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Chair

The Honourable Shawn Murphy

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• (0900)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.)): I will at this time call the meeting to order. Welcome, everyone. *Bienvenue.*

This meeting, colleagues, I think is a very important one. It's to deal with the state of repair, the governance, the rehabilitation plans concerning the seven or eight buildings that comprise the parliamentary precinct, and of course including the building we're in now. These, as everyone knows, are very historic and traditional sites and form part of the heritage of this country. They're home to approximately a million visitors a year, and they're very much a symbol of our system of parliamentary democracy.

The Auditor General's office has completed the performance report on the governance, the rehabilitation plans, the availability of resources dealing with the total renovation of these buildings. The committee has had a tour, which we thank the Deputy Minister of Public Works and Government Services for organizing.

Today the committee is going to hear from the Auditor General on this performance report, and we're very pleased to have with us this morning the Auditor General, Sheila Fraser. She's accompanied by Sylvain Ricard, Assistant Auditor General, and Edward Wood, principal.

From the Department of Public Works and Government Services, the committee is pleased to welcome the deputy minister and accounting officer, François Guimont. He is accompanied by Mr. Robert Wright, the project executive director, major crown projects, parliamentary precinct branch. Most of us met Mr. Wright last week, who gave us the tour of the buildings.

We certainly thank you very much for that, Mr. Wright.

So without any further delay, I'm going to call upon the Auditor General for her opening remarks.

Ms. Sheila Fraser (Auditor General of Canada, Office of the Auditor General of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair. We thank you for this opportunity to meet with the committee to discuss chapter 3 of our 2010 spring report, entitled "Rehabilitating the Parliament Buildings".

As you mentioned, I am accompanied today by Sylvain Ricard, Assistant Auditor General, and Ted Wood, principal, who are responsible for this work.

We had two objectives in conducting this audit: first, to examine if Public Works and Government Services Canada, within its mandate and in cooperation with others, had put in place a sound governance

framework for the overall rehabilitation project, and secondly, to look at whether the department had sound project management practices for rehabilitating the Parliament Buildings.

The importance of the buildings on the Hill cannot be overstated. The Parliament Buildings are the centrepiece of our national political life. The site, the architectural style, and the building layout were designed to convey an image of ceremony and order. With time, the buildings and the grounds have become a symbol of Canada's parliamentary democracy and the federal government.

The Parliament Buildings have been in need of major repairs and upgrading for over two decades. Through its assessment of building conditions, Public Works has identified serious risks that could affect the continued operations of Parliament. The heritage character of some buildings is also threatened. Furthermore, the Senate and the House of Commons have indicated that their current and future needs cannot be met by the buildings in their present state.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, the governance arrangements are hindering rehabilitation work while the buildings continue to deteriorate.

We found that decision making and accountability are fragmented. We also found that the current arrangements do not allow for reaching consensus on priorities and committing resources to implement long-term plans.

These weaknesses, which cannot be attributed to any organization alone, result in delays in making decisions and implementing projects, and contribute to increasing project costs and risks.

We believe that unless governance is fixed, only limited progress will be made on the rehabilitation of the Parliament buildings. Three critical issues need to be dealt with: accountability relationships, long-term planning to rehabilitate buildings and meet the requirements of their main users; and stable and long-term funding to complete planned work.

The ultimate purpose of these buildings is to support Parliament's unique operations. In our view, the Parliament buildings are a special purpose space and the control of and responsibility for these buildings need to rest with Parliament.

• (0905)

[English]

Mr. Chair, we have recommended that the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, in cooperation with the principal players, should develop and propose mechanisms to ensure that the responsibility and accountability for the Parliament Buildings rest with the Senate and the House of Commons.

On the question of project management, we noted that the rehabilitation projects on Parliament Hill are unique and complex. We found that once rehabilitation projects were agreed to, the department had in place generally sound management practices. These practices took into account the unique nature of this work, such as the heritage character of the buildings, their age, and their condition.

[Translation]

We are pleased to report that the department acknowledges the recommendation and has undertaken, within its mandate and authorities, to work with other stakeholders to strengthen governance.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, the longstanding governance problem, which we and others have raised over many years, has to be resolved.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my opening remarks. We would be pleased to answer any questions.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Fraser.

We're now going to hear from Mr. François Guimont, the Deputy Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

[Translation]

Mr. François Guimont (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am very pleased to be here to discuss chapter three of the Auditor General's recent report on Rehabilitating the Parliament Buildings.

Mr. Chair, I would like to thank you and your fellow committee members for taking the time to visit some of the project sites last week. These visits present wonderful opportunities to get a first-hand view of the important work my department is carrying out on your behalf. Mr. Chair, I would like to underline how much it meant to my staff to have the opportunity to showcase these important projects to committee members.

During the tour, we responded to a broad array of questions and I found it be a rich exchange. As a follow-up we made a commitment to respond to two specific questions. Mr. Chair, I would like to take the opportunity to table the responses before the committee today.

As the official custodian of the heritage buildings and grounds on Parliament Hill, Public Works and Government Services Canada is responsible for their care, upkeep, structural integrity and appearance; the management of major renovations and new construction; and the provision of general-purpose accommodation. It carries out

these functions in consultation with its parliamentary partners, that is, with the Senate, the House of Commons and the Library of Parliament.

[English]

As you know, under the long-term vision and plan for the parliamentary precinct, a multi-faceted program of work has been undertaken to upgrade and restore the three main Parliament buildings.

Our initial five-year program of work from 2007–12 first focused on creating interim accommodation to allow the main parliamentary buildings to be emptied and their functions to be relocated off the Hill, to carry out urgent repairs. I am pleased to report that 13 of the 15 projects in this phase are complete, and the remaining two will be finished in 2010. All of these projects were completed on budget and on schedule, and several have realized substantial time and cost savings. As a result, we will be ready to empty the West Block this summer, four years ahead of schedule. Furthermore, full rehabilitation of the southeast tower was completed in the summer of 2008, and rehabilitation of the north towers is now under way.

To keep deterioration in check, the long-term vision and plan also include a preventative maintenance program called the recapitalization program. It addresses critical elements that can't wait until major renovation projects begin. This will allow future work to be undertaken efficiently and cost-effectively.

We were very pleased that the Auditor General's report recognized Public Works and Government Services' strong results in project management and program delivery. The AG report noted that project management practices are generally sound. The department places due importance on protecting heritage character. The department has a reasonable approach to collecting information on building conditions. A process is in place to collect information on client needs. The impact on the environment is taken into account. The department has a costing methodology in place. The rehabilitation projects benefit from lessons learned.

The Auditor General also noted that the federal heritage buildings review office has commended the West Block project as showing great respect for the heritage character of the building.

While the AG recognized the good work we do in Public Works and Government Services, she also drew attention to the issue of governance.

• (0910)

[Translation]

The department acknowledges the Auditor General's recommendation regarding where responsibility and accountability for the Parliament buildings should rest. The department takes this issue seriously.

[English]

First, I have assigned a senior assistant deputy minister in Public Works to lead this important file. That was done last Friday. Second, we are studying and engaging other countries and provinces to get an understanding of their governance models. This analysis was drawn from a review of literature, as well as discussions and meetings between the department and, for instance, the Sergeant at Arms in the United Kingdom, and more recently, the architect of the Capitol in the United States.

Third, Madame Aloisi, the new assistant deputy minister responsible for governance, will be engaging central agencies and the Department of Justice over the summer to discuss governance matters in detail. This will inform the development of options and discussions with parliamentary partners this coming fall and winter.

In closing, I feel we are at a crossroads for setting a long-term path for the rehabilitation of the parliamentary precinct.

I will be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Guimont.

We're going to go now to the first round, with Mr. Lee, for seven minutes.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This meeting has gotten off to a fairly good start. Our basic problem as members of Parliament is that everybody owns this place but nobody owns the place. The Auditor General's view has been very helpful in at least crystallizing an awareness that there isn't an actual landlord. There might be something on paper, but nobody really carries the can on the place. There's no minister whose responsibility is to ensure that this place is the way it should be.

I appreciate the position the Minister of Public Works and the Deputy Minister of Public Works are in, that they own only a piece of this. They said it very clearly: they manage the renovation. They're managers. They're imported. They make sure the lawns are cut. Public Works does a lot of things, but Parliament has never said to the Minister of Public Works, you're in charge of the whole place, the meeting rooms and everything. It looks as though that has been a continuing problem for 140 years.

So let's look at the framework issue the Auditor General has pointed out. You just made some comments, Monsieur Guimont, about trying to renovate the framework that would manage the Hill. Could you shine some more light on that? Does your department have an objective, or has an objective been expressed by those non-landlords who are organizing this possible new framework for the management, ownership, landlording, husbandry, whatever it is of the Hill? It's not caretaking.

Mr. François Guimont: Thank you for the question.

I would say as a first point that Public Works and Government Services Canada is the custodian of the buildings, so we own the buildings and the grounds. We're not alone, frankly. The National Capital Commission has a role. The parliamentary partners have a role to play. It's their institution.

I think Madam Fraser, in her report, gives a very good analysis of the shared accountability, which in itself can be a challenge. It is noted in her report—and I certainly agree with this—that the department, as custodian of the buildings, works under the government system, under the executive branch, and more directly, in our case, as we carry out investments, under Treasury Board rules.

