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# Board of Internal Economy

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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus (Speaker of the House of Commons):** Ladies and gentlemen, I call the meeting to order.

I know one of the members isn't here at the moment, but he'll join us in the next few minutes.

[*English*]

Welcome to this meeting of the Board of Internal Economy. I would like to call this meeting order.

I understand our deputy speaker Chris d'Entremont is joining us online. He'll be available on the screen at the front of the room.

Welcome, all. Thank you for being here today.

[*Translation*]

This is my first meeting as Speaker, so I'll ask that you forgive me in advance for mistakes I'm sure to make during this meeting. I'm counting on the good will of everyone at the table.

I hope to run this meeting efficiently.

[*English*]

I know all of you have the agenda and have had an opportunity to take a look at it and to provide input on it.

Before I begin, I would like—although she is not in the room—to eventually welcome Ms. Gould and Mr. Gerretsen, who are our two new members to the Board of Internal Economy.

With that, Mr. MacKinnon, I understand you've been designated the spokesperson for the government to replace Mr. Holland. Can you confirm that?

**Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Chief Government Whip):** I'm pleased to confirm that.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** That's the first easy decision. Thank you very much, and thank you for joining.

Has everyone taken a look at the minutes from the previous meeting? Are there any corrections or modifications that people would to make?

If not, I see Mr. Julian.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Peter Julian (House Leader of the New Democratic Party):** I have a question about business arising from the previous

meeting, but we should start by adopting the minutes of the previous meeting.

I'll ask my question after we do that.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Can we adopt the minutes of the previous meeting?

It looks like everyone is in agreement.

We'll move on to the second item on the agenda, business arising from the previous meeting.

Mr. Julian, you have the floor.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome to the Board of Internal Economy. I believe Mr. Scheer and I are the longest-serving members here. Mr. Scheer has occupied several positions on this committee throughout his career. I've been here in this corner all along. Regardless, we welcome you and Ms. Gould and Mr. Gerretsen.

I think we'll work well together, as always. We'll make a good team.

My question was about the minutes of the previous meeting and interpretation resources. During our previous meeting, we asked for additional information from the House Administration about interpretation resources. As we all know, this is a critical issue now that we have virtual Parliament.

That information was provided and distributed, and I'd like to know when we'll have a chance to discuss it.

If not today, maybe at the next meeting.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Julian, and for raising the subject well in advance.

We'll be getting more information about this matter. If the committee members want, we can add it to the agenda for the next meeting. At that point, we'll have all the information we need to make an informed decision.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Whip of the Bloc Québécois):** I, too, would like to congratulate you on your election, Mr. Speaker.

You can count on my participation. I expect you've noticed, or perhaps you've been told, that I'm a member who's always seeking good solutions for the common good so we can work well together in a non-partisan way. I would therefore like to officially welcome you.

As you'll see, we're a good group, and we'll work together to ensure good administration in order to support MPs and their teams and the proper operation of the House.

I'm sure you've heard that Mr. Julian and I are very attuned to issues with interpretation. I have some more specific questions to ask you about issues arising from the June 15 minutes about interpretation resources.

When we took a break at the end of the last session, the Administration team was getting ready for the pilot project, which was a solution to make up for the shortage of interpreters.

The pilot project team practised interpreting regular meetings and administrative meetings.

Mr. Speaker, can you tell us if the pilot project will soon be in a position to support interpretation in parliamentary committees?

• (1110)

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Yes, certainly.

I'll ask Ian McDonald to update us on that. Thank you very much, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Mr. McDonald, you have the floor.

**Mr. Ian McDonald (Clerk Assistant, Committees and Legislative Services Directorate, House of Commons):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To answer Mrs. DeBellefeuille's question, we are in the process of testing and simulating the remote interpretation system. Over the past few weeks, we've been recording meetings while they are being held, behind the scenes, with interpreters working remotely. We then either transmit these recordings to our colleagues in the Translation Bureau, or feed them the live stream.

We want to make sure that everything works well and that they're happy with the quality that will be provided. We expect to be ready to test this system in one or two committees, and then integrate it into the interpreting resources over the next few weeks.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** I'd like Mr. McDonald to confirm something. As far as I can see, there are still slots available to hold meetings or special committee sittings.

As whip, I can see that the Monday slots—11 a.m. to 1 p.m., and 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.—are still available. As for the Tuesday slot, it will now be taken up by the Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying. There would also be a slot available on Fridays, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Could Mr. McDonald confirm that this time slot is still available for parliamentary business?

**Mr. Ian McDonald:** This would require confirmation. If there are slots available in the schedule that has been provided to the whips, we can consult with our colleagues to add meetings and ensure that the necessary resources will be provided.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Chair, I'm asking this very specific question because, in some committees, there is talk of holding additional meetings. So, I want to make it clear to the clerks that there are open slots to hold additional meetings.

However, I noticed that today, because of this Board of Internal Economy meeting, the Chair of the Standing Committee on International Trade decided not to convene that committee, as the slot had to be used before today or tomorrow. I don't know whether this was the unanimous decision of this committee or a decision of the chair.

I would like confirmation that the Clerk of the Standing Committee on International Trade has indeed informed members that there are slots available for this meeting.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I'll ask Mr. McDonald to elaborate on this situation.

**Mr. Ian McDonald:** When there's a Board of Internal Economy meeting, normally it's me or my colleague Scott Lemoine who contacts the whips' offices to pass on the confirmation. In this particular case, I don't know if the Clerk of the Standing Committee on International Trade has initiated any further steps or not, but we had already followed up with the whips' offices.

I can inquire and give you more information if I have it.

• (1115)

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Chair, I have one last question.

I assume that, at the November meeting of the Board of Internal Economy, we'll have an updated dashboard, as we're used to getting to inform us of improvements made by the House administration.

According to my empirical observation of the situation and what is reported to me, there has been a marked improvement. We are very pleased that more members are participating in person in committees and in the House and that virtual participation is more rare.

That's the impression we get from our observations, but I think that will be confirmed for us next month. I also know it's thanks to the joint efforts of the whips, the MPs, but also the House administration.

When things are going well, it's worth pointing out. We're quite happy with the way the start of the session went.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Mrs. DeBellefeuille, I'm delighted to hear that.

On the administration side, we're certainly doing all that we can. I'd also like to thank you and your peers from all political parties for your work in good faith, attitude and cooperation in improving the situation and ensuring that all MPs have access to all the resources of the House of Commons to do their job properly.

If there are no further questions or comments on business arising from the previous meeting, we will move on to the third item on the agenda.

I invite Mr. d'Entremont to speak to us about this file.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont (Chair, Working Group on the LTVP and the Centre Block Rehabilitation, House of Commons):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have three presentations to make today.

The first is on the long term vision and plan, or LTVP.

[*English*]

As chair of the LTVP working group, I am here today to update the board on the progress of the Centre Block rehabilitation program and the working group consultations, and to bring forward recommendations to the BOIE for consideration and approval. The following items were reviewed and discussed by the working group over three meetings and an additional one that was held jointly with the Senate LTVP subcommittee on common elements.

Seeing as I am off-site, I do hope there are a number of staff who are sitting at the table as well, so that they can answer some questions as we move along.

In terms of an update, the project site work continues well. Public Services and Procurement Canada, PSPC, has confirmed that the overall project health is in line with the planned approved scope, cost and schedule. The value spent to date on the Centre Block rehabilitation, including the Parliament welcome centre, is \$680 million of the estimated \$4.5 billion to \$5 billion, as of September 15, 2023. The targeted time frame for completion of construction still remains between 2030 and 2031.

