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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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• (1100)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick South-west, CPC)): This meeting is called to order.

Welcome to meeting number 79 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), the committee is meeting today to study “Report 3: Rehabilitation of Parliament’s Centre Block—Public Services and Procurement Canada” of the 2023 reports 1 to 4 of the Auditor General of Canada.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses. Good morning, everyone.

From the Office of the Auditor General, we have Andrew Hayes, deputy auditor general; Susan Gomez, principal; and Elsa Da Costa, acting principal.

From the Department of Public Works and Government Services, we have Arianne Reza, deputy minister; Robert Wright, assistant deputy minister of the science and parliamentary infrastructure branch; and Jennifer Garrett, director general of the Centre Block program in the science and parliamentary infrastructure branch.

Mr. Hayes, you have the floor for five minutes, and then I'll go to the Department of Public Works and Government Services.

It's over to you, Mr. Hayes, for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Andrew Hayes (Deputy Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General): Mr. Chair, thank you for this opportunity to discuss our report on the rehabilitation of Parliament's Centre Block, which was tabled on March 27, 2023. I would like to acknowledge that this hearing is taking place on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

Joining me today are Susan Gomez and Elsa Da Costa, who were responsible for the audit.

In this audit, we looked at whether Public Services and Procurement Canada effectively managed the scope, schedule and cost during the early phases of the rehabilitation program, and whether the department, in cooperation with key partners and stakeholders, put in place a governance framework to support timely decisions.

Based on a 2021 estimate, the cost of rehabilitating Parliament's Centre Block and of building the new Parliament Welcome Centre

is expected to be between \$4.5 and \$5 billion. This vast program involves many stakeholders and partners, including the House of Commons, the Senate, the Parliamentary Protective Service and the Library of Parliament.

Overall, Public Services and Procurement Canada used flexible approaches to effectively manage costs and schedules during the planning, design and early construction phases of the rehabilitation program. The department also balanced the requirements of the parliamentary partners, the heritage character of the building, sustainability and equitable access for parliamentarians and the public.

We found that the department assessed the Centre Block building and site to fully understand the building's structural and mechanical conditions, and it consulted and worked with experts to integrate environmental sustainability and accessibility elements. The department also consulted with experts and stakeholders to develop the scope of the program and adjusted workflows when faced with delayed planning decisions on important user requirements, such as office space.

• (1105)

[English]

In our 2010 audit that looked at the rehabilitation of the Parliament buildings, we recommended changes to the governance framework meant to guide the overall program. In the current audit, we found that decision-making by parliamentary partners remained fragmented.

Though Public Services and Procurement Canada established a governance framework for the implementation of the program, parliamentary partners were slow to endorse key decisions on some user requirements. At the end of our audit period, some important decisions remained outstanding, such as on the security requirements for Centre Block. To support timely decision-making from parliamentary partners, we recommended that the department submit a progress update to both the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Speaker of the Senate at least twice a year.

We found that Public Services and Procurement Canada had processes in place to manage the costs of the program in its early phases and mitigate the risk of rising costs. For example, the department had methods to estimate and monitor costs, manage changes and risks, and provide quarterly reports to departmental committees. We also found that the department used a flexible approach to manage the schedule and timing of activities. For example, it went ahead with moving equipment and relocating utilities, monuments and trees. This helped to mitigate the impact of delayed decisions and keep the program on schedule in its early phases.

At the time of our audit, the department kept spending below the 2016 approved funding. As of July 2022, the department had spent more than \$880 million. Of that amount, \$450 million was spent on planning and design activities, and approximately \$430 million on early construction activities, such as the excavation of the visitor centre site and the removal of hazardous material from the Centre Block building.

Given the size and complexity of this program, a streamlined decision-making process is needed to effectively manage the costs and timelines of the rehabilitation program. It is also important to maintain rigorous cost management processes and to monitor the risk of cost increases as the program moves further into the construction phase and as spending increases between now and the planned completion date of 2030 to 2031.

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

Thank you.

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

We will now hear from the Department of Public Works and Government Services.

Ms. Arianne Reza (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon. I'm pleased to appear before the committee to discuss the Auditor General's report on the rehabilitation of Parliament's Centre Block.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered today on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation.

With me today are Rob Wright, the assistant deputy minister responsible for the overall restoration and modernization of Canada's parliamentary precinct, and Jennifer Garrett, the director general leading the Centre Block rehabilitation project.

The restoration and modernization of Centre Block is the largest and most complex heritage rehabilitation project ever undertaken in Canada. Public Services and Procurement Canada is carrying out the work on the iconic Centre Block and the broader parliamentary precinct hand in hand with Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Given the size and complexity of this project, I am encouraged by the positive observations made by the Auditor General. The Auditor General recognized our use of flexible management approaches and reported that the department has effectively managed the

scope, schedule and costs of the rehabilitation work, keeping the project on schedule and within budget.

The report also highlighted the department's efforts to collaborate with stakeholders, including indigenous partners and experts, to rehabilitate Centre Block on behalf of Parliament and all Canadians.

[*English*]

Mr. Chair, when it comes to the governance of the rehabilitation program, Parliament is responsible for determining and making decisions on requirements. PSPC is responsible for the planning, design and construction work, including the budget and time needed to deliver on these requirements. This complex project is about balancing budget and schedule constraints with sustainability, heritage, accessibility and inclusivity alongside the need for modern, safe and secure facilities to support the operations of Parliament.

Achieving this balance is not easy. Success requires timely and sometimes difficult decisions to be made. The Auditor General acknowledged that while considerable efforts have been made to strengthen governance and decision-making, some challenges remain.