Ours is not the only department; all departments are like that. Yet the requirements set forth by the House of Commons and the Senate are theirs, and they don't follow exactly the same rules. You have your rules quite logically. I think this has been picked up over the years, as you rightly point out.

For a number of years people have noticed that there is shared accountability. It's not that no one is necessarily accountable at the end of the day; it's shared accountability, and with that come challenges.

More specifically, on the issue of governance and what we may be looking at—

● (0915)

Mr. Derek Lee: Could I just interrupt?

Okay, governance is the big picture here, but you said “we own the buildings”. This is, with respect, a meaningless statement. By “we”, you probably meant Public Works, or did you mean the crown?

Mr. François Guimont: I would say the crown vests the ownership in Public Works as a department. So it is ultimately—

Mr. Derek Lee: So if you really owned them, wouldn't you take care of them? I don't expect you to account for 140 years of history, but if you say that you own them, then I'm going to look to you. But I'm not going to look to you, because I know you don't really own them. Canadians own them.

I'm sorry, I've diverted a little bit. We'll go back to the framework.

Mr. François Guimont: It's fair. I understand your point, and I agree with that. Ultimately, we're custodians of these buildings on behalf of Canadians. It's the same way when we carry out investments, we use taxpayers' money.

Going back to the point of governance, not to be too long about this, I think the first step, quite logically, is to look at the models out there, and there are quite a few where the ownership has been vested into the legislative branch of government. We have examples of that; it's been documented. I think Madam Fraser notes that, whether it's in the U.K., Australia, New Zealand, or frankly even in a republican-type system like the United States, it's a bit of the same principle. So in order for one to manage correctly and set projects, the accountability should be in one area. It doesn't mean that it excludes discussions—far from it—but having one area where the accountability is squarely rooted is certainly helping decision-making in long-term investments.

As we look at the options—we're going to be looking at the various models—we are going to look at elements related to ownership, the point you make. What should the new entity look like, structurally speaking? Who should be part of that entity, the decision-making functions related to governance? Leadership—who should be in charge? Funding elements: how would that be thought through, how would that be challenged, how would that be set in place?

There's the issue of transparency. When we look at the models, most of them have a relationship with an auditor general equivalent, so there's transparency in how decisions are made, value for money, and things of that nature. On oversight, it's the same thing. And delivery and implementation: how will that be carried out?

So in a governance model, I'm not saying these are the only elements that should be considered, but it's quite important to be able to go through these elements as options are being put forward and considered.

Mr. Derek Lee: Okay.

From the Auditor General's perspective, as she looks at it, that's the missing piece of the model, the mechanism, the organism that governs the place.

I will say, Mr. Chair, that on our trip the other day to look at the renovation of the West Block and the other precincts, it looked very well managed. I have no complaints about that. But I'm really interested in the evolution of these series of boardroom meetings and slide shows that's going to produce a framework. That's what the Auditor General says we need, and that's what MPs and senators need to make sure the place is properly taken care of in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lee.

We're going to now move to Madame Faillie.

• (0920)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faillie (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Last week's visit was much appreciated. I do nonetheless have a couple of questions concerning the management of the project. Of course you must have learned something from your experiences renovating the Library of Parliament. Unless I'm mistaken, a substantial portion of the Library renovation work was contracted out. Which firm is currently overseeing the renovations under way on Parliament Hill?

Mr. François Guimont: A number of different firms are working on the Hill. In the case of the Library of Parliament—Mr. Wright will answer that question—the project was managed by the firm of the original architect, Mr. Fuller. More specifically, the work was carried out by PCL, Fuller and Pomerleau.

We contract with different firms for different projects. Briefly, when we go forward with a project proposal, we call for bids to ensure the best possible price and the best possible work. So then, different firms may be retained. That said, these were the three firms hired to oversee the work at the Library of Parliament.

Ms. Meili Faillie: What is the status of the renovations currently under way to the West Block and Centre Block?

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Wright (Project Executive Director, Major Crown Projects, Parliamentary Precinct Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): As far as contractors for those projects, those contracts have not been awarded to date, so we don't have contracts in place for the major rehabilitation. On the north tower project that we visited last week, Verreault Construction is the general contractor who is conducting the work on the north tower rehabilitation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faillie: Generally speaking, how much time does it take to complete these arrangements, and subsequently to award the contract? How far along are you in preparing the tender process?

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Wright: For the major rehabilitation of the West Block, for example, we will be going forward in the fall for new government authorities to be able to go out for tender to begin the major rehabilitation. We expect to be able to start the project this fall, and then tranche by tranche we will go out for additional contracts. To be able to accelerate the project as quickly as possible, we have the project broken up into parallel streams of activities that are based on our discussions with expert consultants in the scheduling and costing areas to make sure we have probity from both a fiscal and a timeline perspective.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faillie: According to the OAG, analyses produced in 2009 came to significantly different conclusions as to the announced timing of the construction work.

Since the OAG's report was produced in 2009—and I refer you to paragraph 3.41—the department has hired a consulting firm to provide an independent review of the analyses and conclusions respecting costs, as well as of the timing of the construction work.

What is the current status of the independent review and what does the review indicate about the risks, costs and timing of the construction work?

Paragraphs 3.19 and 3.41 further note that two studies were conducted by consulting firms, the first in 2006 and the second in 2009.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Wright: This paragraph refers to a specific building called the West Terrace Pavilion, which is in the long-term vision and plan. This is a critical facility as part of attaining sufficient capacity on the Hill for the operations of Parliament. The issue is about timing and sequencing of the construction of this new facility. As the Auditor General's report has underlined, these buildings are facing significant deterioration, and this deterioration needs to be addressed in the here and now. Our focus at present is on rehabilitating the West Block and the East Block so that we can get to the Centre Block—

• (0925)

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: What is the current status of the review?

[English]

Mr. Robert Wright: This assessment, this third-party review by Deloitte, has been completed. The finding of the third-party review is that accelerating the construction of the West Terrace Pavilion would be a high-risk strategy, in the sense that it could cause delays to the rehabilitation of the core historic parliamentary buildings from a time perspective and from a space perspective. As you saw last week, we are relocating facilities off of the Hill. The West Terrace Pavilion does not have enough capacity to be a replacement for that interim relocation strategy, so from both a timing and a space perspective, it was deemed a high-risk strategy.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: You have discounted that option for the time being.

Mr. Robert Wright: Yes, for now.

Ms. Meili Faille: But it's still something that you might consider.

Mr. Robert Wright: Yes.

Ms. Meili Faille: Paragraph 3.10 on page 9 refers to a report entitled "A New Approach to Governance of the Parliamentary Precinct" that was produced five years ago, in 2005.

A task force found that there were some major shortcomings at the time in the area of governance. I'm wondering if it would be possible to see that report.

I'd like to know how much money Public Works and Government Services Canada spent on this task force in order to get an idea of the extent of these shortcomings. Also, why were the task force's recommendations not implemented?

Mr. François Guimont: Mr. Chair, we will arrange to get a copy of the report to the committee. As far as costs are concerned, perhaps my colleague here has some idea of what it cost to draw up this report.

[English]

Mr. Robert Wright: In fact, the document was essentially done internally with the Senate, the House of Commons, the Library of Parliament, and Public Works participation. It was really a task force of the administration of these bodies, so other than the printing costs, there were no specific costs attached to the production of that report.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Faille.

Go ahead, Mr. Christopherson, for seven minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you all for your attendance today.

First, I cast my voice with those who want to acknowledge and appreciate the tour. That was really very helpful. Aside from being fun—it was kind of neat to get in there and look around—it really was very impressive. I want to say that I can see why the Auditor General, when she talks about this overall, the actual work being done, when it's hands-on, it's really quality work. I think we were all

impressed. It looked like an archeological dig, with every single stone and rock marked. We were talking to some of the artisans there, and they're really into it and understand that this is like being allowed to restore art, which basically it is.

However, what we're dealing with is the governance issue. We don't need to go too far in the report or even beyond today's remarks to realize that for a long time, this has been the issue. The governance framework in place is inadequate to guide the overall rehabilitation of the Parliament Buildings, says the Auditor General's report. Acknowledging another task force that was done internally in 2005, there are key flaws in the current structure.

Three examples from Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, all of them lead back to the legislative branch, which is what we would call Parliament, being ultimately responsible.

Another one, page 11: "We found that the governance framework in place is inadequate to guide the rehabilitation of the Parliament buildings".

Lastly, just today—I could go on, there's more in there—this is the strongest yet: in the second-last paragraph of the AG's presentation this morning, "In conclusion, Mr. Chair, the longstanding governance problem, which we and others have raised over many years, has to be resolved."

There's not much more language left that the Auditor General can use and still remain within the confines of parliamentary language to say this needs to be done.

Then what do I get? I see the deputy minister come in and offer me a report with three steps that he's taken. They're all very well and fine. My problem is that it just continues the problem because his department stays responsible for deciding what the governance is going to be.

It seems to me, Chair, that right from the get-go, the parliamentarians ought to be responsible for this. That's what's being recommended. Ultimately, we take ownership. If it doesn't go right, we take the heat. Ultimately, there's a clear path for decision-making and representation. All the arguments are made there.

My problem, Deputy, is that what you have recommended keeps us in the same problem, in that it's being led by the executive side, and it's the legislative side that should be in control.