Many members of the House of Commons have had the opportunity to see for themselves by participating in tours of the construction site, in which they have viewed the degree of demolition, protection and progress within the historic Centre Block, as well as the excavation for the new Parliament welcome centre. Feedback from members has been very positive, and there certainly has been appreciation and excitement for the project and the ability for members to be engaged.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Currently, the Centre Block demolition and abatement work is 95% completed, targeting completion in January 2024. The exterior masonry conservation work has been completed on the north façade, and the workers have moved to the east façade. Overall, completion of the masonry work for the Centre Block building is approximately 12% completed.

The excavation for the Parliament Welcome Centre is nearing completion and has reached the desired depth. So the bottom has been reached. Bore holes are now being drilled for the geothermal system, with approximately 50 of 92 holes already drilled.

In parallel, the design development has moved on to the next phase of the plan, targeting submission two package for review later this fall. Based on the latest detailed reviews the working group has been involved in, the following recommendations should help the board make decisions.

[*English*]

In recognition of indigenous peoples, members and visitors to Centre Block, it was important to the working group that we take into consideration the very important ceremonies and traditions related to indigeneity that would be occurring in the renovated Centre Block. The current practice allows for smudging and qulliq cere-

monies to be carried out anywhere in the Parliament Buildings with proper notice so that systems and personnel can be made ready to accommodate activities.

In the newly renovated Centre Block and the new Parliament welcome centre, the recommendation is to continue this practice. The two-phase fire alarm system being planned for the buildings would also facilitate this process.

In addition, a proposal for a dedicated space that is purpose-built for smudging and qulliq ceremonies was put forward and advocated for by the Senate. Upon review of several options and a joint discussion with the Senate, the working group agrees that the dedicated space would be a valuable addition to Centre Block. It would be an intimate room designed with indigenous design principles appropriate for its function and significance. We therefore recommend to the BOIE that the dedicated space be approved as an addition to the program and be implemented in the newly created space in the central courtyard, which you will see in the next item. We also ask for endorsement of the overall approach.

[*Translation*]

As the board is aware from previous updates, the centre court above the Hall of Honour is to be infilled on three levels.

While creating approximately 750 square metres in new floor area, the enclosed light court will also assist in achieving project goals on sustainability and accessibility. The approach for the sixth floor has already been endorsed as a shared space for parliamentarians, and further work was required to make a recommendation for the remainder of the space.

Options for the function and allocation of the new space on the fourth and fifth floors of the infill have been reviewed by the working group, as well as discussed jointly with the Senate LTVP Subcommittee.

Numerous options were considered with the common goal of finding the best and most flexible use to support parliamentarians in their future workplace. We have come to an agreement with a joint recommendation for the board's consideration. We are proposing to fully share both levels and to make the new flexible workspace available to all parliamentarians.

We are also proposing that the fourth floor infill be reserved as a dedicated space for smudging and *qulliq* activities. Since it is a new infill, it could be used as a starting point and be designed specifically to host indigenous ceremonies and gatherings. Both the Senate sub-committee and our working group are excited to recommend adding this new space in Centre Block for parliamentarians' use.

[English]

The gallery seating proposal was approved by the board in March 2020. With the approval, it was acknowledged that there has been a significant reduction in the overall number of gallery seats to accommodate accessibility improvements, and the BOIE asked that the project team pursue alternate viewing options for visitors.

Since then, we are happy to report that a very good proposal has been presented. It is a phased approach and introduces some bench seating in the gallery, which allows for the seating capacity to increase significantly. When the Centre Block reopens, it would have most of the north and south galleries with benching. This would increase the gallery seating capacity from the original renovated option of 296 individual seats to a range of 424 to 431 with benches. If further capacity is found to be necessary, the east and west gallery seating could be converted to benches at that time and would allow for up to 455 seats in total, of which we could accommodate up to 24 accessible spaces.

Just so you know, preclosure, the Centre Block gallery seated 538, and West Block currently sits about 334. We'll find this to be an excellent improvement in capacity and accessibility, and we recommend the proposed approach for approval by the board.

● (1125)

[Translation]

In the development of the layouts for Centre Block, the working group has reviewed detailed proposals for the number, location and dimensions of the leadership suites and parliamentary office units.

The offices are distributed over the six floors of Centre Block with leadership suites located in similar areas as in Centre Block pre-closure where possible. New locations have been proposed based on thorough consultations held in late 2022 with each official party's whip, to ensure the most functional options for their party's working style, and with the working group, for the overall approach. The current proposal has done a good job at reconciling everyone's preferences so far. The proposed allocations are shown on slides eight to 13. It is proposed that the remainder of offices be attributed as general parliamentary office units or ministerial suites and allocated as required in a similar manner to pre-closure closer to the Centre Block reopening.

The average size of a parliamentary office unit in this proposal is slightly smaller at 86 square metres than the current board approved standard of 90 square metres. The size of the majority of offices is within a 15% variance. The variance results from the historic condition of the building and trying to maximize the number of offices that can return to the new Centre Block.

The total number of parliamentary office units returning to Centre Block will be 50, including the leadership offices and the Speaker's office. This is approximately 20 less parliamentary office units than prior to Centre Block being closed mostly owing to building upgrades and code compliance, larger two-storey lobbies, and standardization of the parliamentary office unit sizes.

The parliamentary office units will have two entry points, one in the reception and one in the MP's office. Work is being done to

look at more details of the individual office units with respect to acoustics, furniture, accessibility and any requirements that may be needed to support parliamentarians in their workplace. We will return with more information once consultations are completed and work is ready to be presented.

At this stage, unless the Board of Internal Economy feels that further consultation or discussion is required today, or through the party leaders' offices, we recommend that the board approve the number, location and dimensions of the leaders' offices and parliamentary office units presented today, so that the design work can progress.

There is still some flexibility in the allocation of the distribution, given that it will still be a few years before Centre Block is ready for occupancy.

[English]

The working group was briefed on the existing processes and practices with respect to arts and artifacts. The authority for these lies with the Speaker and, for common areas of Centre Block, with both Speakers. The Speaker can also choose to delegate to the working group some items for consideration; hence, we would make recommendations to the BOIE in those instances. The following three process maps were presented for everyone's understanding.

There will be many decisions on this project with respect to arts and artifacts, given the heritage nature of this project and the opportunities that will present themselves in the new Parliament welcome centre. The working group was briefed on some of those elements and the complexities involved in the decisions that will be required. The project team will be putting a list of priority elements together and keeping us abreast of the work in this respect. Should the Speaker feel that further consultation is required, we will be available to assist in that capacity and report further to the board.

● (1130)

[Translation]

In conclusion, the working group on the Long-Term Vision and Plan has been very engaged in a detailed review of the issues and proposed design for Centre Block and the new Parliament Welcome Centre. We continue to be confident that parliamentarians' requirements have been taken into consideration. We are very pleased with the progress and the opportunity to be involved in this project.

The working group anticipates a site visit this fall and will continue to review and consult on the ongoing work. We would expect to be able to provide a design update to the board sometime this winter.

Thank you for listening to me. This was a reconvening of the meeting that was supposed to take place this past spring, so it's nice to finally be able to appear before you.

I am happy to take questions or elaborate on any of the information provided today.

Thank you very much for your attention.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. d'Entremont, for that very skilful and comprehensive presentation.