The Auditor General's report includes three recommendations—first, that to support timely decision-making, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement table a program update to the Speakers of the Senate and the House of Commons at least twice a year; second, that a gender-based analysis plus assessment be undertaken to ensure that Centre Block is inclusive and reflects the diversity of Canada's peoples; and third, that the department publish long-term vision and plan annual reports within the same calendar year.

● (1110)

[*Translation*]

The department agrees with these recommendations and we are positioned to take action on all three within this calendar year.

With regard to the Auditor General's recommendation to further improve governance and decision making, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement has delivered the first installment of semi-annual updates to both speakers.

The update includes key parliamentary decisions required to support the on-time and on-budget delivery of not just the Centre Block, but all major projects being delivered under the Long Term Vision and Plan.

As to the recommendation that a Gender Based Analysis Plus assessment be undertaken, the department will update its GBA+ assessment for the Long Term Vision and Plan by 2024, with a more detailed focus on the Centre Block.

As to the recommendation regarding timely and clear reporting, the department will publish the 2022-23 Long Term Vision and Plan annual report before the end of this calendar year.

Mr. Chair, the department is working hard to ensure the project remains on track, and that the results reflect the diverse needs of parliamentarians and all Canadians.

[*English*]

Public Services and Procurement Canada is appreciative of the work of the Auditor General in recognizing these efforts.

Once restored and modernized, Centre Block will serve the needs of a modern parliamentary democracy. It will be sustainable, secure, and accessible to all Canadians, enabling more Canadians to engage in our country's parliamentary tradition and democratic processes.

Thank you, and we're available for questions.

The Chair: Thank you, all, very much.

I am going to turn to our first round, with Mr. Nater.

Mr. Nater, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses. It's great to have you all with us today.

My questions are going to begin with Public Works. I may go to the Auditor General's Office if I have time.

First, thank you, Mr. Wright and Ms. Garrett, for the tour last week. It was my third time visiting the Centre Block project, which is always a fun and exciting place to visit, especially now that it's not accessible to the public, so it was a special honour to be able to do that.

I want to start off with some of the lessons learned from the West Block project, where we're now sitting, and how those were able to be taken over and applied to what's now happening with the Centre Block project. How were those lessons learned applied?

Ms. Arianne Reza: That's an excellent question, as we are building on our experiences in terms of project management, procurement strategy, and how we engage on the governance with parliamentarians.

With that broad swath, I'll turn it over to Mr. Wright for some more precision.

Mr. Robert Wright (Assistant Deputy Minister, Science and Parliamentary Infrastructure Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thanks very much for the question.

Lessons learned are really at the core of the methodology that we undertake within the precinct and the broader department. We have

a searchable database for lessons learned that all project managers have to use. Certainly, many were pulled from the West Block and are being applied to the Centre Block rehabilitation project. I'll mention a few really important ones.

The first one is a detailed assessment and investigation program. With heritage buildings, among the biggest risks are the unknown conditions. What are you going to find behind the walls? For Centre Block and the Parliament welcome centre, we did the most exhaustive assessment or investigation program that we've ever undertaken. I would say that it's paid off, whereas in the West Block we had an estimate of the amount of asbestos-containing material that was quite high, but we ran into a lot more. We had an estimate of the condition of the structural elements within the building, but it was much worse than we anticipated. With the very detailed assessment that we've done on Centre Block, we've run into very few surprises and very few key risks that we didn't anticipate.

I would say the biggest surprise, which we found quite early on in the project, was that the foundation of the east side of Centre Block, the Senate side, was not a modern foundation. It was more of a rubble core. We addressed that within the contingencies of the project. We essentially put a sandwich of cement around that and tied it together with steel. It was stabilized and we were able to move on until we can put a modern foundation there in the future. That's really been the biggest surprise so far.

There are a couple of other elements that are really important. One is carrying out activities in parallel, rather than in sequence. The Auditor General's report mentions these flexible approaches. That really comes from the experiences of previous projects. In some cases, it makes sense to be doing the design and the construction in parallel. For example, the interior demolition and abatement, the removal of the asbestos-containing material and the excavation for the Parliament welcome centre were not dependent on a lot of functional requirement decisions from Parliament or design elements. We were able to proceed with that important construction activity, which got it out of the way and de-risked the project.

Another thing to mention would be mock-ups. These are very important. We'll be engaging Parliament, hopefully soon, on determining design mock-ups for offices for parliamentarians, as well as for the seating in the House chamber, given that the size of the chamber has not grown and the number of MPs has grown significantly since Centre Block was originally constructed. We really need to work hand in hand with members to design a new seating arrangement in the House, which potentially could be phased in over time. That's going to take work with Parliament.

Perhaps the last one I'll mention is advance testing. This is linked to mock-ups. Certainly the operations of Parliament are increasingly digitally enabled, for example. We want to ensure that all of the testing has been done well in advance, before things go live. This is a no-fail environment. That's critically important.

There's a range of other elements. For example, doors in these facilities are not simple doors. They're essentially parts of a hardware and software system, which are integrated into a security system. Everything has to work perfectly for the doors to work. They're linked to video cameras, etc.

Advance testing on many of the elements is critical to ensuring that Parliament will work for you.

• (1115)

Mr. John Nater: I think I just have a couple of seconds left, so I'll say that I'm sure there's a joke I can make about the Senate being built on a rubble foundation, but I certainly wouldn't go there with our friends in the other place.

Thank you, Chair.

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

Mr. Wright, I must confess that I didn't recognize you without your hard hat and workboots on. It's nice to see you away from the construction site and into the workings of Parliament today. Of course, you're hard at work there as well.

I'll turn now to Ms. Yip.