I'm at a loss. I don't expect you to be able to respond in a way that's going to satisfy me, Deputy. You've done what you needed to do. But I say to my colleagues, I really believe we've got to grab control of this. I think the deputy has made some great recommendations, but I think they ought to be led by parliamentarians right from the get-go. If we're going to look at what is going to be the governance structure, then shouldn't the review of the options and the ultimate recommendation of what is going to be put in place be done by the very people who are going to be assuming that responsibility?

Again, this is not a governance issue. On this one, we are united. This is about us as parliamentarians and our responsibility to represent our constituents in taking care of these buildings. We've got enough evidence that we need to change the way it's being done, including the recommendations in front of us today from the deputy, and we've got to seize control of this thing and make it work. If it doesn't work, then we're accountable. That's how the system works.

But right now, there's no accountability. You've got different players playing different roles. At the end of the day, those same partners don't have equal say in the funding presentations that are made to government. It all happens as if it were a regular government funding program, and it's not.

Auditor General, your thoughts? I usually ask questions with some idea of where you're going ahead of time. You may disagree. You may feel it's fine with the deputy, but I see it as more of the same.

● (0930)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Actually, I am quite pleased with the progress that is being made. I think the reality is that government, or the minister and government, will have to do the preparatory work and do the analysis of options, and quite frankly, this is something that has not happened before. So the fact that the deputy is actually coming here to say that he is going to do these options and present them in the fall I think is a big step forward.

I also think we have to be careful not to underestimate the complexity of the structure that will be put in place. There are several...there is the House, there is the Senate, there is government. It will not be easy to do this, so I think there needs to be a good analysis done of structures that exist elsewhere, to try to propose a model that could work here in the Canadian context. But obviously parliamentarians have to be involved in this. The deputy can speak for himself, but I think what he is proposing is the first step, to do some of that legwork, to do some of the analysis, and then bring an option that then can be studied by parliamentarians. Quite frankly, if Parliament were to take it on, my question is who would do it? Are you going to give it to the two clerks?

So let somebody do the legwork on it, and I think there's a technical-legal issue too that currently Public Works is the custodian. So there will have to be changes to whatever—I don't know if it's laws—to transfer custodianship to Parliament.

So I say I think progress is being made.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, I hear you, but I've got to tell you, it's not often I disagree with you, but I'm not convinced, to tell you the truth. I think the same work can be done and it can go back to a group of parliamentarians. The difficulty with the current process is who we hold accountable if we're not satisfied with this process or any part of it. It's the minister, at the end of the day, and that's the very problem.

So to me the solution is still keeping us within the problem, and I don't know how we break out. You know, human nature.... I've been in government. There are vested interests that are protecting territory, just by human nature, but we're out of the loop. A lot of times, you know, he who pays the piper calls the tune, much like when you're doing consultancy and things like that.

I hear you, and I suspect the government will be relieved that you're on that side of it, because it feels more comfortable going with a recommendation like this, and if it has your blessing, that gives it a lot more comfort. My concern, however, is that it still remains in the hands of the government, by virtue of its being in the hands of the deputy, and we don't have any direction over deputies.

So if there's a guarantee, Chair, or if the deputy can in some way build it in that parliamentarians from all caucuses can play a role right from the get-go, that would probably raise my comfort level. It's just that solving the governance problem by using the current governance structure to come up with the recommendations to change the structure seems to me to be less than efficient. But we'll see.

● (0935)

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Well, what I heard from the deputy—and we should probably let the deputy explain—is that they will be doing the analysis of options, but obviously Public Works cannot make the decision alone, and parliamentarians from both houses will have to be involved in this, clearly.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Christopherson

Mr. Guimont, go ahead, please.

Mr. François Guimont: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it. I won't be too long on this.

Essentially, what we intend to do is provide ourselves—people collectively—with quality analysis. I've looked at the model elsewhere in the world, and it's complicated. I'll tell you, professionally speaking, I would rather walk correctly than run on this, and get it right. We are going to look at this. We are going to do it correctly. Options and analysis will be put forward, so you can see the suite of possibilities that exist, and people will be involved. It's not going to be done in a vacuum. You will see the possibilities in the fall, after we do this over the summer.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Christopherson.

We're now going to move to Mr. Saxton. Mr. Saxton, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to our witnesses for being here today.

I'd also like to thank Mr. Guimont and Mr. Wright for taking us on a very insightful tour of the parliamentary precinct last week. I think we all learned a lot about the extent, the enormous extent, of the repairs and renovations that have to take place. I think it was most remarkable to see the West Block especially, and the work that's being done right there. My colleague Mr. Christopherson talked about the artisans. It truly is a work of art that's taking place.

My first question is for the Auditor General, and it's also regarding the governance issue. You've done an audit. You've looked at the governance structure. There are other examples in other countries that have been mentioned—the United States, the United Kingdom. I'm wondering if you could share with us a model that you've seen that perhaps would be the best model we would look at for a governance structure.

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Thank you.

We felt we had gone pretty far in actually recommending that custodianship be devolved back to Parliament. I would really hesitate to recommend any particular model. I think this will be a complex issue to determine and it will have to be tailored to the Canadian experience. But clearly, there will have to be some body, entity, or organization established that can bring together the House of Commons and the Senate as a minimum to determine the priorities going forward and to look after the plans and do the funding requests, and all of that.

As to how it will actually be structured, I think it is very important to give due consideration to that and then to make the best choice for our circumstances here.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Thank you very much.

My next question is for the Deputy Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

It has been mentioned that the project so far, in this phase, is on budget and on schedule and that there have been substantial time savings and cost savings. I just want to remark that the West Block, I think, is four years ahead of the original schedule, which is quite remarkable.

Can you share with us and explain to the committee how you were able to achieve those cost and time savings so far?

Mr. François Guimont: Thank you for the question.

I'll give one example and then refer specifically to the West Block.

It's interesting that when we do long-term planning on the precinct, there are two elements that come to mind to me as the accounting officer and as I deal with my colleagues from the precinct. Sometimes there are surprises, and sometimes surprises can create delays or cost increments. You've seen the deterioration of the West Block.

When you start to do work, if something is unstable you have to deal with it. That may create a bit of a time lapse and cost increments. We have provisions for that: we have contingency provisions set aside. That's the first point. As I said, there will be surprises and we have to be ready for them.

With the Library of Parliament, that is exactly what happened. Yet, on the other hand, sometimes an opportunity arises that can allow us to go faster. That's what happened with what we refer as "1 Wellington", the former photography museum next to the Château Laurier. It became available. This was not planned; it just became available. The NCC asked if we were interested. We looked at it and spoke to our parliamentary partners and we said that we could do committee rooms in there. We got the money to do that from the fiscal year. It was not planned. That move saved two years, in the

sense that instead of doing a two-step process in the rehabilitation of the West Block, we can now empty it totally. We don't have to keep committee rooms operating in the West Block.

So the West Block will be empty as of this fall, and we're going to be able to work at it in one shot. It's structurally easier engineering-wise and in terms of health and safety, and cost as well. Time is money. That is an instance of having surprises sometimes. On the other hand, we have opportunities. When they present themselves, we have to be nimble enough, with the cooperation of our colleagues, to jump and take a step, as we did.

The other example I will give, Mr. Chairman, is the relocation of the kitchen. As you know, the West Block had a kitchen for providing food for parliamentary buildings. We have, essentially through tender, developed an off-site kitchen. It's not too far away, but it's not as close as it used to be in the West Block.

If I remember, Mr. Wright, the realization from the project was something like 20% below budget simply from good management. Anyway, you will correct me if need be. We had good estimates. The work was done correctly and the kitchen is fully and seamlessly operational for members of Parliament.

Could you add to this, please?

• (0940)

Mr. Robert Wright: In addition to being approximately 20% under budget, as the deputy mentioned, it was also approximately six months ahead of schedule. Within a two-year project schedule, that's a significant time saving.

We are always looking for opportunities, Mr. Chair, to accelerate the projects. As we discussed in the tour last week, I think there are a number of examples that can be underlined, and the deputy has certainly emphasized a couple of key ones.

Mr. François Guimont: If I may add briefly, Mr. Chairman, in the case of the kitchen, it is interesting to note that when we build a new facility, it's easier to have fewer surprises. It is a new facility with new equipment. So the project management characteristics are a bit easier to handle, if you wish. When we do renovations, I will say again that you can have surprises despite the best plans. When we do our planning, the engineering firms that are working with us do intrusive testing to make sure that their estimates are as good as they can be. Despite that, there will be further surprises.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Thank you.

My next question is also for the deputy minister. It's regarding the costing methodology the department has in place. Can you explain a little bit more about that methodology and how it's helped you to save money so far?

Mr. François Guimont: I'll let Mr. Wright answer this.

Mr. Robert Wright: Mr. Chair, it's a very good question. I think we've developed a very robust costing methodology over the past few years. Essentially, in costing as well as scheduling we try to triangulate everything, which means we have our own in-house experts. We also rely on other sections of Public Works, the centre of expertise, to provide us with expert advice, and then we bring on specific cost specialists or scheduling specialists. Then we also work with our prime consultants. We ensure that we have a number of points, and if they are all lining up, we feel very comfortable with the costs or the schedule. It keeps everybody sharp. It's a challenge function to ourselves. We replicate both our costing and our scheduling every month. So every single month we produce a new schedule and new cost estimates for all of our projects.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Saxton.