Some members have questions for you, so let's start with Mr. MacKinnon.

**Hon. Steven MacKinnon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I congratulate you, since this is the first time you've chaired a meeting of our committee.

I would also like to thank Mr. d'Entremont, who is chairing the working group on the long-term vision with a masterful hand. I would also like to acknowledge the presence in the committee of Mr. Wright and Ms. Kulba, who have been working on this project for a long time.

Before asking Mr. Wright a question, I'd like to make a few observations.

Ad hoc decisions do need to be made, and Mr. d'Entremont has just listed a few. I think the same comment has often been made about the spaces reserved for parliamentarians. When the work on the West Block was planned and carried out, all parliamentarians—and I don't want to speak on behalf of the other parties—were somewhat surprised by the lack of space reserved for parliamentarians. We're determined to avoid making the same mistake with Centre Block. This building contains a number of offices reserved for the House administration. I trust that the administration will find it just as comfortable after Centre Block reopens and will then want to enable as many parliamentarians as possible to take up residence in Centre Block.

We have seen the plans for the parliamentary spaces in Centre Block and heard the reasons why there will be fewer spaces reserved for MPs inside Centre Block. We understand the reasons, and I don't think it's worth repeating them today. That said, we're going to keep a very close eye on the use of space and enable as many MPs as possible to have their offices in Centre Block.

That's the comment I wanted to make.

Now I'd like to ask Mr. d'Entremont or Mr. Wright a question.

Could you tell us briefly about the timeline? I'm pleased to note the Auditor General's comments regarding the project and its execution. I'd like to congratulate you, as I know how difficult it is to get a passing grade from the Auditor General. I say well done to the whole team!

I'd like to get Mr. Wright's general comments on the progress of the work, on the budgets, obviously, and on the timeline.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Mr. d'Entremont, I'll leave it to you to decide whether you want to answer this question or whether Mr. Wright is going to answer it.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I think Mr. Wright is in a much better position to answer that question than I am.

**Mr. Rob Wright (Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC)):** Mr. Chair, I thank the member for his question.

First, we continue to make progress in line with the budget and the basic timeline. This is important.

• (1135)

[*English*]

To add a few details to what Deputy Speaker d'Entremont provided, the excavation for the main Parliament welcome centre is completed. We've now installed well more than half of the geothermal wells at the ground level of the Parliament welcome centre, and that's progressing well.

The interior excavation and removal of hazardous material is well over 95% completed. At this point, more than 25 million pounds of asbestos-containing material has been removed from the building.

[*Translation*]

Mr. d'Entremont mentioned the progress on the masonry. The north side is complete, and progress is being made on the east side. Work is now starting on the west side. We're on schedule.

[*English*]

We're now into the most technically challenging part of the project, really the critical path of the project, which is the excavation underneath the Centre Block so that the Parliament welcome centre and the Centre Block can become one facility. To be able to accomplish that is very challenging, because the Centre Block can really only move about five millimetres during the construction. We have to excavate under that. That includes putting the Centre Block on essentially a base of about 800 piles or stilts. That will allow us to do the base isolation for the seismic retrofit for the building as well.

To be able to take away the rock beneath the building, we need to have these piles in place and replace the floor slab at the bottom of the Centre Block. It's very technically challenging, but it's progressing well. Of the 800 piles, we now have over 250 of those installed. The replacement of the level one slab is progressing well. That will allow us to move on to that next stage.

I could perhaps indicate a couple of other things. The heritage restoration work has already begun. As you well know, there are about 22,000 heritage assets within the building. They range from single items like the linen ceiling of the House of Commons chamber to the 53 bells in the Peace Tower or the 35,000 marble tiles in the building—a broad range of heritage assets, each with a conservation strategy.

The restoration and conservation of the stained glass is progressing very well. Of the 53 bells, 22 are in Holland currently being restored. On the heritage lighting, the restoration of that is proceeding very well, as well as the woodwork. Of what you could call a three-phase project, phase one is essentially complete. Phase two is well under way. Phase three is in the future—that's putting in all the new systems, elevators, mechanical, electrical and the final fit-up.

The project is proceeding well, and, as we are here today, decision-making is the key to helping ensure that it continues to proceed well.

**A voice:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**Mr. Rob Wright:** Those are really decisions that the House of Commons takes, at the end of the day, but I can kind of add the colour commentary that lessons learned for the West Block are really being integrated. While it's very true that every one of these projects is a challenge of space and how to allocate that space, I would say that core parliamentary operations are being prioritized in the allocation of space, whether that's providing additional space for the lobbies so that the chamber can function more effectively as more members come online or very much prioritizing offices for members of Parliament in comparison with the administration.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. Wright and Mr. MacKinnon.

Go ahead, Mr. Scheer.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (House Leader of the Official Opposition):** Thanks very much.

I want to ask a few questions just for clarification, because this is the first time I've really had the opportunity to see this since I was Speaker at the front end of this.

Just so I'm crystal clear about the infill in the Centre Block that we're talking about, the ceiling of the Hall of Honour is not being lowered. You're building on top of what's existing there. We're not going to lose that wonderful vaulted experience.

• (1140)

**Mr. Rob Wright:** Thank you very much for the question. It's an important one. As you know well, there are 50 high heritage spaces in the building. Those are being cared for with great attention, I would say, to ensure that the look and feel of these spaces are as they were when members of Parliament left the building at the end of 2018.

I will say, though, that in some cases, there have been alterations to the building, and we're going back to its original heritage element. In the Speaker's office, paint was put over some very beautiful original detailing. We're going back to that. Respect for the heritage is a core value of this project, and we're even trying to go back.

In this particular instance, there will be zero impact to the Hall of Honour, one of the most important spaces in the building, by putting this addition on top of it. The only change you would see is that, if you're walking on the fourth or upper floors, you would see a not very slightly roofline of the Hall of Honour, with some moss growing on it. That will now be infilled, but from the interior of the building, there will be zero impact.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** On some of the diagrams, you can see that there are courtyards internally. Between the Hall of Honour and what would be the exterior wall of the members' lobby on the opposition side, is that going to remain as an open space? Was it ever contemplated to fill that part in too, or to create additional Centre Block office space?

**Mr. Rob Wright:** Thank you very much for the question.

As you pointed out, there are three courtyards in the building. They were previously unused and couldn't even really be accessed. Both the west and the east courtyards will essentially become the roadway for the public to enter into the building. That allows us to avoid taking away parliamentary space for all the elevators, stairwells and code elements that need to come into the building, and we're able to put them in those courtyards that weren't accessed before. The public-facing component of that building is very important, so the public will be able to move in and out of the building without any friction with parliamentary operations.

The centre courtyard, which we were talking about, with the infill over the Hall of Honour.... For the east and the west, we of course are putting the glass roofs over those so that they will become interior spaces. For the courtyard infill, we are not putting a glass roof over the central courtyard. It was envisioned. We discussed it. We moved away from that because we had to put a lot more mechanical equipment in the roofline of Centre Block to modernize it. By not putting a glass roof over the central courtyard, it allowed us to have some different approaches with fresh air intake, which allowed us to lower the roof a little. That was very important for getting approvals from the National Capital Commission and for making sure the project was staying on pace. It was not really a significant loss. There were not really going to be additional offices in that space, so it wasn't an additional loss to parliamentary operations.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** On the indigenous space, do you have any reference points as to how often those types of ceremonies were held in Centre Block prior to the renovation projects? How many times would we be looking at hosting an event like that?