You have the floor for six minutes, please.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Good morning, and welcome to the public accounts committee.

I went on a tour of the rehabilitation in the spring, and I was very impressed with the complexity and progress of the construction. It was fascinating that the hole was so deep and that every little detail—whether it was for the safety of the people participating on the tour or for the workers—was well thought out.

I'd like to begin with Mr. Hayes.

In the report, the OAG noted that the early phases were effectively managed. Could you elaborate?

• (1120)

Mr. Andrew Hayes: Yes, thank you.

We said that the costs, early design and conceptual work were well managed. We said that, at this point in time, the department has kept spending below the approved amounts, which is important. Up to the point in time when our audit was completed, which was a little while ago now, they were on schedule.

We did issue a bit of a warning flag. As time moves on, and despite the flexible approaches the department has taken to date, if there are changes to user requirements or big adjustments required, they will have an impact on costs moving forward. We wanted to make sure that signal was out there, as well.

Ms. Jean Yip: Were there other lessons learned in the early phases that were brought to the other part of your audit?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I think the previous audit we did, in 2010, highlighted the importance of an effective governance framework. In that context, breaking down silos and avoiding fragmentation of decision-making are important. We saw some efforts to address that. It wasn't completely addressed, but, as the audit showed, the department worked around some of those challenges in the early stages of this project.

Ms. Jean Yip: What were some of the challenges?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: Delaying decision-making on user requirements was probably the biggest one.

There is still an outstanding matter, which we reported on at the beginning of our audit, relating to the security requirements around Centre Block. Obviously, there are a lot of factors that go into considering what's supposed to happen for security, and a lot of partners to work with. As those decisions take time, though, it puts pressure on other elements of the project, including construction. If changes are made after construction has started, the costs and schedule impacts can be pretty significant.

Ms. Jean Yip: Therefore, it's important to have that planning in place and take the time to make sure it's done right, especially with security.

Mr. Andrew Hayes: Absolutely. I think it also speaks to the recommendation we made about making sure parliamentarians of both houses and other partners have complete information as to the impacts of delayed decisions and changes. That's important, so fully informed decisions can be made, as well.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thank you.

Ms. Reza, can you describe in more detail the overall decision-making process when it comes to deciding on designs and so forth? PSPC is managing the project, but the department isn't the decision-maker.

How do you get input from parliamentarians and others involved?

Ms. Arianne Reza: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the question.

As it's structured now, we established after the 2010 audit our attempt to make decision-making more streamlined for parliamentarians, and for PSPC to support that decision-making. We have monthly meetings with various partners. We have touchpoints where we work with partners, such as the House of Commons, the Senate, the library and PPS, to talk about the various elements. We bring everybody together.

We have now, post-audit, added a new report that we already table semi-annually. Minister Duclos has tabled it with the House of Commons Speaker, as well as the Senate Speaker. It outlines not only the progress made to date but also the key decision points that need to be made going forward, in the hope that this will be an additional catalyst to help us streamline the existing governance process.

Ms. Jean Yip: I'm sorry. I can't hear you. Perhaps you could lean a little closer to the mic.

Thank you.

Ms. Arianne Reza: Okay.

Ms. Jean Yip: What were some of the key decision points?

Ms. Arianne Reza: I apologize. Let me repeat that.

I would say that, going back to 2010, when the previous OAG report came out, we made some significant efforts, working with our partners in the parliamentary precinct, to streamline a decision-making process and better support it.

We have monthly meetings at senior levels, if not more frequently. We have touchpoints built into the process. Most recently, based on the recommendations of the Auditor General in this report, we added a semi-annual report, which the Minister of Public Works has tabled with the Speaker of the House of Commons, as well as the Speaker of the Senate. It outlines our progress to date on Centre Block and also puts *en vitrine* outstanding decisions that need to be made in the upcoming time. Some are joint decisions between both houses, some are broader across the parliamentary partners and some are unique, but at least we have a way to identify those that are there and the timelines required.

• (1125)

Ms. Jean Yip: I didn't realize it went back as far as 2010.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm afraid that's your time, Ms. Yip.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the people who I recognize.

Mr. Wright, I want to point out that I probably made you practice your French a lot, which was impeccable throughout your visit, even when you spoke about technical matters. Congratulations.

Mr. Hayes, I want to tell you that I find the Auditor General's report quite positive. At the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, we are used to reviewing reports that are more incisive or that identify more problems. In this report, the recommendations are interesting. Can you comment on how you intend to act on them?

The essential thing I took away from the report is that one of the main recommendations was to recognize that decision-making could be fragmented. If that doesn't change, what could the consequences be?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I would say that changing elements that have already been built or are being built could be problematic in terms of project costs and timelines.

When the department waits for decisions, that impacts all aspects of the project. The project is so complex that decisions have to be made in a timely manner, even though there are so many partners involved within Parliament, the cities of Ottawa and Gatineau, and a Crown corporation.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Okay.

As to the potential impact on cost increases, do you have any idea what they could represent?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: It is difficult for an auditor to estimate that right now.

I would note however that construction costs have changed since the pandemic. Certain studies from the office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer have indicated that some costs have increased in the current context.

There was a budget for the project, but the amounts were calculated in 2021, so it is possible that costs have increased since then.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Okay.

I would also like to know whether your audit included the procurement method used for materials.

Since the reconstruction of Parliament, with its strong symbolic significance, is a costly endeavour, did you consider using a procurement process that is equitable for all regions, provinces and territories?

Did you consider that aspect in preparing your report?

Did you draw any conclusions that you would like to share?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: We looked at the contracts and the processes and did not identify any problems. I cannot comment on geographic distribution, however.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: My next question will be for the officials from Public Works and Government Services then.