I just have a point arising from that, if I can bring it up now to you, Mr. Guimont. It has been indicated that this is a massive rehabilitation project that's under way now. You do have a lot of momentum, and it's obvious that once your department starts, it certainly does have the wherewithal and the capacity to do a good job. But my concern is the appropriations process. West Block will be emptied as of the first of September, I believe, and you're going to start a massive rehabilitation project on that building. Do you presently have the authorities and the appropriations to start the project, and if so, do you have enough appropriations to finish the project? As you know and as everyone in this room knows, you're at the whims of higher-ups, the Treasury Board, and you could have a memo that you're being subject to a 10% or 20% cutback and you have to look for savings.

This is a major project. You're in the process of emptying West Block, which in and of itself is a major project. Do you have the appropriations to start and to finish this major project?

• (0945)

Mr. François Guimont: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your question.

As far as West Block goes, we are where we are, in the sense that the most important thing is being able to empty West Block and by the end of August relocate everything to La Promenade Building. As I say this, as we speak now, we have authority to go to Treasury Board, as you noted. We plan to do that in September to get proper funding to carry through what I would call the second phase of the West Block, which essentially means structurally putting the West Block in place, emptying it, and doing asbestos abatement. We have to empty everything and also do the so-called infill for the Chamber, as we noted to you. So yes, we have the authority to go to Treasury Board.

There will be a challenge. That's quite normal. And frankly, that is true for not only projects in the precinct. For any project for which we go to the board to seek what we call preliminary project approval, there's a challenge function, which I welcome, frankly. Our estimates should be sound and solid. We go through the challenge function. We get the money. We proceed. In the past, the moneys we obtained were sufficient to carry through with the projects.

The Chair: But your answer to my question was that you have the authority to go to Treasury Board. You do not have the spending authority to either start this project or finish the project.

Mr. François Guimont: When we receive approval from Treasury Board, we will at that time have the money to proceed with that phase of the West Block.

The Chair: But you're not at Treasury Board. You don't know right now whether you're going to receive that approval.

Mr. François Guimont: No. I understand the point, Mr. Chairman. We do what we need to do in Treasury Board submissions. Until Treasury Board ministers approve, I don't have an approval. But we have a program of work to carry through for the West Block plus other repairs in that second phase we're now moving into.

The Chair: This is no reflection on you, Mr. Deputy, but you can see my point. You are emptying the West Block, and as of today's date you do not have any spending authority to start the next stage of this process. Whether or not you will receive that spending authority or receive it in a decreased amount depends entirely on another body, another institution here in Ottawa, which you really have no control over, right?

Mr. François Guimont: I don't control Treasury Board, indeed. But Mr. Wright is also noting here, and I'll let him speak, that we have authority to proceed with demolition and asbestos.

I'll let Mr. Wright say a few words on this.

Mr. Robert Wright: As the deputy correctly pointed out, we are going to Treasury Board in the fall to get a large authority for the West Block. But we do already have authority from Treasury Board to proceed with 40% of the demolition and abatement work. We do not have to wait for Treasury Board authority to be able to initiate the project. That's a significant amount of work, so there will be no delays, no impact from going to Treasury Board moving forward. This is the traditional way we do move forward with projects.

The Chair: Okay.

We'll now start the second round.

Mr. Lee, you have five minutes.

Mr. Derek Lee: Thank you.

I want to get back to this framework issue, away from the bricks and mortar again.

I just want to ask, which minister is leading this? It may not be Public Works. Who's going to lead this? Is the Board of Internal Economy involved? Is the procedure and House affairs committee involved? Has there been a person designated to actually be in charge of developing and creating the new governance framework? Is there some person, some minister? It should be a minister, perhaps, or maybe Mr. Christopherson. I don't know.

Can you tell me the state of that art, the organization chart on that governance structure renovation?

Mr. François Guimont: Yes. The answer is threefold. My minister is responsible for carrying out the analysis and developing various options. I am therefore the accounting officer supporting the minister. That line is direct. The senior assistant deputy minister given the responsibility on Friday, Madame Aloisi, will be the point person, the senior officer, working with central agencies.

I single out the department for what Madam Fraser said. From a distance, it looks simple; when we get into the details, it's going to get a bit complicated. It's the nature of the beast. That's the line of accountability. These are the players.

To your question, as we finalize, as we prepare this analysis and look at the various pros and cons and all the elements, we will then turn to our parliamentary partners we have dealt with in the past. But that's going to be subject to you. We've been dealing with the clerks as well as the librarian. They would be the points of entry. But then it is for the clerks to deal with BOIE, COIE, etc. That would be the way we would normally look at this.

● (0950)

Mr. Derek Lee: Okay, I think that's a good answer. There's a particular person who is in charge and delegated this responsibility.

Mr. François Guimont: Yes, senior.

Mr. Derek Lee: He or she will move the ball along in accordance with the plan.

Mr. François Guimont: Yes.

Mr. Derek Lee: That's great.

Do you have within Public Works an identifiable branch or envelope that actually manages the Parliament Hill precinct?

Mr. François Guimont: Yes, we do.

When I joined the department in 2007, the parliamentary precinct used to be under the responsibility of our real property branch, under an ADM. I recognized the importance of having a senior person, full-time, in charge of the precinct. At that time, I deployed Madame Aloisi as the ADM, the assistant deputy minister responsible for the precinct. I severed the precinct from the real property branch. They have their autonomy, focus, and direct access to me. That's the framework.

Mr. Derek Lee: Well, it's nice to know we're not just another piece of real estate. That's good.

At some point, if there were a chance in the organization chart, you would move that branch—it may not be a branch, but an envelope of the public service—over to a new governance structure. It's something you could just move out or move sideways, is it?

Mr. François Guimont: These things could be looked at in the context of the analysis.

Mr. Derek Lee: Okay.

Looking at the chart of the Hill renovations, it looks like we're going to have a temporary chamber for the House of Commons in the West Block. It also looks like we're going to have a temporary chamber built for the Senate in the East Block. There are going to be two temporary chambers constructed. Is that correct?

Mr. François Guimont: Yes, that's the plan.

Ultimately, when the Centre Block renovations will be carried out these chambers that are temporary in nature would be reverting back to committee rooms.

Mr. Derek Lee: In terms of taxpayers' dollars, the fact that the Senate and the House don't want to share a temporary chamber is not going to be that wasteful—is that a good way to put it?

I would have thought that if you have to move the House and Senate out and you build a temporary chamber for them, they could have in sequence shared the same chamber. When you're doing the House of Commons, the MPs move out and then they move back into their chamber. Then the senators would move into that same temporary chamber while the Senate chamber is being renovated. That's not what's going to happen, I gather. Are you saying that's not wasteful?

Mr. François Guimont: I'll ask Mr. Wright to answer this. There may be an issue about sequencing that creates the need for the two chambers.

Mr. Robert Wright: Thank you. It is a good question.

I would underline two key points. One is part of the long-term vision and plan. There is a need for additional committee rooms, so that's in the plan. These will be converted into permanent committee rooms on the Hill, where there is limited space. In that sense, it is a use of prime real estate.

The other issue is this we've studied several times whether the Centre Block could be done in two phases. The analysis back from experts each and every time has been to do it in one shot, as the deputy termed it earlier for the West Block. That is, to relocate both the House functions and the Senate functions out of the Centre Block at the same time so that we will have full access to the Centre Block to do the rehabilitation.

Mr. Derek Lee: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lee.

Mr. Kramp, five minutes.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I wish to go to the governance question as well, but before I do, let me first say that I really am pleased and confident as a member of Parliament that Public Works appears to have a real sound handle on the work you're doing right now. You seem to follow that old saying: you plan your work and you work your plan. You do it very well. Honestly, I think every member who has both visited and had the opportunity to see what you do should feel very confident that Canadian taxpayers' dollars are being spent wisely, based on the responsibilities you have now.

I still have some serious concerns, however, about the ultimate authority. I'll get to that in a second.

In our tour, I just had one thought. It was a bit of a fascinating topic to me. We were having a discussion with regard to protecting the heritage and the history versus the actual structural capacity and the soundness of new building. The statement was made that basically Centre Block is not a true heritage building. Of course with the destruction a lot of it is new construction. It's built structurally sound, with the facade of a heritage context. So we basically appear to have, and certainly do have, the feeling and reality of what we are here.

I asked what the savings would be if we did the same thing to West Block, knowing full well that it's a structural governance building. It's not a facade building. It's a sound building. If we were to reconstruct with new technology and then put the heritage facade per se back on it, we would potentially cure both things. We'd save ourselves significant money, perhaps. You suggested maybe even \$300 million. Of course, with the construction, the efficiencies, and the effectiveness, we would still potentially not lose our heritage factor.

Is it a viable option? Is it something we should consider?

This takes me right back to our first decision of governance and ultimate authority. Can you imagine the discussion on that? We have, of course, the House of Commons, the Senate, the library, and the capital commission. We have Heritage Canada. We have anybody else who wishes to get in on the argument too. Somebody has to make an ultimate decision here. There has to be an ultimate authority. We seem to lack that. In Madam Fraser's statement, the governance arrangements are hindering....