**Ms. Susan Kulba (Director General, Real Property, House of Commons):** We don't have actual figures, but it happens on a frequent basis. It happens everywhere, whether it be in a member's office or in a committee room. The flexibility is really what we're aiming to keep, to be able to do it everywhere, and then specifically create a purpose-built space for ceremonial-type activities.

• (1145)

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** The specificity of it is that, if there's smoke from the ceremony, you have considerations from—

**Ms. Susan Kulba:** Yes, it's due to the fire alarm systems. The building was going to have a two-phase fire alarm system anyway, but it still requires notification through our security services so that they're prepared should an alarm come on and stuff like that. That ceremonial room will help us be able to do it a little more quickly at times and a little less planned.



**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Is the thinking that it would be exclusively for that particular purpose, or from your perspective, would it just be built to accommodate it and then it would be up to the two Speakers and the internal use policy to decide what types of events could be held? I'm just thinking of other types of ceremonies that might have....

**Ms. Susan Kulba:** Exactly.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** I do understand that the board was supposed to have had a meeting and then a subsequent tour, but then the House adjourned last June. A tour was provided for the media, though. There was a Canadian Press report at that time where you outlined many of these changes. I'm just wondering how far down the pipe we are. Is some of this a *fait accompli*, and you've already made plans to order materials and do scheduling, or is it truly that nothing is going to happen unless the board takes the decision today?

**Ms. Susan Kulba:** If I may, it is a board decision. We're in design on these interior decisions. As Rob says, the base building is moving along. They're replacing the floor, and we're soon going to have to lock in all the decisions that affect what's called "core and shell", those base building elements like elevators, washrooms and things like that. We're still in design development, and we're expecting that to still be going on for probably another year. We don't want to make huge changes, but we certainly are here to solicit input and to make sure parliamentarians are satisfied with what's going on.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

Are there any other questions?

Ms. Gould, let me take an opportunity to welcome you as a new member of BOIE.

**Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to be on BOIE.

Thank you very much for the presentation, and you have my apologies. I came in a bit late.

My question follows a bit on Mr. Scheer's just in terms of the designs. For some of us, it's the first time we're seeing them. Thank you for including them. Obviously, this is something that's really important and that is going to impact generations of parliamentarians to come.

I'm just wondering.... I understand that there's going to be a future meeting of the LTVP group. If there's an opportunity for all of us, perhaps, to take these designs away and for the LTVP group to look at this at their next meeting, to perhaps come to the final approval there.... I think that probably some of us would like to spend a bit more time with the designs.

Overall, I think there's a really nice vision there, but we just want a little more time to be able to say, "this works" or "this doesn't work", and to allow that group to look at it. Maybe there's a space where we say that we're in support of the general direction, but give us a bit of time to look at this. Then that group can come back with the final feedback from all of us.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** I'll answer that one quickly, and then I don't know if staff will have an answer to it as well.

The staff, of course, have been working really hard to put some of these together, and we, as the LTVP, are trying to represent things as best we can for the caucuses we represent. I would say that it would probably be a great opportunity to maybe pull the whips and House leaders together—and maybe some members of the LTVP—to go off and do a bit of a tour of Centre Block and take an opportunity to not only see the design...because seeing a design on a hunk of paper is different from actually standing in the space itself and saying, "Okay, here's what we actually have to work with."

I can put that out. We can try to have a broader meeting at some point, and if we have to do it in chunks, each caucus individually or all caucuses together, maybe we can do that as well. I don't mean caucuses. I just mean the House leaders' and whips' offices. I can offer that out there for sure.

• (1150)

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** That's very helpful. I think there's a lot of interest around the table for that.

Next is Mr. Julian.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I offered my welcoming comments to Ms. Gould before she came in.

I'm glad you are with us. We've had a refreshing of the BOIE, and this is important.

I wanted to compliment the staff on the incredible work that's involved. Particularly, I am impressed by the degree to which the heritage character of Centre Block is being preserved. I know that this has basically forced the removal of all of the heritage tiles, all of the components of the building, and then there is rehabilitation and reconstruction. It's an enormous task, but I am quite confident that at the end it will be a building that Canadians can be proud of as the centre of our democracy.

What I'm interested in asking you, Mr. Speaker, and the chair of the LTVP, Mr. d'Entremont, is this: What are the decision points today? It appears from the presentation that there will be a design update that we will be looking at. I certainly agree that we should be going through the building and consulting with the whips, House leaders and caucuses. What are the decision points today, if any, and when would we see a design update brought to the BOIE for discussion and, I'm assuming, approval?

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** Rob, do you want to grab that one?

**Mr. Rob Wright:** Working with the House of Commons, we could bring a design update at any time you would like to receive an update. We could do that in tandem with a site visit or a formal discussion here in the committee room.

On decision-making in particular, I can't emphasize enough the importance of the decision-making. Yes, we are in design, but we are also in construction. The decisions inform the design, which informs the tender packages that go out to construction firms. Although the project continues to track well, we have been taking on some water on the design side and the decision-making. We have a tremendous relationship with the parliamentary partners, with the House and the Senate. Of course, in the Centre Block, decisions have to be made in tandem, not just in this House but with the Senate of Canada as well.

We've projected for 21 key decisions for this parliamentary session to be able to keep on track. I just want to make sure that nobody leaves here with a different understanding that decision-making can be deferred without any impacts.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** If I may, Chris and Rob, if I understand you correctly—and please correct me if I'm wrong—I think there are four decision points that we're looking at. There's one we're seeking consensus for, and I think there's probably one that is the subject of the discussion around the table right now.

On the fourth, if you look at page 12 of our package, there are the smudging and quill practices that we're seeking consensus on. We're seeking consensus on a central courtyard infill. We're also seeking consensus on accessibility, and the one that is more a subject of more discussion around this table is the leadership suites and the POUs. Those are the issues we're having. I know that Mr. Scheer and Madame DeBellefeuille have questions to ask as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Scheer, you have the floor.

[English]

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** I just want to pick up on what my counterpart, the government House leader, said on having a bit of time to digest this and maybe another opportunity to have a site visit.

Instead of coming to a decision today, I would love the opportunity to at least inform my caucus that this is where we're at and maybe even walk them through some of this. In my experience, some members have more or less interest in this type of thing than others, and we haven't really had an opportunity to update them. I would suggest, in a good faith way, to maybe defer a formal decision on these recommendations until we have had the opportunity to inform our caucuses. There may be some feedback, and maybe we'll take up Mr. d'Entremont on his offer of a tour or some kind of site visit.

• (1155)

[Translation]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Mrs. DeBellefeuille, I'm going to answer Mr. Scheer's question.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Okay. My question isn't related to that. Did you want to respond to Mr. Scheer first?

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I would like to answer it.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Very well.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I'd like us to reach a consensus on Mr. Scheer's comments, as well as those that reflect everyone's interests. Maybe we should postpone that decision.

[English]

We could put off having a consensus on this until our next meeting.

Perhaps we can all engage, and, Chris, your committee could work with the different leaders here with the purpose of trying to get that done before the next meeting and having those internal discussions so that we could, hopefully in the best-case scenario, come back with a consensus decision at our next meeting. That way we could allow the good folks whom our decisions will affect, such as construction and the design decisions.... We won't allow them to take on too much more water.

I'm going to get to you in a second just after Madame DeBellefeuille, Karina.

Go ahead, Madame DeBellefeuille.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Are you asking me if I agree with what you just proposed?