What strategy did you use to ensure that the materials are sourced from all parts of Canada?

Ms. Arianne Reza: Thank you for the question. I think it is very important.

How do we establish a procurement strategy and award contracts?

We have two main suppliers, PCL Construction and EllisDon. We have been assured that the materials they use come from all over the country.

I have asked whether that list of materials could be made public.

I know we work with roughly 500 suppliers who provide cement and various other materials, but I don't know their technical names in English or French. I also know that the supply chain is made up of suppliers who, for the most part—93% or 94%—are from all over Canada.

• (1130)

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Do you know the breakdown by province?

Ms. Arianne Reza: I think so.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I would appreciate it if you could provide that information to us.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Ms. Reza, do you have those figures at hand? Can you give us some more information?

Ms. Arianne Reza: I will ask Mr. Wright to give you the details.

Mr. Robert Wright: Yes, I can give you more information.

As of now, we have concluded contracts with Ontario, Quebec, Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba and Nova Scotia. We have a strategy to ensure that we use Canadian companies and that the materials come from Canada, of course. That is not possible, however, for all the materials and all the companies.

For example, 22 of the 53 Peace Tower bells are now in the Netherlands for restoration. We can't do that work here, and the British company that cast those bells is no longer in business.

The capabilities of certain industries are limited, world-wide. As the deputy minister stated, most of the contracts—93.7% of them—are Canadian currently, and they are spread out all over the country.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being present.

It's not very often in this place, in particular this committee, that we see such an audit. It's often—and I'm sure the Auditor General's Office can attest to this—more severe. I want to commend the auditor and, of course, the entire team for your work. It's not often that we see this level of compliance, but also this level of good work. I want to thank you on behalf of the folks in my riding, but also Canadians writ large. It's an important task you're undertaking, restoring the seat of Canadian democracy, and I think Canadians value that.

I, myself, have not been able to tour Centre Block, but I do know, of course, from my previous time in this place, how much work was needed there. It's an incredible undertaking, and it is easy to underestimate the reality of just how difficult it really is to restore a historical building of this significance. Just the care and concern you have taken in the review.... The audit seems to be done quite well.

However, I do want to note a particular aspect that was outlined in the audit. I'll turn to the Auditor General's Office first. It's in relation to the GBA+ analysis. What were the answers given by the departments, when asked why they had not conducted an analysis?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: The response to the recommendation pointed to the fact that a lens of gender-based analysis plus was applied to the long-term vision and plan, which is the overarching part of the project, Centre Block being a component of it.

Our view was that a careful look should be taken of Centre Block and the Visitor Centre, because of the essential nature of this. The fact is that this is where the public will be looking, and this is where the public will be engaging.

From our perspective, having a clear view of all the elements that should be taken into consideration in a GBA+ analysis for decision-making is important. It's true that on the environmental, on the accessibility, and even on some consultation with indigenous communities, the department has done some work. We think this is an area that's important for a follow-up.

• (1135)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much for that, Auditor.

I have spoken in some capacity with the Algonquin. The Algonquin folks, in particular, have been very concerned about a project across the street for some time now. That's in relation to the former American embassy, which sits on Algonquin territory today. It was the position of the government that they would see this building restored—I'm using this as a case example—but also bring greater inclusivity and participation of the Algonquin.

In my conversation with them, it seems as though those conversations have not met their expectations. I understand there's a continued discussion, in particular regarding that site, as to how they can continue to be included. Barring having another instance where there is a protest at that building by the Algonquin for the lack of participation by them, do you anticipate this process and lessons learned from that instance on how to better include indigenous folks? That question is for the department.

Ms. Arianne Reza: Let me circle back to your initial question about what we've done on GBA+, because I think it is important to note that we do have a long-term vision and plan for the Parliamentary precinct, and we have a robust GBA+ report framework that guides that. It was produced and published in 2017.

Given, as we've heard from the Auditor General, the importance of Centre Block and the fact that it's going to integrate the West Block and East Block, and that there is going to be the visitor welcome centre and the operations, bringing in an updated GBA+, including inclusivity across the universal access-designed pathways, indigenous, HVAC systems to make sure that we can do smudging.... I think that's a critical piece that we want to strengthen, but I wouldn't want to leave committee members with the impression that the work wasn't under way. It's a key piece.

As it relates to where we are on the specific site that you were referring to, perhaps we can turn to Rob for an update of the latest. Obviously, this is an area of significant collaboration between the Algonquin and the federal government.

How that fits into next stages in the work, I leave to you.

Mr. Robert Wright: Thank you very much for the question. It's an important one.

We've continued to work very closely with Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, with the Algonquin Anishinabe nation and with the national indigenous organizations.

The thrust of that work has been around determining an Algonquin-dedicated space within what was originally labelled the indigenous peoples' space. That has made some important progress. We're not collectively quite at the finish line on that, that's for sure, but there's been some good progress, I would say, with the Algonquin nation in coming to a position where a dedicated Algonquin space could be fit within the broader project, which would be important. That would be at the heart of the block 2 redevelopment, for which construction will be starting next year.

To your point on lessons learned, I would say that one important thing that has really created a tight relationship is lots of communication. We've done visioning sessions on Centre Block and the Parliament welcome centre with the Algonquin Anishinabe and the three national indigenous organizations for the design team, CENTRUS, on the Centre Block and Parliament welcome centre. They've brought on, with our work, indigenous architects: an Inuk architect, a Métis architect and a first nation architect.