Well, we all would love to see a clear definition. I don't want to use the comparison of the private sector, but the private sector might have a project that is worth billions. Somebody is going to make a decision. That person or group or board will be accountable. Here, who makes the ultimate decision? Should it be, potentially, Parliament, as Mr. Christopherson stated? I would hate to see that decision politicized, because this is something for the long haul. I would fear that. Obviously, we are parliamentarians who are responsible to the public at that time. So there are a lot of discussions here.

Madam Fraser, I still want to go back to you. Do you still not feel that somehow, some way we need to move to a single authority so that we can get on with having a sense of real responsibility?

• (0955)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Thank you.

We've clearly stated that the governance issue is problematic. We've seen examples of and pointed to delays in the project because people can't agree on priorities. It would be nice to have a single authority, but there will always be other people who have either influence or control over this.

When we talk about heritage buildings, there will always be the heritage assessors, or whatever, who will do that. There's the funding, which has to come from government, so Treasury Board will always have a role. But creating a body—however that will be structured, and the custodianship goes back to Parliament—will eliminate some of the difficulties in the current model.

So it would help to have this body, however it is structured, that would be more accountable for the decisions that are made, and would negotiate directly with Treasury Board for the funding. That would eliminate some of the disagreements that have occurred over the years.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Thank you very much. I certainly hope this committee will seriously consider a governance model and make a recommendation in our report going forward.

Mr. Wright, on the hypothetical scenario I threw out on the façade versus the structural thing and potential savings, is it potentially worth discussing? Is it something that either a committee or a particular segment of government could suggest? Obviously we can't contravene the acts of Parliament on preservation of heritage, etc., but is there a little bit of grass we can cut on this issue? What are your thoughts?

• (1000)

Mr. Robert Wright: I would first emphasize that the West Block, the East Block, and the Library of Parliament are structural load-bearing buildings and very well built. In restoring them, we've assessed and analyzed very deeply how they were built. We have a deeper recognition of how well they were constructed the first time. So I'm not so sure there would be any benefit to structural integrity by moving to a steel-frame building, like the 20th-century Centre Block, which is also a classified heritage building. I think it could get very murky whether there would be any cost savings or not.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kramp.

[*Translation*]

You have five minutes, Mr. Carrier.

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Thank you.

Good morning, Ms. Fraser, Mr. Guimont.

I want to thank Ms. Fraser for addressing the problem of the management of the renovation work. You mentioned that the renovations being undertaken are unique and complex.

In a previous life, I was a project manager. I handled some complex projects, including the complete renovation of a court building that housed a detention facility, courtrooms and a registry office, without any interruption to day-to-day operations. Like the House of Commons, a court house cannot shut down. If the department plans the work and estimates the timeline properly, then it is possible to carry out some complex renovations and to come in on budget and on schedule.

As you pointed out, I think the problem has to do with governance. I'm not questioning the competence of PWGSC officials. I'm sure they have all the qualified engineers and personnel to get the job done, but no doubt they are caught up in government red tape. You mentioned that asbestos abatement in the West Block cannot be completed with the current appropriations. So then, another request for appropriations must be made to Treasury Board and in my opinion, that's an issue in terms of project management.

Attempts were made to reassure us earlier by saying that the budget needed to complete the work would likely be approved. However, until that happens, doubts persist and no work is done. Given the tender process, if the work is interrupted for even the briefest period of time, unless these are planned stoppages, costs automatically pile up.

I see that PWGSC wants to make an effort to resolve this governance issue. Yet, when I hear the department say that it wants to examine the governance framework in place in other provinces and countries, it brings to mind our committee. When committees are struck to look into a problem, often it takes a while for them to report back. I'm surprised that we have not progressed beyond this point.

Federal departments are generally perceived to be well structured and well organized. However, studies are still suggested to bring about some improvements. We need to move faster than that. If a department lacks the required skill, then it needs to be found quickly. I believe that is the mandate that has been assigned to you.

When I worked as a project manager, I was accustomed to seeing the full work order, along with the cost estimate. Obviously, projects are carried out with partners, with other departments and with Parliament, for instance, but someone is in charge. Someone is responsible for seeing that the project is completed on time. My question is for Mr. Guimont. Can you outline the project parameters for me? Is there an overall work completion schedule?

I've been an MP for six years and there has been talk about shutting down the West Block for the past three or four years. The building has never in fact been closed, but this year, it looks like there is some truth to that rumour. You mentioned in your opening remarks that you were four years ahead of schedule. That's quite a feat, but I'm not sure it's a good thing. To be either four years ahead of or four years behind schedule is indicative of a scheduling or planning problem.

Were you caught in a bind that prevented you from carrying out the project, or were you obliged to rely on Treasury Board's good will and to tackle the work in stages? Please enlighten me.

●(1005)

Mr. François Guimont: First of all, I have to say that the support we are getting to move forward with the renovations to the West Block is excellent. It truly is. There is much work to be done, of course, but we have received the necessary authorities and appropriations to start the project. That's the first point I want to make.

Before emptying out the West Block, we had to find an alternative location south of Wellington Street to house former West Block employees. Renovations to La Promenade building were complex. It took a while to find accommodation for that building's employees. Then we had to deal with Library of Parliament staff. We signed leases for office space in relatively close proximity to the Hill, for practical reasons. Phase one involved relocating employees and finding suitable office space for them. Phase two consisted in the actual renovations to La Promenade building, once the premises had been vacated.

While it might seem that the work at the West Block has dragged on for quite a while, we couldn't simply empty the building before we had found alternate accommodation for staff.

In phase one, we emptied out La Promenade and in phase two, we completed the renovation work. Now we can concentrate on the West Block. That explains why it has taken us so long. Had there been a simpler solution, we would have resorted to it. And I might add that our parliamentary colleagues were in favour of the multi-phased approach that I have just described to you. They recognized that this was necessary in order to move ahead with the West Block renovations.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

We're now going to move to Mr. Young. Mr. Young, you have five minutes.

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I want to note that this is a non-partisan issue. No one has suggested in any way that Treasury Board would not fund these important projects. The buildings are architectural art. They're unique buildings. In fact, they're living history. They're the residences of our democracy. We're all responsible—everybody here, everybody in Parliament—for the stewardship of the place in a non-partisan way.

I want to note that when I first arrived here, I discovered the incredible amount of activity in these buildings. I was amazed to have two houses, the Senate and the House of Commons, sit, once they start, throughout the day, with no break for lunch and no other breaks whatever. There are over 40 standing committees, plus special committees, that could be sitting at any time, any week, and sometimes twice a week. And every word is translated into French and English. So the activity is phenomenal.

On the other hand, we've been so focused on the issues that affect the lives of Canadians, there's a huge amount of deferred maintenance in the place. This has been happening for decades. We're in the position where we have to renovate our house while we live here, which in my town is known as a nightmare scenario; for us, it's at least staying in the same precinct.

Last week, when we had the tour—I thank you for the tour—I saw that it was more than renovating: people have to take down the building block by block, mark the stones, and then rebuild the building. In fact, these are artisans. They're not just builders. It's living art. They're rebuilding the residences of our democracy. That's expensive, and we understand that.

All that said, Mr. Guimont, I do have a question on timeframes. It's a long time to renovate or rebuild a building. Is there any chance, do you think, that you'll be ahead of schedule, or that you can do it a little bit faster in the West Block, for example?

Mr. François Guimont: I'll let Mr. Wright answer this question, please.

Mr. Terence Young: Okay.

Mr. Robert Wright: As I indicated earlier, we are always looking for opportunities to accelerate work. We break the work packages, if you will, into the type of work that can be done in parallel so that we can accelerate, if possible, the work and make the best use of the artisanal capacity, which can be limited in the industry.

While we are committed to meeting the 2018 deadline for the West Block, our hope is that we will be able to do it quicker.

• (1010)

Mr. Terence Young: So the answer is “maybe”. That's a great answer; I appreciate that.

To Madam Fraser, you've pointed out the issues and your concerns regarding governance. We've heard from the deputy that 13 of the 15 projects—amazingly—finished on time and on budget. Once again, when I compare it with the private sector, it's an outstanding record.

Did you say that your concerns are allayed now, or that you still have concerns? Or are you just happy with the progress on the governance side?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Thank you.

As we mentioned in the report, we didn't have major concerns around the project management. In fact, the report was actually quite positive about project management.

We had two major concerns. One concern is on the governance, that the governance needs to be resolved. This is an issue that's been identified for some 25 years now, so it's time to fix that issue. The other concern was on the funding. In this parliamentary system where you have yearly appropriations—and this is an issue that we've discussed with the committee many times—we really think, and other committees of Parliament have actually suggested this, that there be long-term, multi-year appropriations for these very large projects so that parliamentarians, first of all, know the total cost rather than just the yearly cost. They know the total cost of these projects, and the departments too have the funding allocated to them so they can complete this more efficiently. You don't have the stop and start with funding that could occur.

Mr. Terence Young: Has that occurred? Or are you saying it occurs?

Ms. Sheila Fraser: It has occurred in the past, I believe, and it certainly has occurred on other projects. We've clearly seen issues of that in other projects.

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you.

Mr. Guimont, we were very impressed, on the tour, with the quality of the work, with the planning, with the methodology, and frankly, with the people. In fact, on the tour, Mr. Wright could answer virtually every question himself, so he's clearly very hands-on.

I have a concern. I understand it's good human resources management to move people around every few years. We get the best out of the people and the people have a great career, but is there any way you can keep your best people on the job longer because they're so highly specialized?