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I would like to know if there's a consensus.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Are you asking all members?

I'm a little confused.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Yes, I'm asking all members.

[English]

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I'm not opposed to that. I was just thinking that if the next LTVP meeting is before the next BOIE meeting, we could essentially give it a mandate and authority to approve it once we've had a chance to look at it, go on the tour and receive feedback.

In the interest of not delaying this too long, I don't know what the timing of those two meetings are. If BOIE is meeting first, we can come back to BOIE. As Mr. Scheer was saying, we need a bit of time with the map. The idea of doing a tour is a great idea. I'm comfortable with either of those decisions. In the interest of speed, it's whichever comes first.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I'm informed that the next BOIE meeting is November 9, which might be a little tight. The one following that would be November 23. Perhaps that's the one we can shoot for.

Seeing a nodding of heads would be great.

Ms. Findlay

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (Chief Opposition Whip):** That is in keeping with what I was going to suggest. It's important that we do this at this table. I don't think a few weeks, even if that sounds like three and a half weeks, are fatal, or it shouldn't be, to design decisions. Generally, most of us want to see a well-functioning workspace. The people who will be in administrative leadership in the years to come need the space to do their work.

I don't necessarily agree with my friend, Mr. MacKinnon, that we need to maximize the number of MPs with their offices in Centre Block. You can just walk across the street from many of the offices. I do think that the people who will be tasked with leadership in future Parliaments need the space to do their work, which includes having more space like meeting rooms and boardrooms. That sort of thing does need to be.... I've been over for a tour, but I wasn't given the same access tour as the media received. I was basically only taken into the lobby areas and things like that.

This tour that was given to the media in June sounds very extensive. It included all four floors, and presentations were made about the design to the media with which I have some concerns. I don't want it to appear that somehow promises were made, or suggestions were made, before we've had a chance to discuss it.

I agree with Mr. Scheer that we need time to discuss it, time to go and take a look, and time to ask questions in the space. I think that's important.

• (1200)

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** To that point, I'm going to ensure that we're going to be able to offer the tour for members here, and that it will be a very fulsome tour. I think we will be able to do that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, I ignored you. The floor is yours.

Then it will be Mr. Scheer's turn.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** It would be nicer to say that you forgot me rather than ignored me.

This is the first time we've had such a lengthy discussion since the committee began its work. I imagine that, as the work progresses, the decisions will become clearer and more meaningful for parliamentarians. What we're discussing today is very healthy. I also agree with what is being proposed.

Mr. Chair, I wanted to have some assurance as to the design, about the way the spaces are laid out. I'd like to be reassured about all the precautions that are being taken to ensure that the new Centre Block is accessible to people with reduced mobility, in every respect.

We've already seen large new buildings fail to consider important details such as the height of elevator buttons. These details must be taken into account if Centre Block is to be accessible to people with reduced mobility.

The washroom spaces must also be adapted to new parents. I'm talking about changing tables. These are details, but I imagine, Mr. Chair, that this is driving the planning and design discussions, and that these details are very much present in the discussions of the team that is putting this in place.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I'll ask Mr. d'Entremont to answer that question.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** A lot of work is being done on the accessibility of the building. There's almost a whole subcommittee working on this. We're seeing more and more children in our assembly, so we need to make sure that washrooms and so on are more accessible and family-friendly.

I think Mr. Wright could add a comment on building accessibility.

**Mr. Rob Wright:** Thank you very much for the question.

Sustainability and universal accessibility are important elements of the project, and we are working on them with the House of Commons and the Senate, of course. There is also an accessibility advisory committee and another committee that provides design advice using universal accessibility experts.

[*English*]

We also have an MOU with the new Accessibility Standards Canada office. We've had the chief accessibility officer of Canada in for a site visit and a number of meetings. We are going through a process to achieve a gold standard from the Rick Hansen association, so I think we are taking this quite seriously both inside and outside the building.

The landscape is totally focused on the experience of an individual within the parliamentary precinct being a universal, accessible experience. This goes beyond mobility issues to hearing and sight issues and others. We're working with a broad array of stakeholders in the accessibility advisory committee that we have in place.

I'm happy to come and provide more detail on this at any time, of course, but I think we're on a good path.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. Wright. I would also like to thank all the members for their questions.

We have two more people who wish to speak, but since this is the first time since June that we've had a chance to speak to this issue, I would like to say that I appreciate the tone and tenor of this discussion and the questions that have been asked.

Mr. Scheer, did you want to ask a question? No? Okay.

Ms. Gould, you have the floor.

[*English*]

**Hon. Karina Gould:** I'm sorry. I just wanted to clarify something on the consensus point.

Are we in a position to agree to the first three recommendations?

**A voice:** No.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Go ahead, Mr. Scheer.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** I'd like to clarify what I was proposing.

I know that, for members, there are a couple of intersection points where they may have had opportunities to be aware and to have feedback. However, with the reality of this place, I know we have a lot of people in our caucus who would be hearing this for the first time. We try to avoid presenting a *fait accompli* if there are decision points to be made. Our preference would be that we hold off on this to give each party a chance to bring members up to speed. Then, when we give the go-ahead, you can go ahead knowing that this box has been ticked.

[Translation]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Before I go to Mr. Julian, I want to make sure there's a consensus that by November 23, we're going to try to get some things done. First of all, we need a full visit for the members of the Board of Internal Economy—

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Perhaps you could ask those questions after mine, because I want to ask Mr. d'Entremont, Mr. Wright and Ms. Kulba what the consequences would be of postponing this for about a month. If we come back on November 23, would the fact that the decision isn't made today have any consequences, in your opinion?

I wouldn't have a problem with that at all, but if you think it would be a problem, we should know.

[English]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Mr. Wright, before you answer, I have Mr. d'Entremont, who has his hand up. Perhaps he has some comments and then, Mr. Wright, I'll have you finish off.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** Ultimately, some of these are left over from the spring, so we're working as quickly as we possibly can, knowing that it's hard to get into BOIE over that time.

There may be some things here that we can wait on for a couple of weeks. I understand that we do need to get together for an LTVP meeting to talk to the group.

I'll let Rob take it on, but some of these things have been left over from spring.

**Mr. Rob Wright:** The deputy speaker's exactly right on this. Things are stacking up a bit, so it's about how we work together to deal through this. These decisions are certainly one thing, and I think waiting a month on these decisions is not a big challenge for the project.

My broader concern would be that these are a portion of the decisions that really need to be made by the end of this parliamentary session and that have been stacking up. The challenge, I would say, is more how to do that effectively with everybody doing it in an informed way. That is critical.

Of the 21 decisions we've envisioned for this parliamentary session, 14 concern Centre Block.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I have just a supplementary comment, Mr. Speaker, if I might, to Mr. Wright.

The 21 decisions you're seeing need to be made between now and June.

• (1210)

**Mr. Rob Wright:** It's between now and the end of the parliamentary session in December.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Okay. That's quite a different timeline.

It would seem to me, Mr. Speaker, that we really need to get the information about what those decisions are, particularly the ones that are part of BOIE, because if we're meeting on November 23, that could well be our last meeting before December. It appears to me that we need to either accelerate the number of meetings we have or start making decisions.