It also informed our approach to the block 2 redevelopment. As you may be aware, we did an international design competition for that, with a jury that had three members of Parliament and six indigenous members on it. The winning firms were Zeidler and Chipperfield, and there is also a wholly indigenous-owned firm, Two Row, out of southwestern Ontario.

I would say that this has really created a very dynamic engagement on indigenous people being very engaged on the future redevelopment of the parliamentary precinct.

The Chair: We'll move now to Mr. McCauley.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

• (1140)

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Witnesses, thanks for being with us today.

I have a very quick question to start. Ms. Reza, maybe it's best for you or Mr. Wright.

Are we still looking at 2031 to move into the new old place? Are we still on budget? If so, what is the expected budget? I notice that it showed \$4.5 billion to \$5 billion, but what are we looking at right now?

Ms. Arianne Reza: I'll start with the move-in date, and then move the technical budget question to Rob.

First off, we are still on track for 2031 for the construction to be completed. There will be up to a year for user testing, commissioning of the building and ensuring that we have all the pieces working correctly.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Just the ballpark date is fine.

Ms. Arianne Reza: The budget element is still between \$4.5 billion and \$5 billion.

Rob can give us the status of—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: No, if it hasn't changed....

It's good news that there haven't been the surprises that we found perhaps in West Block. I understand that part of the issue was that we went in not knowing what was behind the walls, so it hasn't turned out to be as bad as we thought.

If it hasn't turned out to be anywhere as bad as we thought, I'm just wondering why we are still at a 2032 move-in and why we are still budgeting the same amount.

Mr. Robert Wright: I would maybe shift that just a little to say that it's turned out to be as we thought.

It's the advance investigation—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Let me interrupt.

Mr. Robert Wright: No, this is important.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Sorry, Mr. Wright, but let me interrupt.

As I recall, we went in and we didn't know what was behind the walls. We didn't have the original plans; they went missing. It's not as we thought, really, because we didn't know what was there. So how can—

Mr. Robert Wright: There are a couple of things.

This investigation program started before Centre Block was emptied. With the great collaboration of Parliament, we started going in with the invasive testing. Ms. Garrett's team did a lot of invasive testing even before Centre Block was emptied. That was a lesson learned from West Block. We did not do that on West Block, but we did it on Centre Block.

The second thing that we did before setting a baseline schedule and budget was an extremely exhaustive investigation and assessment program. That informed this baseline schedule and budget, so—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: So the \$4.5-billion estimate was done after that.

Mr. Robert Wright: Exactly. It was in June 2021.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay, that's fine. Thanks very much.

Mr. Hayes, I want to pop over to you.

Welcome back. We haven't seen you for a while.

You talked about some of the delays around the security environment. Could you expand a bit on that? Are you talking about security as in the members' entrance, how people are coming and going, or are you talking about security as in perhaps addressing what happened to the DND building in Kanata, where the building was rife with PRC Beijing bugs?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: Thanks. It's good to be back. I was trying to keep a low profile.

We're talking about just the user requirements. You can see in the semi-annual report the department produced—I think it was a week or so ago—that there are still some references to security-related matters, including some of the lessons learned from the convoy demonstrations. Our point is that, as the department is waiting for decisions, it can't move on with some of the steps that it needs to take.

I can't say that we were specifically looking at some of the examples that you noted.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Who would be, then? There are a lot of people coming and going. I realize that they have security clearance, but we see a lot of workers coming and going in the buildings. Who is looking at that to ensure we're not taking back a building that has security issues planted in the walls? Again, with the DND building, I think it was almost a billion dollars to fix.

Ms. Arianne Reza: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

As my colleague noted, the semi-annual report that was tabled outlines physical screening of members, of people accessing the House of Commons, the Senate, the different screening processes—the arrival piece. It has the physical security as well as some other elements.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Right. Mr. Hayes addressed the security of members and that, but it's the actual security of the building, the IT systems. Again, it's to avoid what happened at the DND building in Kanata. I realize that a bunch was done beforehand, but do we have a process in place to address that?

I see that Mr. Wright is nodding. Maybe he can address that.

• (1145)

The Chair: We need just a brief response, please, Mr. Wright.

Mr. Robert Wright: Yes. I'll ask Ms. Garrett to add a couple of additional details.

There is a very strong framework around security clearances for all workers who come on to the site. That's very robustly managed. There's a very clear system for how people get on site. We feel quite confident in that system.

On the IT systems that you indicated, which are very important, the House of Commons is the technical authority for Parliament— for all of Parliament—on the IT systems. It's actually the House of Commons that takes on that responsibility. For the portion around the Prime Minister's Office, the RCMP has protocols in place for testing and making sure that everything is.... There's quite a strong process around that, in which the House very much takes a leadership role.

Jennifer, I'll go over to you.

The Chair: I'm going to have to cut you off, but I'm sure Mr. McCauley will come back to you when his turn is up again.

I apologize. I have some time constraints here.

Ms. Bradford, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming in today.

This is a fascinating project on probably the most well-known building in Canada. Canadians are justifiably very proud of it, so there's a lot of interest.

I'd like to share that I have actually had two tours. As members of Parliament, we're allowed to go on Fridays and have a personal tour, which I did several months ago. At that time, many of the artifacts were still in wooden bins. They were all labelled, catalogued and stored. Think of that, if people can imagine it. Great care is being taken. A few months later, the public accounts committee got to go, and I saw it again. I could see progress. The bins were all moved away, so I assumed everything was in storage.

Given that there is such great interest, I'm sure that all of our visitors who come to Parliament and see all the construction, the massive hole and everything, are dying to know what's going on inside.

The AG recommended that PSPC provide more timely information to all Canadians about the project. Beyond publishing the long-term vision and plan—and I know there are great updates on the website—can you tell us what measures are being taken to make sure that Canadians have access to updates about what's happening with the project?