Mr. François Guimont: Thank you for the question.

I would say that the precinct is rather unique in the sense that the people working there love their jobs. I'm not saying it's not the case elsewhere in my department, but it's very hands-on, it's very real. There has been a turnover. That's just the reality. It's true in my department overall and it's true in other departments, frankly, as some people retire and we have to replenish the ranks.

I would say that I want to keep I have—I made that point to Mr. Wright, and he's smiling. But more importantly, I think it is—I don't want to overstate it—fairly easy to get quality people because it is a meaningful place to work. It's real. I often get that feedback from the folks.

If I may, I'll make one last point. When parliamentarians take the time to come, walk, ask questions, it's a great reward for my people. These little things go a long way in saying to people or in people saying to themselves, “I have a meaningful job. I interact with people who actually use the premises, and that's democracy.”

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Young.

We're going to go back to Mr. Christopherson, for five minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

It would seem that I am evolving to be odd man out. It's not the first time I've been there, and I suspect not the last, but that's the way it is sometimes.

I accept that maybe I'm getting a little cynical. I was first elected in 1985, 25 years ago, as an alderman. I mention that not to talk about me, but to point out the fact that the first time this issue was raised was the same year, 1985. When I hear that suddenly everything is going to be fixed, I have my doubts about how quickly that's really going to happen. I note that the current plan, as put forward by the deputy in terms of all these consultations, says that this will inform the development of options and also discussions with the parliamentary partners this coming fall and winter. I am willing to predict—and I hope I'm wrong, and I'll say so publicly—that about a year from now this committee or some other committee is going to be dealing with the same issue. It will not be resolved. There's going to be another year go by.

I understand Mr. Kramp's comments. I think he shares some of my concerns. I appreciate what he said. He knows the respect I have for him and his role in this committee. I worry about politicizing the issue if it came in the hands of the politicians. Fair enough, but let's remember that all three of the examples that are in the report today have the equivalent responsibility back with the politicians. In Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, they felt they were able to overcome any potential partisanship by relying on the overarching responsibility, I think, that we all feel and accept as parliamentarians to this place, above and beyond our respective political parties.

Having said all of that, I realize that the process in front of us is likely the way it's going to be. So be it. It's democracy. I'll live with it. But help me understand, even in the proposal that's here, Deputy, where do the parliamentarians finally play a role? Even if you come up with all these options, unless we change something, the current decision on the options will still be taken by the cabinet. They might nicely consult with the rest of us mere MPs, but the fact of the matter is that under the current process the decision is exactly the same as if we were funding highways. So help me understand where we bring in the parliamentary role in this as we ultimately see the options lined up and a decision being taken. How does Parliament own that process if currently we stay with what we have, which is the usual executive and legislative?

• (1015)

Mr. François Guimont: Thank you.

I will repeat some of the points I made, and it's not disrespect. We are moving into something new here, and I'll make the following points.

We have a mandate to look at options. I have a senior assistant deputy minister who knows machinery issues, who comes from the precinct.

This is a priority for me. We have an OAG report, very clear, with one recommendation. Normally, Madam Fraser puts more recommendations on me than that, so that's very clear. There's no lack of focus. I am saying here, from experience, professionally speaking, that we want to do a good analysis; we want a good analysis to be done.

And I will make a bracket here. The various regimes that exist worldwide, including here in Canada, have seen adjustments. I want to see why the adjustments were made. A year and a half ago, I met the Sergeant-at-Arms—

Mr. David Christopherson: You want to see. See, that's the problem: it's all about you and the department. I'm sorry, sir. All I'm hearing is justification. You're not answering my question.

Mr. François Guimont: Okay, so I'm getting there.

Mr. David Christopherson: How do the politicians play a role, sir?

Mr. François Guimont: What we plan to do, if I may, is carry out the analysis over the summer—that's not that long—and in the fall be able to engage our parliamentary partners. Normally, the way that's done will be through the clerks and for them to tap into BOIE, COIE.... That's going to be their call. I will not dictate that. But we plan to engage parliamentary partners. Normally, the way I do this is through the House clerks, the librarian, and we have interactions with BOIE and COIE. We make presentations and that's normally the way we do our business. So we plan to use—

Mr. David Christopherson: But sir, that's the problem. It's the way you usually do business. All the reports are telling us to change it, and all we're getting is the same old, same old, including the process for determining the options and who gets to pick the options. At what point do we acknowledge, instead of just saying it, that parliamentarians need to play a role? That's what I'm not seeing here.

Mr. François Guimont: But it will be, through the point I made, in tapping into the clerks and the two committees.

Mr. David Christopherson: But that's consultation. I'm talking decision-making.

Mr. François Guimont: If I may, I think the consultation informs decision-making. It's part of the process.

Mr. David Christopherson: But who makes the final decision? Let me ask you, right now, under your proposal, who makes the final decision of which governance option gets chosen?

Mr. François Guimont: It's not a proposal; this is a course of action. But ultimately—

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay. And by the way, the appointment of that one person happened within the last few days, so again, things only happen when they're pushed to the nth degree. But again, to my point, who makes the final decision, sir, under your current thinking, your understanding?

Mr. François Guimont: It's the executive branch—

Mr. David Christopherson: It's the executive branch.

Chair, I rest my case. We go all the way around the mulberry bush and we come right back to the recommendations being generated by the executive, the shortlisting of options generated by the executive, and the decision of which option is in our best interest gets chosen by the executive.

So to me, we've got a problem right from the get-go, and we're continuing it. And I say, with heavy heart, I really believe that a year from now some group of MPs is still going to be struggling with this issue. And that's not on you, Deputy. I realize I came across a little harsh on you, but you're the point person, and like us, that's why you get the big bucks.

We've got to take ownership of this. You can only go so far, and the fact that you can only go so far is indicative of the problem we have and we're not breaking that problem. But of course I am going to live with the majority. I accept that I'm a lone voice on this, and having said my bit, I will shut up.

• (1020)

The Chair: Okay. Having heard that, we will now move to Mr. Shipley for five minutes.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Thank you.

Again, the same as everyone else, thank you for allowing us the opportunity to be guided through a great tour last week.

I appreciate the response. It may seem insignificant, but let me just talk about it. It is about the crack in the library stairs.

Let me take this through. That project, if I remember, finished in 2006. That means that project is now four years old. It is indicated in here that those cracks, the deterioration of the steps going to the library, are because of poor drainage.

I'm watching the steps of the Supreme Court building being torn apart. I've not had this type of response as to the reason, but I was told when I asked over there that it is an issue around some drainage and there are repairs being done.

We've just toured the West Block in amazement at the amount of work and how it is being done. We're exposing foundations, putting in seismic rods, all of this. Yet we have a deterioration of stairs because of poor drainage on two of our major buildings.

How do we build the confidence, if we can't build the stairs, that we're actually doing the right thing for the rest of the building? As much as I don't discredit what is happening, it raises, I think, a legitimate issue, quite honestly. If the small things are not lasting, how do we have the confidence that the large things are not going to be deteriorating? Stairs that should last 40 or 50 years, we're looking at four years. Help me with that.

Secondly, this whole governance thing has come up. Mr. Guimont, in your report, on page 5, there's only one recommendation—that's good news—but it's not the first time this recommendation has come forward. It has been going on for generations. I'm trying to understand why we're just moving ahead with it now. These have been issues in terms of being able to move ahead with the governance. You've assigned a senior assistant deputy minister, and I know you haven't been here forever, but it would seem to me that it is something that is just coming forward now. There have been recommendations, from my understanding, for many years. Why just now deal with an age-old problem that has been ongoing in terms of us being able to move ahead with long-term plans, long-term financing, and long-term reconstruction and maintenance of some

buildings, according to Mr. Wright? Not to discredit that, but they have fairly significant deterioration—for example, the West Block.

Those are the first two questions, please.

Mr. François Guimont: I'll start with the second question, and I'll let Mr. Wright handle the issue of the stairway.

On the timing and why now, again, I'll speak from experience. When the report was developed by the parliamentary partners, the report referred to as the 2005 report, this was filed. At the time, people felt that the focus should be on moving with the West Block. That took the effort; that took the attention. It's not a perfect answer, but that's the answer. That's what happened.

It doesn't mean that any of the points made, going back to 1985, as was noted—the Nielsen task force, etc.—were ignored. People were talking about them. I remember even in early discussions with the OAG's office that they were looking at the issue of governance, generally speaking, as they were carrying out their audit.

I would simply say this, and it may not be a perfect answer: the timing seems right now, quite simply. We have a mandate to look at various options, and we will do that. That mandate was not there before, quite simply. I take solace in the fact that we are going to look at this and look at it quite seriously. There's a senior person in charge. I'll be tracking this with other senior people in the department and central agencies. As I said, parliamentarians—whether it's late summer or early fall—will have a chance to see the work we are doing and contribute to it.

• (1025)

Mr. Robert Wright: On the issue of the stairs and confidence in the project, there are a few key things I can say. We had an independent assessment of the cause of the cracks in the stairs. The advice we got back was that it was a design flaw and a construction issue. So we are going to take steps to fix the issue, and then follow up with the prime consultant and the general contractor.

As far as moving forward and confidence, we're always attempting to gather strength, so we are taking lessons learned from the library, which is a fantastic finished product. The issue of the stairs is important, but we've improved our methodology since completing the library, and we gathered lessons learned from that project.