I would prefer that we accelerate and perhaps insert an extra BOIE meeting that allows us to catch up on our decision-making process. I completely agree with Ms. Gould and Mr. Scheer that we need to make these decisions based on fact and consultation, but we have only six sitting weeks until we rise in December. If there are nearly two dozen major decisions that need to be made, the BOIE needs to be seized with them and we need to work through them with alacrity.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Before I go back to Mr. d'Entremont, I would like to pretend that I'm so reactive in this chair that we can make this happen. I just want to let members know that three meetings of BOIE are scheduled for before the end of this session: on November 9, November 23 and December 7.

I think the fundamental point you're trying to make, the essential point you're trying to make, Mr. Julian, is the right point. We need to have a better understanding of the number of decisions that we need to be making so that, in this period we have now, before we take a tour and consult our caucuses, we can have a fair sense of what we need to do before the Christmas break. That way we can make sure the folks who are doing the construction have the decisions made in time, and we can do that efficiently and cost-efficiently for the general public.

We'll go to Mr. d'Entremont first and then Mr. MacKinnon.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** I just want to say that over the next week or so, if there's something that the caucuses need to be presented, we'd be more than happy to provide them that. I know Rob and the gang and I would be more than happy to come to the caucuses to make quick presentations on it as well, just to help make this go a little bit faster. Hopefully, amongst the offices, we'll be able to set up another meeting off-site so that we can get some of these things talked about so that we'll all be ready for that meeting in November.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** That's very helpful.

Mr. MacKinnon, go ahead.

[Translation]

**Hon. Steven MacKinnon:** Mr. Chair, a fine collaboration has been established, and I give Mr. d'Entremont full credit for his role in chairing of the long-term vision and plan working group.

I would simply like to politely remind all my colleagues that the governance of this project is essential to its success. The decisions that all parliamentarians are invited to participate in are also essential to the progress of the project. We like to comment on timelines and budgets, but I remind you that the primary sources of cost overruns or time overruns are non-ad hoc decisions.

It's a huge project. This is one of the largest projects in Canadian history involving a heritage building. Our political parties are all represented on the working group. If there needs to be more communication between the representatives of the parties who sit on the task force and those who are here at the Board of Internal Economy, perhaps we should proceed in that way.

I remind you that these decisions are not partisan. They were made in the interest of the project, in the interest of this building, which is a symbol of our country's democracy, and in the interest of all parliamentarians.

We have also established good co-operation with our peers, our counterparts in the other place, who are also invited to comment and take part in this project, and all parliamentarians on the task force have developed good relations with their counterparts in the Senate.

I just want to say that, as the saying goes:

• (1215)

[*English*]

time is money and time is time.

[*Translation*]

These are decisions that the task force made in May.

Mr. d'Entremont put it very politely: We cannot make people or projects wait. For example, if you're renovating your house, and a decision is made in May, but you wait until November to have your project approved, there will be additional costs. The same is true for this project.

I therefore urge all my colleagues to ensure that this project moves forward and that the task force representatives are able to communicate their decisions freely to all parliamentarians and their colleagues.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you for that reminder, Mr. MacKinnon.

In the discussions we've had today, we've all made a public commitment to make sure that we're able to meet the deadline so that we can make the decisions necessary to meet the budgets that are allocated for this monumental project.

I see no further questions.

I would like to thank Mr. d'Entremont, Mr. Wright and Ms. Kulba, as well as their entire team.

We can now move on to the next item on the agenda.

[*English*]

We'll move to our Joint Interparliamentary Council report.

Mr. d'Entremont, you're back in the hot seat.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** We started talking about a \$3-billion project, or a \$5-billion or \$6-billion project, and now we're going to just a few hundred thousand dollars here.

[*Translation*]

As co-chair of the Joint Interparliamentary Council, or JIC, I am pleased to present the annual report of parliamentary associations on their activities and expenditures for the 2022-23 fiscal year.

With me is Jeremy LeBlanc, the clerk of the council. His team is responsible for producing this report.

I would like to give you a general overview of the work of the associations during this period, as described in this report, after which I would be pleased to answer your questions.

In March 2022, the JIC lifted the moratorium on hosting foreign delegations and travelling abroad, allowing parliamentarians to attend in-person events for the first time since the pandemic began.

In 2020-21 and 2021-22, associations' activities were virtual and therefore there was very little spending on activities.

The 2019-20 fiscal year was an election year so, to properly situate the fiscal year covered by the report before you, it may be more appropriate to make comparisons between last year and the 2018-19 fiscal year, the most recent year without a pandemic or election.

[*English*]

In 2022-23 parliamentary associations undertook 61 travel activities in 31 different countries, and the Canadian Parliament welcomed 26 delegations from abroad. Compared to the 2018-19 fiscal year, we see a reduction of about 25% in the number of travel activities. In addition, the number of participants in these activities is approximately 15% lower compared to 2018-19, although the level of spending is about equal.

We can thus see the impact of inflation in the travel sector on associations' level of activity. The total budget for parliamentary associations for 2023 was just over \$4.3 million, the same amount as the previous five fiscal years.

Over \$1.5 million was spent on membership fees for multilateral associations last year. Indeed, we can see an upward trend in contribution expenditures since those of the last year represent an increase of almost \$100,000 compared to the previous fiscal year and an increase of approximately \$150,000 compared to 2018-19. This variation can be explained by a slight increase in membership fee allocations to Canada, and since invoices are received in foreign countries these expenses may vary based on exchange rate fluctuations.

[Translation]

Total expenditures related to parliamentary association activities in 2022-23 represent a budget utilization rate of 88%, leaving a balance of \$502,051 at the end of the year. However, it is important to note that part of the envelope, almost \$178,000, had been set aside for the planning of international conferences that Canada is hosting. The balance of surplus is largely due to delegates cancelling their participation in activities at the last minute or not obtaining permission to travel.

This year, parliamentary associations did not hold annual general meetings, as decided by the JIC, due to difficulties in accessing the resources needed for meetings.

• (1220)

[English]

We have seen a significant reduction in the number of virtual and hybrid meetings last year, due to the end of the moratorium. However, virtual activities have continued to be an important part of the work of associations in addition to travel and hosting delegations in Canada, despite current resource constraints that limit virtual or hybrid meetings that could be held simultaneously in the parliamentary precinct, often to the detriment of the associations. Translation is an issue that we'll continue to look at.

This is a very brief summary of the activities of the associations, but there is much more detail in the report. I remind you that following the presentation.... Actually I'm going to move right into it because I know we're starting to get pressed for time. I'll take questions after this.

I'm also here to seek your approval for a temporary increase of the council's budgetary envelope for the fiscal years 2023-24 and 2024-25. Associations play an important role in international relations and help to advance Canadian views and interests. Parliamentarians can exert a degree of influence over decisions taken in other countries and in multilateral bodies. However, in order to do so effectively, Canada requires adequate representation at activities.

Associations have had to reduce the size of the delegation in addition to reducing the number of activities they can undertake within the confines of the existing budget. This directly impacts the number of votes Canada may be allocated at international annual meetings and limits the number of contacts Canadian parliamentarians may have. It also can prevent Canadian delegates from participating in certain committees and, therefore, fully carrying out their mandates.

As mentioned a few minutes ago during my presentation of the annual report, the total budgetary envelope for parliamentary associations was just over \$4.3 million in 2023, an amount that has not increased since 2017-18.

[Translation]

In the winter of 2022, a council subcommittee recommended that an analysis be conducted to assess whether the current budgetary envelope was adequate to sustain an appropriate level of activity. The details of this analysis are before you in this submission.

The analysis shows that with the same level of funding as the 2018-19 fiscal year, this past fiscal year, associations participated in 25% fewer travel activities and the number of participants in these activities was approximately 15% lower compared to 2018-19.