Ms. Arianne Reza: Thank you very much.

I think over and above what we're doing in terms of publishing it, we're trying to make it more accessible through different social media channels and different videos that are available, interactive school programs—I believe some of the school programs are still going on, talking about the restoration—and having touchpoints across the country to make it more accessible.

For more details, I'll go over to Mr. Wright.

Mr. Robert Wright: Thanks very much for the question.

This is very important, as the deputy indicated. We do a number of things, and there's always more that can be done. This is very important.

There is an annual media tour. The media come in and get to see the progress, as you have, and ask any questions they want. That provides an opportunity for all Canadians to keep track.

We've also been working with Parliament. CPAC is starting to do a documentary on the project, at our encouragement, working with Parliament. I think the first installment is coming out before Christmas, or some time around then. CPAC plans on covering the project right until its completion. That will provide another forum for parliamentarians and Canadians to be able to keep track of the project.

You mentioned the annual report. There's a quarterly report, as well, on the Centre Block project. There are a number of videos.

As Ms. Garrett just mentioned, we also work with the City of Ottawa on the Doors Open program. I think for the past three years, we've participated in the Doors Open program. Several thousand people come each year for that. It's very difficult to take that many people through the project site, but I think this past year, they got to get up and see the actual excavation site for the new Parliament welcome centre.

We have also used the Heritage Canada information centre to put in displays and interactive... We've had virtual reality for people who come to these spaces. We're always trying to have the appropriate outreach for Canadians.

The last thing I'll mention is that a couple of years ago, we also did some public opinion research to hear from Canadians on what would be important to them, to make sure that the design and plans responded to that.

• (1150)

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Thank you. It is the people's House, so I'm glad you're including the public.

This project has encountered a couple of major unexpected events that happened prior to when it first started. Namely, there was COVID, which was then followed by the "freedom convoy".

To what extent did the COVID-19 pandemic affect workflow, supplier relations and overall project progress?

Also, what was the impact of the convoy occupation, which shut down downtown Ottawa for several weeks? What impact did that have? Were workers able to get on site during that time?

The Chair: Once again, please give a brief reply.

Ms. Arianne Reza: All right.

Thank you very much for the question.

At a high level, there were some impacts from COVID. The site was closed and the work was stopped. We've tried to accelerate to keep up with getting back on track to make up that lost time.

I would also note, in terms of the convoy, that as a result, colleagues and the then minister of public works, Minister Tassi, did go to PROC, the procedure committee. This issue was studied in terms of looking at Wellington Street to see whether or not it should be part of the precinct. As parliamentarians may or may not know, 40% of parliamentarians are already working on the other side of Wellington Street. That number of parliamentarians will increase. Looking at that precinct footprint is one of the key consequences.

I'll pause here to see whether Rob has anything on the labour disruption—

The Chair: I'm afraid we'll have to come back to that, if there's interest.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I would like to go back to my earlier questions about the geographic distribution of procurement activities.

Ms. Reza, in your procurement strategy, what is your concept of equity? For instance, is it based on the provinces' payment of taxes to the federal government? If Quebec pays 20%, does it receive 20% of the contracts?

Ms. Arianne Reza: Thank you for the question.

Procurement contracts are awarded following a competitive, open and transparent process. I do not think that procurement contracts are awarded on the basis of ratios or percentages in terms of geographic distribution, but we will of course check that.

I have been the deputy minister for just four weeks. I am sorry, but I will have to check. Mr. Wright and Ms. Garrett, who have a great deal of experience, could provide further details.

Mr. Robert Wright: Thank you very much for the question.

The procurement process is competitive, but we do try to award government contracts to Canadian companies.

At present, in terms of construction and design sub-contracts, 14 contracts have been awarded to Quebec companies. The contracts are awarded to companies throughout Canada, but since the work is done here, most of the contracts have been awarded to Ontario and Quebec companies. We also try to award contracts to companies from other parts of Canada, and we will continue to do so up until project completion.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you.

I would like to ask another question.

The Chair: Please be brief.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Okay, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wright, we know that hazardous materials have been removed. Do you know where those materials were sent and how they will be handled?

Mr. Robert Wright: I will let Ms. Garrett take that question.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but there is only enough time for one of you to answer the question.

Mr. Robert Wright: Okay.

There are specific sites that accept such materials. They are under provincial control. Right now, I think the sites accepting those materials are in Quebec. They are special sites that have to meet Quebec's rules. We have also used such sites in Ontario.

• (1155)

The Chair: I'm sorry, but your time is up.

Thank you very much.

[English]

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor for two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to follow up on some of the aspects that are taking place in the visitor centre, or the new welcome centre. You know what I'm talking about. In any case, I'll refer to it as the new welcome centre.

The new welcome centre is an addition to the building's overall square footage. You'll see, for example, that it will replace the existing welcome centre that most Canadians, if they visit our capital today, will go through. It will replace directly what we're seeing there with a new visitor centre that will be just below, in a subfloor of Centre Block.

On that development, we spoke in our last round about the GBA+ analysis and about including indigenous perspectives. In terms of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 calls to action, particularly those targeting public institutions and the education of Canadians, do you find that in your role, or at least in the procurement of items and important symbols and designs, you have incorporated aspects of some of the calls to action, particularly the ones outlined in the section on education, and 13 to 50?

Ms. Arianne Reza: It's an excellent question. We have been working very hard with our indigenous partners and some of the GBA+ broader community to look at the welcome centre and the visitor centre, which are two separate things, to make sure that those elements are properly integrated.