On the West Block, for example, we've done a couple of pilot projects on the southeast tower and the north tower, working with several universities and the private sector in innovative partnering relationships. We've developed a pretty robust monitoring program to understand how the building is acting, both in a deteriorated state and as we fix it.

We spoke earlier to the costing and scheduling. I think there should be confidence moving forward.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Shipley.

We'll move to Mr. Lee for five minutes.

Mr. Derek Lee: Thank you.

Although it may look like we're giving you a hard time, Monsieur Guimont, we're trying to get our framework renovated—no pun intended.

In your remarks earlier you were very frank that you communicate with and link up with the Board of Internal Economy and the Senate counterpart—the BOIE and the COIE. Nobody around this table is connected to BOIE and COIE. You referred to them as the two committees, but they are totally dysfunctional and disabled when it comes to transparency. Nothing that goes on in those so-called committees is ever public; nor is there any linkage between those committees and, in the normal course, members of Parliament.

So can you think of a way of overcoming this disability that may be there? As you've been trained to do, asked to do, or whatever, you're dealing with what you think are committees of the House, when they're totally disconnected from the day-to-day operations of the House, as most MPs see it.

I'm not being negative about those two bodies—they have a statutory function to fulfil—but they do not have a committee function that would represent the House in a fulsome way in the kinds of matters we're dealing with here. Maybe you weren't aware of that, but that's one MP's view. Do you think you might find a way to overcome that?

There are other committees. The procedure and House affairs committee, for example—and there's a counterpart in the Senate—would be a more typical committee to deal with. Can I just throw that issue at you?

The Chair: Since this show is being televised, somebody should explain what BOIE and COIE mean.

I think we should allow you, Mr. Guimont, to do that, and then continue on with your answer.

Mr. François Guimont: I find it awkward to explain how the House and the Senate function, but the acronym stands for the Senate Standing Committee on Internal Economy.

The Chair: And there's the Board of Internal Economy.

Mr. François Guimont: That's in the case of the House of Commons. The BOIE is the House of Commons, and COIE is the Senate. It's the same principle.

Frankly, I'm not well positioned to give suggestions on matters that should be dealt with by the legislative branches of the Senate and Parliament. I would be looking for a good point of interface that is meaningful from your perspective. There's a side of me that is tempted to say I have enough problems of my own, and I mean that in a.... I should call them challenges. I have my own challenges.

• (1030)

Mr. Derek Lee: In total fairness, Mr. Guimont, you did not design this two-headed monster. It was designed by our Constitution. I was just trying to suggest to you that as you and your ministry work with renovating the governance framework, there may be an organizational problem in everyone assuming that by hooking up with those two committees, BOIE and COIE, this solves the issue. From my point of view, I don't think it does at all. And certainly we would all have to recognize that there is a total absence of any transparency

from those committees, as they were designed to be non-transparent. But you cannot assume, as you and your officials go about this renovation of the framework, that this is the appropriate touch point or hook-up with Parliament, in terms of consulting or seeking authority or approval. It may be the worst place you could go.

I just throw that back at you as an issue. I don't have a solution, and if there isn't a reply to that comment, that's fine; I'll close off my....

The Chair: Mr. Guimont.

Mr. François Guimont: I've made my point. This is not in my hands. The only point I would make, Mr. Chairman, that makes sense is that we would be looking for a meaningful point of entry into the legislative system of the Senate and the House.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lee.

Mr. Dreeschen, for five minutes.

Mr. Earl Dreeschen (Red Deer, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I certainly appreciate this opportunity, and again I echo what everyone else has mentioned. We learned so much when we went on our tour, and certainly if governance is something that needs to be addressed, after what we saw, and your comments on shared accountability, I think Public Works truly has shown how departments can work to seamlessly make some of these major projects work efficiently, and I'd certainly like to commend you for that.

I'm just curious if you have any insights into some of the potential governance models that would benefit the goal of rehabilitation of the parliamentary precinct. Do you have any suggestions that you might be able to present?

Mr. François Guimont: I don't at this point, frankly. I have elements, and I made references to them earlier on, about accountability; ownership; transparency; how decisions will be arrived at; whether this will be reviewed, for instance, by the OAG; who will define results. There are a number of parameters that would compose what good governance would be. At the macro level, I would say that in my mind, governance implies clear decision-making functions, establishment of resources and results to be achieved, tracking those results, and reporting transparently to the public. But above and beyond that, there are plenty of models. They are all in my head, swirling, if you wish. Some have a person responsible, like on Capitol Hill, the architect. It used to be the Sergeant-at-Arms, in the case of the U.K.

So the basic elements are someone in charge, some unit that has the capacity to deliver, and some decision-making function that agrees on what the priorities are. I fundamentally believe, and Madam Fraser said so, that it starts with what the priorities are and why. When you agree to that collectively, things—in my mind—fall into place.

That's what you've seen with our execution. I'm very pleased to say we're very satisfied with what we've done. It has been recognized by the OAG. But at the end of the day, when people agree on what the priority is—number one, number two, number three, they agree on the game plan—things normally fall into place correctly. That's what we've seen when we're given the ball. And it could be anyone else, frankly—I believe that—who is capable and has the wherewithal. They will deliver because the priorities are clear and not shifting.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: I was going to talk to you as well about the elements you spoke of. You spoke of leadership, transparency, oversight, delivery, implementation, and a few others that I didn't get jotted down in time, but I suppose that would be something you would be able to present to whoever it is who tries to put something together in governance and to have some input into that decision-making as well.

Mr. François Guimont: We haven't done a lot of thinking at this point. The senior ADM was appointed Friday. But in my mind, the first steps in any good analysis would look at the models, would dissect the models, would draw out what I would call common trends, elements that seem to be compatible from one model to another. It would look at the pros and cons, and Madam Fraser is right—and it's not easy to do that—it would then transfer this to a Canadian context. What are the adjustments? What are the legal impediments? What are the legal requirements?

Colleagues, I say that again, it looks like “why does it take so much time?” To get it right, to do it correctly, the analysis is a substantial piece of work. Then things will emerge out of the analysis that will be a bit more obvious to many, but it starts with a good analysis where you dissect the systems that are in place, pros and cons, how does it work, what are the pressure points—and adjustments vis à vis our Canadian reality, because we are different in some ways from other Westminster models, even if we have at the core the very same elements.

• (1035)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you.

Mr. Wright, you spoke of some of the universities and research and pilot projects that you have done with them. A while back I was at the University of Manitoba, and they had gone through and were showing us some of the types of things that might be used, such as composite rods versus rebars. I am just wondering what the universities are gaining out of this type of project, and perhaps what you are gaining out of the work being done in different universities.

Mr. Robert Wright: Thank you.

This is one of those real win-win scenarios, I truly believe. We're gaining a lot. We're getting a peer-reviewed assessment done by the university. We've partnered in a very strategic manner, I believe, with three universities—specifically, the University of Calgary, University of Alberta, and the University of Manitoba, which you mentioned. Together we are looking at what are the best manners to rehabilitate these buildings, focusing first on the West Block, and to make sure that we have an evidence base to the approaches we take.

So it is informing our contract documents and the work that we put out to tender to general contractors and it's driving the advice we're receiving from our prime consultants. For the universities, there have been over a dozen peer-reviewed scholarly articles that have been published in international journals. There is also a capacity and interest in the university base that is being developed from an academic perspective that was quite lacking. So it really has been a great story, I would say.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dreeshen.

I just have a question. There are a few minutes left over, and there are a couple of members who may want to ask a short question too.

I'm going to refer you, Mr. Guimont, to paragraph 3.52 of the audit. In that paragraph, the auditor makes reference to a 2009 report that was completed. I'll just quote it:

In its report, *A New Approach to Governance of the Parliamentary Precinct*, the task force concluded that there are “key flaws” in the current governance, including a narrow mandate split across a number of organizations; fragmented and complex decision-making processes; and a lack of stable and committed funding devoted to development and upkeep of the buildings. The report recommended the implementation of a new governance model.

I have three points, and I'll just throw all of them at you. First of all, does that specific report make reference to an actual model, or does it just say that a new model is needed? Secondly, can you provide the committee with a copy of that report? Thirdly, is there any specific reason that nothing was done back in 2005? Basically, that report mirrors a lot of what the Auditor General is saying here today.

Mr. François Guimont: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To your three questions, I have three answers.

The report will be made available to you. I made that commitment before.

The second point I would make about the report, having gone through it, is that it's a mixture of what Madam Fraser has done, what I would call an analysis of what the issues are. So it was not a straight “this is what the model should be”. It goes through an analysis of the issues that we and the parliamentarians are facing from a governance perspective. That's one point.

My next point is that goes through a number of principles. Frankly, some of them I have used, principles that should be considered in looking at governance models.

Thirdly, it does propose governance options.

[*Translation*]

There is also the custodianship model.

•(1040)

[English]

There are various structures that involve BOIE and COIE, etc. The only point I would make on this, and it's more an observation than a criticism, is that the analysis portion of the report—i.e., the actual models—is somewhat brief. This is where it needs further analysis, to me as a person who likes to dig and understand the ramifications of certain things. But the substance of this report will not be excluded from the analysis that we will do over summer—far from that.