Additionally, since then, we have noted a total increase of 12.4% for annual contributions paid by multilateral associations, and we expect these fees will continue to rise. As the contributions are paid by the council's budgetary envelope, this leaves less funding available to distribute for association activities. While we all may wish for these contributions to be lower, it is essential that Canadian delegates be present and active at international meetings in order to influence budgetary decisions and encourage fiscal restraint.

[English]

Costs per activity have also been steadily increasing with the average cost per activity having increased 18% since 2018-19. This is consistent with the impact of inflation specifically on the cost of travel. The majority of association activity expenses are transportation costs, and we have seen an even higher rate of inflation for air travel at 27.2%.

While we continue to maximize opportunities for virtual participation when feasible, there has been a return to in-person activities worldwide, and Canada must play an active role in those activities.

The council is seeking a temporary increase to the parliamentary associations' budgetary envelope in the amount of \$430,050 for both the 2023-24 and the 2024-25 fiscal years. This would be shared according to the usual thirty-seventy split from the Senate and the House. This is not new funding being sought, but rather it's from within existing budgets in the Senate and the House of Commons.

Thank you.

Jeremy and I are happy to answer any questions you might have.

• (1225)

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you very much, Mr. d'Entremont.

I am opening it up for questions. I already have Ms. Findlay and Mr. Scheer on the speaking list. Just signal to me if you would like to speak as well.

Ms. Findlay.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I note that although we're talking about access and about cut-backs on the numbers and delegations, etc., in the last fiscal year, April 2022 through to March 2023, parliamentary association members travelled abroad for events 16 times in the U.S., five in France, four in the United Kingdom, three in Egypt, two in Belgium, two times to Cambodia, two to Greenland, two to Poland, two to Rwanda, two to Tahiti, two to Thailand, once to Albania, Austria, Bahrain, Colombia, Denmark, Ghana, Greece, Japan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Morocco, Norway, Senegal, Spain and Tunisia.

In a world where we, here, as parliamentarians have moved to hybrid Parliaments, we're saying that all that travel is necessary worldwide for parliamentary associations. I, personally, am not inclined to increase the budget for that. Like in any times of constraint, which we are in, I understand there are increased costs, but perhaps the way to deal with it is not to be travelling quite as much or with quite as many. Those are a lot of trips, and when the comment is made that we influence what's happening in those countries and their decisions, I'm not sure that is completely accurate or to what extent an increase of the kind being sought is justified.

I don't think travel has really been very constrained through parliamentary associations. Do we really need to have our delegations in smaller locations particularly like Tahiti twice in the same fiscal year? I'm not convinced of that. I better understand things like, leading the way on expenditures, as I understand it, is the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association, where we've had a lot of activity with respect to NATO. We are an important member of NATO. We have a ground war in Europe. Some of those make more sense to me than some of this other travel, so I am not inclined to agree with an increase.

Thanks.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** If I may answer just a little bit on the virtual side of things. Time zone challenges, when you're dealing with other countries, are difficult. When I participated in APF issues, sometimes we met with people from Vietnam all the way to here, and it was always difficult to find a spot where we could actually participate. Sometimes, that meant early mornings and late nights for many of the delegations who were participating in it.

When it comes to where those groups are actually going, we don't make that decision on their behalf. We don't necessarily approve or disapprove it. We give them a budget envelope to deal with. We're just trying to echo back the challenges that we're hearing for those associations as they travel. Of course, there are many members from our different caucuses as well.

Jeremy, I don't know if you have another comment on that when it comes to the added costs. When you have 27% more cost in air travel, we are already cutting the number of members who are actually able to participate in some of those things. There has been a fair cut. Yes, they seem to be travelling, but not everybody is getting to participate like they have in the past.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I know you have a supplementary, Ms. Findlay. Perhaps that would be helpful. Then, if Mr. LeBlanc would like to respond, that would be great.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** If I could just respond to that, then maybe you could respond.

You're speaking to a member of Parliament from British Columbia. I understand about time zones. I deal with them every week. Sometimes I have meetings at three and four in the morning in B.C. to deal with an Ottawa matter. I get that. To me, that is not persuasive.

Also, it may be that not as many people are travelling as before, but maybe that needs to be cut back even more, given the realities of our economy.

• (1230)

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Sure.

Mr. d'Entremont, did you want to go, or Mr. LeBlanc?

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** No, I think I'll let Jeremy. I would call him the guru when it comes to putting the budgets together. I trust him immensely on this one.

**Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc (Clerk Assistant and Director General, International and Interparliamentary Affairs):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is true that there have been a fair number of association activities that have taken place since the pandemic ended. It is substantially lower than the number of activities that most associations would have undertaken before the pandemic: a cut of about 25%. What that's meant for many of the associations is not being able to fully participate in the activities, especially at multilateral bodies.

You mentioned the example of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association. For that association, the reduced budget has meant they are not able to participate in meetings of certain committees that Canada is a member of. They've had to reduce the size of the delegations they send to those meetings, which means that Canada doesn't have as many votes at the assembly as it might otherwise. That's true of the IPU, the CPA, the CAPF or a number of those other associations.

You also mentioned the number of countries and some of the places that have been visited. In many of those cases, those are the spots that are hosting multilateral conferences, as opposed to areas where we're going to have a bilateral visit in that country. There are a number that are bilateral visits. In some cases, though, the site of the meeting is in Rwanda. It's not necessarily a Canada-Rwanda activity, but it's a meeting of the IPU with hundreds of countries that happens to be taking place in Rwanda this year. It may take place somewhere else in the following year.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. LeBlanc.

I have three other people on the list so far. I have Mr. Scheer, Mr. Julian and Mr. MacKinnon.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** I wanted to ask a quick question and then make a comment.

You said that this requested increase could be funded out of existing House of Commons and, I presume, Senate administration budgets.

Have you already identified where those savings could be made?

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** I think Jeremy could answer that one as well.

**Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc:** Yes, I think I'm probably best placed to answer.

There are funds that are lapsed by both the Senate and House administration each year. There's a portion that's lapsed in the funding for members' office budgets that is not fully utilized, for example. There's also often funding that could be lapsed in the committees envelope, for example, or other envelopes that are available for the administration.

Our finance friends could give a more precise example of the amount that's funded each year. Certainly, we're comfortable that the \$400,000 that's being sought here could be found within those existing budgets that would otherwise lapse, rather than requesting supplementary funding in order to provide that.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** When those budgets or those envelopes lapse, is that money essentially returned back to the consolidated revenue fund?

**Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc:** That's right.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** So it goes back to taxpayers.

For the reasons that my colleague mentioned, I can't support this increase either. I understand the important work that these associations do. I believe in our parliamentary democracy. It gives wide perspective, from all political parties, when these conferences and bilateral visits occur.

In the current climate, I just don't believe that we can support this type of increase. I think there are a lot more priorities that the Government of Canada collectively and Parliament collectively have to focus on in terms of findings savings and efficiencies for taxpayers to bring down inflation. We had confirmation from the Governor of the Bank of Canada just yesterday that government spending has an impact on inflation. It helps to drive it up.

I think any little thing we can do, any big thing, anything of any shape or size, in whatever scope that we can do, to help ease that pressure should be our focus.

I can't support the recommendation.