I know—and we'll hear from Rob in a moment—that there is actually work with the Dominion Sculptor so that we have indigenous sculptures. To this point, of bringing that in, that supports some of the recommendations you were referring to.

I don't know if that's sufficient. Rob could add more.

Mr. Robert Wright: Maybe I'll just add a couple of items to what Deputy Reza indicated.

There is one thing I'd adjust a little. It won't replace phase one of the visitor welcome centre. That was always phase one. This will add on, so it will be interconnected: Centre Block, West Block and East Block will be all interconnected as one facility.

As the deputy indicated, the design team is working with indigenous architects. We're working with indigenous communities, as well as looking at the fellowship program of bringing on indigenous carvers. That is resulting in some interesting concepts that will come to Parliament around having appropriate indigenous elements

into the Parliament welcome centre, which I think could prove quite exciting.

We've also worked in supporting Heritage Canada and a survivor steering committee for the selection of the residential school monument that will be located on Parliament Hill as well.

There are a host of activities that we're working on to help ensure that these calls to action are responded to.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I am now going back to Mr. Nater.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Chair.

Again, thank you to our witnesses.

I probably have a bit of a hodgepodge of questions in this round, but I want to start with our friends from Public Works.

In a previous question, I think from Madame Sinclair-Desgagné, you mentioned that some of the bells in the carillon are now in the Netherlands being restored, or at least some are still here and some are over there. I have a question on that. We know that the carillonneur did continue to perform for a period of time while deconstruction was happening. Is there any possibility that the carillon will begin to operate prior to 2031, give or take, or is it likely that's going to be happening when the building reopens? Is there any chance the bells could begin to sound prior to 2031?

Ms. Jennifer Garrett (Director General, Centre Block Program, Science and Parliamentary Infrastructure Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): We did have the carillonneur. She went in with her safety gear and continued until we had to commence demolition activities within the Peace Tower.

At this point, based on our schedule, we'll try to get her—or the carillonneur who will be in place at that time—back in place to play the bells as soon as possible, because we understand the importance. But at this time, we can't promise that she'll be back playing the bells before the 2031 time frame.

• (1200)

Mr. John Nater: Thank you for that. I think we're all looking forward to that, so whenever that happens it will be good.

I want to turn a little bit to the concept of heritage and heritage preservation. During our tour last week, we talked about high-heritage places versus those areas that had limited heritage value, if any, so I have a couple of questions on that. What is being done to work on those high-heritage locations to preserve those?

The second question is, where and how are things being restored? In our conversation last week, you mentioned what it looked like when we left in 2018 or early 2019 versus what it looked like in the early times of Centre Block as it was being built after the great fire of 1916. How is that being addressed in terms of how it will be restored? Will it look the way it did when we left in 2019, or will there be some efforts made to restore it to the original state of the building after the fire?

Mr. Robert Wright: Thank you very much for the question.

The heritage restoration of Centre Block is certainly at the heart of the work that's going on. That needs to be done in balance with a whole host of other elements, like universal accessibility, sustainability, security and all of the functional requirements, but it remains at the core.

As you mentioned, there's high-heritage space. There are 50 high-heritage spaces within Centre Block and about 22,000 heritage assets. That can sometimes be a one-off like the heritage ceiling of the chambers, or it can be the 53 bells in the Peace Tower that we mentioned, or it can be the 35,000 marble tiles that are in the building. There's a broad range of those heritage assets and they all have a specific conservation strategy. Many are removed from the building to be restored off-site, but much remains in the building, protected, and will be restored on site.

To your point about 2019 versus the earlier eras of the building, certainly in some of the high-heritage spaces the conservators have found that some of the earlier, very beautiful work was covered up, sometimes by paint, because things were getting a little old. Parliament has to continue operating and there are only very short time periods, like breaks over the holidays or the summer, so sometimes paint would be applied on top of that. They have gone in behind and scraped that away. Part of the strategy, in many cases, is to actually take it back to its original design intent.

We often get the question of whether we are going to protect the heritage as it was in 2019. As I said to you last week, the answer is kind of "yes and no". Where appropriate, sometimes we're going to try to take that back to its original intent from the 1920s—almost 100 years ago.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you.

I have about 30 seconds for my last question.

You mentioned a couple of times the hazardous material and the abatement. Would you be able to share with the committee how much of that has been completed and how much has actually been removed from the building?

Mr. Robert Wright: Absolutely. We are getting close to the completion of the interior demolition and abatement. We're above 95% complete at this point. That has entailed the removal of about 25 million pounds of asbestos-containing material from the building.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That is Mr. Nater's time.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our officials for being here today and for answering our questions.

I have been looking at the modernization of Commonwealth Parliaments, not just here in Canada, but across the world, in my role as Commonwealth vice-chair for the Canadian branch.

We recently had a seminar in the Ontario legislature where we saw some of their adaptations for what an inclusive Parliament looks like. There's that whole question of maintaining tradition and modernization and where we are on that spectrum. I'm not sure if any of you have seen what the Ontario legislature's adaptation of indigenous artwork, for example, has been.

I'm wondering if that is something we're considering for Centre Block in terms of the whole rehabilitation. I know you've had consultations with indigenous communities and with Heritage, but I'm wondering if there's a concrete plan going forward with regard to that.

• (1205)

Ms. Arianne Reza: Thank you very much for the question.

It's almost twofold in terms of looking across other parliamentary precincts and seeing how they're managing major rehabilitation. I think Canada is considered a world leader in this, so that is one thing we should be aware of.

In other Parliaments, we've seen that their attempt to fuse, as you say, some of the traditions with accessibility, universal design and important cultural elements is ongoing. We heard Mr. Wright talk about doors earlier. Doors are often an area of heritage value. You go through a significant entrance and you're walking into Parliament, but there is a huge tech aspect to it and a huge universal aspect to it.