That's what the report is about. It was not singularly about the models, but really was a dissertation on the issues and principles, and it offered a couple of models.

The Chair: We have two minutes left over.

Mr. Kramp, you have a question. You have a couple of minutes.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Okay.

Just going back to the governance, I still have the concern that we have too many cooks in the kitchen. It's really difficult. If you only have a body or a few bodies trying to make a decision, you can come to a decision. Time is money. When you have multiple bodies all bearing the responsibility, it's really difficult to have a clear sense of direction, and I think that really puts people in Public Works in a difficult position.

You do extremely well, given the parameters you have right now, but I think we have to close this loop. We cannot allow this to continue; somehow, some way, we have to close the loop, step by step. I think you've made a great first step: you've assigned a senior assistant deputy minister, and she's going to report sometime this fall or this winter. I would suggest let's tighten the timeframe on that; let's have a definite date when she's going to report. I certainly want this committee to see the results of that report. I would certainly hope that in the meantime I think this committee should talk up this subject well around the precinct of Parliament. We need to have a clear sense of direction. I think we could be of great assistance to you if you had a clear sense of direction.

I thank you for your move forward on this. I think it's a step forward. I think the consultations you're doing on this certainly demonstrate that you not only have heeded the words of the Auditor General, but in many cases you've started to work pre-emptively on this matter, so we thank you.

Just on one quick little sidebar, on the steps where the crack was, you put in a supplementary report in which you've stated that you're going to go ahead and repair that and then go back to the contractor for redress afterwards. Have you contacted the contractor first and said we have a problem that needs to be fixed? Have they refused to, or do we have a delay that you were forced into doing this yourself and seeking redress after? Just a quick response, please.

Mr. Robert Wright: We have contacted both the prime consultant and the general contractor. As I indicated, that was on the basis of an independent assessment of the issue. I would say at this point there is a disagreement between Public Works and those bodies. We do not want to wait; we want to avoid any health and safety issues. We'll repair it and then in parallel seek redress.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Thank you very kindly.

In closing, I would just state for the record the statement of our deputy minister, Mr. Guimont. I think it really says the substance of what this committee's responsibility is right now. You said: "In closing, I feel we are at a crossroads for setting a long-term path for the rehabilitation of the parliamentary precinct." I couldn't agree with you more. But at the crossroads we need a sense of direction. Right now we're doing a shotgun approach to it, yet we have to have a rifle shot with a clear sense of direction. Certainly it would help you, I think it would help the Canadian taxpayer, and it will save time, effort, and money to get rid of some of the confusion going forward. I think we have to bear responsibility for that. Too many of our parliamentarians have sat on this and not acted, and I think we have a responsibility to do so. We thank you for your good work.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Kramp.

Madame Faillie, two minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie: Thank you.

I would like to come back to the technical questions I asked earlier about the tendering process. I assume that a fairness monitor will be hired to ensure the impartiality of the tendering process.

Mr. François Guimont: Which tendering process would the member be referring to, Mr. Chair?

Ms. Meili Faillie: Earlier, I asked you when you planned to call for bids for the West Block renovations.

Mr. François Guimont: Okay.

[English]

Mr. Robert Wright: As I indicated earlier, we plan to start work this fall, so that would mean an initial call for tenders this summer.

•(1045)

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie: Will you be engaging the services of a fairness monitor? We are, after all, talking about large sums of money.

[English]

Mr. Robert Wright: When we go for the major call, yes, there will. That is our recommendation, to have a fairness monitor.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie: Will you be calling for a public consultation process? Will you be holding an interest call?

[English]

Mr. Robert Wright: For the major proposal, yes, it will be a full, in-depth process.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie: And when would that be?

[English]

Mr. Robert Wright: I don't have a date at this point.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: Will that happen this fall?

[English]

Mr. Robert Wright: For the major piece of work we first have to go to Treasury Board, get authorities, and then go forward with the tender process.

This initial tender offering will be for 40% of the demolition and abatement work, a smaller package, so it will be a pre-qualified list of general contractors and then a “seek for the best bid” price.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: So then, the process is not yet under way.

Mr. Robert Wright: No.

Ms. Meili Faille: I imagine that all of the planning has been done. When must the contractor be ready to go? When is the work scheduled to start?

[English]

Mr. Robert Wright: We will be going out for tender in the coming month. That's the plan. The work will begin in September, as soon as the building is emptied.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: You're saying then that the work will begin in September, that you haven't yet received the necessary authorizations and that you will be calling for bids.

Could you be more specific, Mr. Guimont?

Mr. François Guimont: We have the resources we need, for example, the 40% for the asbestos abatement process. As Mr. Wright explained, we are preparing to put the work out to tender. It's not actually a tender process. Instead, we choose from a list of pre-qualified contractors. Once the building has been emptied, which should be by the end of August, the work will get under way. We will then request and obtain appropriations from Treasury Board to carry out the remaining stages of the work over the long term.

Ms. Meili Faille: You mean the remaining 60%?

Mr. François Guimont: Yes, and even more.

I'm talking about appropriations required to carry out the needed work on the West Block, quite apart from the asbestos abatement and decontamination issue. As Mr. Wright explained, as is standard procedure in the case of major projects, an interest call will be held and a fairness monitor will be appointed. That's not surprising, given the size of the contract.

Ms. Meili Faille: Can you provide us with a written schedule of the planned renovation work?

I have one last question. Earlier, you talked about your costing methodology. Can you tell the committee a little more about this methodology? You say that costs will total \$769 million. I'd like to know how you came up with that number. You mention a logical model or a costing methodology that you use.

[English]

Mr. Robert Wright: We can come back with a full accounting of those costs once we've gone to Treasury Board and gone through—

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: No, that's not what I'm asking you. Earlier, you mentioned a model where everything is triangulated, where all of the stars are aligned, so to speak.

[English]

Mr. François Guimont: We will provide that to the committee. It's going to be descriptive in nature. We'll file that with the committee.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Faille.

[English]

That concludes the questions, colleagues.

There are a couple of things I want to bring up.

First of all, Monsieur Guimont, in echoing all the comments we heard today, we all found the tour very valuable, and we want to thank you and Mr. Wright for organizing it. It's too late now before the summer adjournment, but you may want to consider offering that tour again to all parliamentarians come September or October. I think it would be appreciated. I ask you to consider this, because I think it would be valuable for every member to have that opportunity. We'd certainly spread it around that they really should take the tour. And of course you'd have to schedule it so that you're not conflicting with other.... Noon hour actually might work well.

Colleagues, in the last five minutes the clerk has circulated the international peer review that was completed over the past year by auditors from Australia, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. That report has been concluded and is now being tabled with this committee. At the same time, the response from our Office of the Auditor General I understand will be up on the website. Both documents will be on the website of the Office of the Auditor General later today, if the public is so interested.

This committee has tentatively scheduled a meeting for late September or early October with the two principals, who are both from Australia. It will be held at an off hour, probably an evening meeting, to accommodate the time in Australia so the principals can testify. We'll have a hearing not only on the peer review but also on the response from our own auditor's office.

Also, I should point out that a memo was circulated earlier today by the clerk regarding the Quebec conference, August 29 to 31. I urge all members to look at it. All members of the committee are invited and urged to attend. You can communicate with the clerk as to the travel arrangements.

Those are some brief announcements.

I'm now going to turn it over to you, Ms. Fraser, not only for your closing comments on this hearing, but you may want to comment on the international peer review, if I have omitted anything at all. Then we're going to go to Mr. Guimont.

Ms. Fraser.

• (1050)

Ms. Sheila Fraser: Thank you, Chair.

First of all, I'd like to thank the committee for their attention to this very important issue, and I hope we are able to resolve the governance structure and perhaps prove certain members' skepticism unfounded. Let's hope.

On the peer review, you will note this was an audit that was done of all of our professional practices, which is more extensive than ones that have been done in the past, which focused either on the performance audit or on the financial audit. Not surprisingly, the audit indicated that there are areas we need to improve. There are two. In the performance audit and special exam practice, they concluded that our quality management framework was properly designed and working effectively. On the financial audits, though, they noted that while the framework was appropriate and suitably designed, we have to improve on our risk management and documentation in our files. So we have put together an action plan, and we have quite an extensive project under way, which we have discussed previously, I think, to renew our methodologies throughout the office.

So I look forward to the hearing on that. And if rumours are true and this is the last hearing we have, I wish you all a very good summer.

Thank you.

The Chair: This probably won't be the last meeting of the committee, but it will definitely be the last hearing, so on behalf of the committee, we wish you a good summer, Madam Auditor.

Mr. Guimont, do you have any final comments on this issue?

Mr. François Guimont: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'll simply make three points, the first one being thank you for taking the time to come again and do a tour. I think that being able to see and touch and talk to people can make a big difference in the way you look at things, and I'll gladly get something organized, as per your suggestion.

The second point I would make is that we will follow up the commitments we made. You can count on that, as usual, and I'll do that in a timely fashion.

The third point: the exchange at points was robust, but you know, I take in this an acknowledgement from committee members that you're keen to contribute in making the precinct a better place, and that's the way I'm taking it. I take good note of the points you make, and we'll take it from there.

Thank you.

The Chair: Again, on behalf of the committee, I want to thank everyone here, thank all of the witnesses.

And I just want to remind everyone that there's another committee coming in, so please vacate the room as soon as possible.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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