**Hon. Greg Ferguson:** Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I have some difficulty with the recommendation to increase the budgets. I note that we saw with the JIC over the last four years a 74% usage rate of the budget—a 35%, a 34% and an 88%. It seems to me that essentially we're not getting a full use of the existing budget. I think it's fair to say that Canadians are really struggling to make ends meet. They're being gouged when they go to grocery

stores or get a fill-up. They're being gouged by the financialization of housing. They're really struggling.

I can't see a justification to increase the JIC budget, particularly when the budget over the last four years has not been fully used. It doesn't seem to make sense to increase the budget when the existing usage rate has been so low. I understand we're coming out of the pandemic, but we hopefully as well have had other ways of getting things done.

I certainly agree that international meetings can often be very important. I think we need to ensure that we are fully using the existing budget, but I can't support increasing that.

I note the proposal talks about a 30% increase, I believe, from the Senate side. I note that the Senate pickup on international travel seems to be often higher—40% to 50%. I note that with some concern about the existing evaluation between the House of Commons spending and the Senate spending on this. I'm not sure that the Senate is spending proportionally to the uptake by senators—who aren't elected but appointed—and the amount of travel that they actually do.

I can't support this initiative. I hope that the JIC can look at other ways of ensuring that we are represented, but also at fully using the existing budget that is allocated and that has not been fully used at any point in the last five years.

Thank you.

• (1235)

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** If I may just make a quick comment there, when it comes to the utilization rate it's always been difficult. The way we try to budget for the associations is to give them a *premier versement* in the beginning and then see who has trips planned or challenges in their budgets for the final part of the year. What's happening really is that, at the end of the year, since they don't know what their budgets are, they can't book in time, and they really can't spend some of the monies that they have sitting in the association. It's been a bit of a challenge. It's kind of the way that we budget.

Maybe we could allow them to budget full amounts and hope that they don't go over them, but that's been part of our challenge with JIC—to hold them to the budget that is actually available to them.

Senators get to travel a little more than MPs, because of pairing and other issues. If an MP can't go, it opens up a slot for the Senate, so that's a long-standing practice within those associations as well.

I don't know if Jeremy has a little more to add to that.

**Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc:** Thank you, Mr. d'Entremont.

On the utilization rate, I would point out that two of those years were pandemic years, when there was no travel at all, so of course the utilization rate would have been much lower in those years.



It is true that there are challenges in getting that utilization rate up to 100%. In many cases, it has to do either with trips that are cancelled or delegates' participation that's cancelled at the last minute with whips. If each association has two members on a particular delegation whose participation is cancelled at the last minute—that happens from time to time, and that's a reality of a minority government—then they are not spending their full budget, but perhaps there is not enough funding left over for them to undertake a new activity with the \$10,000 or \$15,000 that may be saved by the cancellation that comes in those sorts of activities.

One of the solutions that's been discussed at the JIC in the past is the idea of potentially overallocating the envelope, of taking the \$2.7 million that's available for activities and, rather than just apportioning that \$2.7 million between the 13 associations, perhaps allocating \$3 million among the 13 associations, with the idea that their utilization rate will make it such that the spending in the end might be \$2.7 million. It allows associations perhaps a bit more flexibility to be able to fully spend their budgets by taking that approach.

It's an approach that has been suggested in the past, one that the Senate, if I'm honest, has not been terribly comfortable with, but that is an avenue that potentially could be explored. It means having some degree of comfort that, if the risk that's taken in that over-allocation proves to be riskier and associations go past that allocation—so if we allocate \$3 million and they do spend \$3 million—then we're over the size of the total envelope. However, if we allocate \$3 million and it means that they end up spending \$2.65 million of the \$2.7 million, then that could be an idea. That's something the JIC can explore.

• (1240)

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you very much.

We have a final comment from Mr. MacKinnon.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Steven MacKinnon:** It's clear, Mr. Chair, that there will be no consensus on this point.

I'd just like to remind my colleagues that budget constraints are reducing Canada's place in the world, and therefore in NATO, of course, as well as in the African Union and the International Inter-Parliamentary Union, where there is currently a Liberal member, a Conservative member, an NDP member, but unfortunately, no Bloc Québécois member. These trips are always undertaken on a multi-party basis. These people always adopt the philosophy that partisanship ends where the ocean begins and that Canada, although represented in a multi-partisan way, is also represented in a non-partisan way.

I regret that, because of a certain vision, the government is willing to sacrifice Canada's representation in those bodies. Indeed, leaving room for others also means leaving it in international bodies and forums. I'm very sorry about that.

Obviously, there will be no consensus.

Clearly, this is going to hurt the smaller parties in the House of Commons. However, we are going to go along and give in to the committee's views on the budget.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** So there is dissent. There is no consensus on increasing the budget as proposed at tab 4 of this presentation.

However, I believe that there could be a consensus on the reallocation of budgets on an ad hoc, temporary basis, as Mr. d'Entremont proposed at tab 5.

As a result, there is no consensus to increase the overall budget.

Is there a consensus or not on the second part relating to the reallocation of funds?

[*English*]

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** I'm sorry. Do you mind if I just ask for a clarification?

I was under the impression that the entire 10% increase was to be funded through reallocations from existing budgets. Is that right?

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Yes, you are right.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Then, it's no.

**An hon. member:** I hear a no.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Where there may be consensus, I don't know, is that the JIC ensure that it uses the budget that's already allocated, that 88% usage rate of last year. If the JIC wants to look at that, it's certainly within its purview.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You referred to the recommendation on page 3 of the presentation.

It contains the wording of the recommendation. In that recommendation, there is no mention of the reallocation of funds. Reading it, I see that it recommends that we accept the temporary increase in the budget envelope. So this isn't a permanent increase, but a temporary increase for the fiscal year ending March 31 and for the next year. It says that 30% of the funding will be allocated to the House administration and that 70% will be allocated to the Senate.

Basically, the temporary funding for the other fiscal year will have to be redistributed.

What I don't understand is your second question. What I understood from the discussions is that there is no consensus on the recommendation.

What exactly are you proposing?

• (1245)

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I made a mistake, Mrs. DeBellefeuille, and I apologize.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Okay.

I'm somewhat sensitive to the discussions I've heard. My colleague from the Conservative Party, for whom I have a great deal of respect, is asking for reductions in delegations abroad in order to reduce fees. Obviously, this implies that the Bloc Québécois and the NDP could be excluded from missions.

I want to say that missions currently respect the proportion of the House, which is democratically elected. It's true that delegations are already reduced, while allowing members of the parties to be represented. That said, if there is no consensus, we could continue our discussions on the other elements that I think urgently need to be discussed.

We could get back to our current discussion if the Joint Interparliamentary Council made a counter-proposal that we could reach a consensus on.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** That's an excellent suggestion, Mrs. DeBellefeuille. It's certainly a good way to go.

Mr. LeBlanc and Mr. d'Entremont, thank you for your presentation.

The sixth item on the agenda is the constituency office leasing model for the British Columbia Legislative Assembly.

I invite Mr. St George and his team to make their presentation.

[*English*]

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I was the one who asked for this item, and I am conscious of the time. Were there any decisions made in camera that need to be taken today?

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you for that. Indeed there were decisions that need to be taken today.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** May I suggest, since I was the one who originated the matter...The work is excellent. I want to compliment Mr. St George and his team. May I suggest that we simply receive the document at this point, and potentially come back to it at a future meeting.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you for that suggestion. I see a consensus around the table for that.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank Mr. St George and his team for their work.

Colleagues, we will suspend for a few minutes while we go in camera.

Again, thank you for your participation, and thank you to the general public [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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