom of page 9 of the deck, it says, "Return to BOIE before the House rises for summer break..."

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** "...and seek 'GO / NO-GO' decision for September 2018".

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Exactly. We'd make the decision here in, say, June, about September.

The second thing is that according to this document, the earliest of the moves you referred to—of MPs, ministers, and so forth—would be July 2. Under this scenario, obviously nobody moves until the board says we're going forward.

Now, Ms. Kulba, would you like to go on with the other answers?

**Ms. Susan Kulba:** Yes, that's correct.

Meeting with whips to do space allocation is just part of the planning exercise. We would just certainly want to be prepared for the decision. Should it go forward, we're ready to do the actual physical move much closer to the summer or September time frame. The next little while really is just about the planning of those moves.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Just so I'm clear, this will be an all-or-nothing scenario, right? We are not going to have a scenario wherein we start moving people to the Confederation Building who aren't going to be in the new West Block. We can get a head start on that. I'm hoping we all go together or we all stay here.

•(1135)

**Ms. Susan Kulba:** That is correct.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** Any scenarios for moving would be brought back here for the board to decide. Currently we're not considering a scenario of moving half the people in or out, but we would certainly not make that decision. We'd make the recommendation to this board, and the members of this board will make the decision on the move scenario based on some recommendations from us.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** The point is that if we're still going to have this building open, we keep using this building.

**A voice:** That's right.

**Mr. Stéphan Aubé:** As for the cost of the deferral, to your comment earlier, we'd have to put that question back to PSPC. When we come with the recommendations, we could come back and ask for solutions for that, but I wouldn't want to comment on it because it would be linked to the cost of delaying the move.

If you want, we'll come with that information at the next meeting. We'll take that as an action.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Go ahead, Monsieur LeBlanc.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Thank you for your presentation, and especially for the good work you have been doing for so long.

I have had the privilege of sitting on the Board of Internal Economy for a number of years, and I understand something about the scope of your project and the consequences that would ensue from bad decisions. Thank Heavens, I don't believe that we have made any so far, and it is thanks to your work and your expertise. Thank you.

My question is very simple. Mr. Chair, maybe you can answer it; I do not want to appear inappropriate. For example, we talked about moving to the West Block. I know that our colleagues in the Senate will move to Ottawa's former train station. When I talked to them, they told me their concerns, but I don't know if these concerns are warranted, because I don't know if they're up to speed on the details.

In your opinion, what will happen if, for example, we decide to move out in the fall, and the Senate concluded that, for its part, for operational and security reasons, it cannot move out? Both Chambers need to agree to move out.

As I said—and this is in no way formal information—I know that, just like us, they are discussing the same or other issues. However, they exercise their own due diligence with regard to their facilities. As I mentioned, I've been having informal talks for some time now, and I have concluded that they also have some questions and some concerns.

How will we bring the two together? What will happen if they decide that the station and their new facilities are not yet ready to accommodate them, and we move out. How do you see that?

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Mr. LeBlanc, we collaborate closely with the Senate. The intention is to move out at the same time, or not move out at all.

From time to time, the people in the administration correct me, and I am happy that they do so. I will let them bring corrections, if necessary.

**Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons):** Indeed.

We work in close collaboration with Senate authorities. This is a joint project with all partners on the Hill. Our modus operandi is indeed that both Chambers will be moving out at the same time, or not, and we are evaluating the risks together.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** All right.

Ms. Bergen, you have the floor.

[*English*]

**Hon. Candice Bergen (House Leader of the Official Opposition):** I guess I'm just wondering about the thoughts of my colleagues. From what I'm hearing—and I'd like to be corrected if I'm wrong—the chances of our being able to move in the summer of 2018 are very low. There is still a lot of work to do.

Thinking realistically, if we can't move in 2018, would we move in the summer of 2019? If we are two months away from an election, that would be unrealistic as well. There could be changes or there could be movement happening after the next election.

I wonder whether we should have a realistic discussion about that. That's one thing I wanted to mention.

Second, to Mark's point, again, unless there is even a reasonable expectation that there are going to be changes in the next couple of months before you would come back to us before we rise for the summer, why wouldn't we just make that call now? What's the reason for coming back?

I'm just wondering about these two things.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** You're asking the members of the board, but you are also, I think, asking questions to the administration.

Go ahead, Michel.

• (1140)

**Mr. Michel Patrice:** I think we're having a realistic discussion based on a plan and a joint document that we're working on with our partners. Right now we're tracking in a more granular way the various activities and key milestones that need to be achieved for us to be in a position to move in September 2018. Regarding those key milestones, those dates, we're not there yet.

For example, with the chamber, they're supposed to be handed over to us on April 3. There are many milestones of that nature that are going to happen in the coming months, and at that point we'll be in a better position, having our data, to assess whether it's feasible.

We're not talking about just the construction. For us it's a project in a holistic fashion. It's construction, integration of technology, training, and testing, and it's all going in parallel. Obviously we're now in a tight time frame because we're at the end of the project, and we need our due diligence exercise to make sure the right decision is made and that you get the right advice based on the right information.

Then with public works we've been looking at alternative scenarios if that date is not open. We're in discussion, obviously. We're planning in parallel for alternative scenarios. Right now there are two that are on the table, which are basically the Christmas break or summer 2019, before the election, but those discussions are ongoing and parallel. We're trying to achieve the move toward the goal of moving September 2018, but definitely it's our view, and our common view, that we do not put the operation of the House at risk.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** The other thing, of course, is that the decisions we make on this can affect the start of the work on Centre Block, obviously, but I don't think the board's going to feel that should cause us to move until we are confident about West Block being ready for us to operate there fully.

I do have a question about your comment about the summer of 2019. It seems to be me that following the election of 2019, assuming that we're in West Block at that point, there's going to be an office of the Speaker, of various House leaders, the whips. Whoever they are, I'm having trouble seeing whether there's a problem that I have to be concerned about because of flux at that time.

**Hon. Candice Bergen:** You know what? You're right. I was thinking there would be MPs' offices, but there won't be MPs' offices, will there?

**A voice:** That's right.

**Hon. Candice Bergen:** Then that's fairly consistent. It would be whoever the House leader is, whoever the.... Yes.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Okay, good.

Is there anybody else?

Go ahead, Ms. Chagger.

**Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons):** I just want to thank you for the reminder that it is we together who make the decisions. I think it is quite beneficial that you are coming to us with updates because of the realities of the situation. I would say it's refreshing to be made aware. I have full confidence in the work you're doing and the expertise you offer.

I would just make a friendly reminder that if we are close to a date for moving furniture in, you will want to test the acoustics, and if that doesn't go well.... I'm not one to debate hypotheticals, by any means, but I just offer a friendly reminder as a member of the team to make sure that we are aware of the need to test acoustics once all the furniture is in. The reality is that it could go overly well or perhaps be somewhat challenging. Thank you.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Okay.

Is that agreed?

We're going to move now to a discussion about the precinct and security aspects of the long-term vision and plan, which requires us to go in camera, and also to discuss some legal matters.

(Motion agreed to)

Before we go in camera, I wonder if there's agreement for a motion as follows:

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Now we'll suspend for a couple of minutes while we go in camera.

That unless otherwise ordered, each member of the board be allowed to have one staff member present from their office at in camera meetings.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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