When it comes to the ongoing discussions we're having with indigenous community stakeholders and that overall plan, I can turn to Mr. Wright to provide a bit more information on how that's shaping up.

Mr. Robert Wright: As Ms. Reza indicated, we do work with an international network of other Parliaments, and we've been working quite closely with the Ontario legislature. They've made several site visits to Centre Block. We definitely are considering, more than considering.... We're working through those plans to take a very similar approach hand in hand with Parliament.

For example, our dominion sculptor team is working very closely with the curators of the House and the Senate to come up with a strategy where art and architecture will come together. The Parliament welcome centre, specifically, provides a fresh canvas to tell the ongoing story of Canada, as was the original intent of Centre Block—to continue to tell the story of Canada. Much of the carving that was done in Centre Block was done between the 1930s and the 1980s, not in the initial stages. There's a strong tradition within Parliament to provide the opportunity to continue telling the story of our country so that is it future-focused.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you so much for that.

In terms of the costs and who the artists will be, how is that artwork going to be selected to ensure inclusivity?

Mr. Robert Wright: I would say that we're not quite at that step yet. Those are the questions that we are, indeed, working through at this point. Certainly, some of that work will be done by the indigenous carvers who have been brought on through the fellowship program. Some may well be commissioned. However, we're not quite at that point, I would say.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

I know there has been significant criticism about spending taxpayer dollars on rehabilitating what is heritage here in Canada, whether it be Centre Block or the Prime Minister's residence, for example. What is your viewpoint on this and the importance of maintaining our heritage and our traditions here in Canada? Also, what is your viewpoint with respect to adjusting and moving timelines for completion and the dollar amounts as well?

Ms. Arianne Reza: Broadly speaking, Parliament... As we heard earlier, Centre Block is most likely the most iconic heritage building that people associate with Canada. From a federal government stewardship point of view, this is a key area where we work very closely with the legislative House on how to best proceed. Very key, as you've heard... We're sticking to the timelines that we anticipated for completion, as well as the budget range, which was noted by the AG.

The Chair: Thanks very much. That is the time.

I'll turn it now to Mr. Stewart.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

Mr. Jake Stewart (Miramichi—Grand Lake, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to move a motion:

That, given recent reports that the National Capital Commission (NCC) paid over \$8 million to replace a barn at Rideau Hall, the committee:

- (a) undertake a study of one meeting on this imprudent spending and invite the NCC and Treasury Board officials to testify on the matter; and
- (b) report to the House that the committee recognize that this is an egregious waste of taxpayer money especially considering the cost of living crisis Canadians are facing.

I want to draw attention to when Minister Anand, the new Treasury Board minister, was placed in the role and said, "There is not one policy of our government that doesn't go through Treasury Board. I will be seeing everything from a policy perspective". I think the minister made it very clear that everything goes through the Treasury Board.

In thinking about this issue, Mr. Chair... We recently learned that the National Capital Commission paid over \$8 million to replace a barn on the grounds of Rideau Hall. The list of ridiculous spending keeps growing. There are hundreds of millions for sole-sourced contracts to consultants like McKinsey, \$56 million for the useless ArriveCAN app, and \$6,000 for hotel rooms. The list goes on.

Canadians are struggling. Our food banks are seeing record usage. The cost of food has gone up 23%. After eight years of NDP-Liberal mismanagement, the dream of home ownership is simply out of reach for most Canadians. Mortgage costs are up 40%. As well, Mr. Chair, the cost of rent has doubled.

I also want to mention that the Auditor General wrote a report on this very issue in 2008. It was called "Conservation of Federal Official Residences". The AG's findings were that over a 10-year period, from 1997 to 2007, the expenditure on upkeep and repairs at Rideau Hall, 24 Sussex and Harrington Lake was approximately \$37 million. As those around this table know, this committee's mandate allows us to study matters that have been reviewed by the AG in recent years. This motion would fall under our mandate. I also believe it is our obligation to ensure that taxpayer dollars are wisely spent. This includes reviewing who at NCC and Treasury Board approved \$8 million for a barn at Rideau Hall.

Now, Mr. Chair, when you consider \$8 million for a barn... In my riding of Miramichi—Grand Lake—as an example of why this amount of money is egregious—we had a \$1.5-million request to the federal government to replace navigational aids on a port system we've had for well over 150 years. We had a \$5-million request to the federal government on a \$120-million pilot project that would have employed 80 people full time for probably a 25-year period. Both projects were denied by the federal government and Minister LeBlanc. He's from New Brunswick, nonetheless. You can see how spending \$8 million on a barn would upset the people in my constituency, where \$6.5 million would have allowed them to ship their goods from the port. Because of the cost of gasoline and the carbon tax, that would have been better for the constituency. At the same time, having a new mill would have made all the difference.

The \$8 million is an egregious waste of taxpayers' dollars. That's why I move the motion.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stewart.

I have a speaking list.

I'm going to look to members for a little guidance here. I'm inclined to excuse the witnesses, because I think this is going to go on for a bit. I understand there's going to be some debate.

Is there anyone who opposes my desire to excuse the witnesses?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Witnesses, you are excused. Thank you very much. We appreciate your appearing before us today. We look forward to further updates on your important project on Parliament Hill.

I think I'm going to continue things. Several members have expressed an interest to speak on this.

Madame Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To begin, I want to thank the witnesses before they leave.

As to the motion, we agree with the principle. That is not necessarily because of the \$8 million at stake, but rather because we do not understand recent expenditures, including some mentioned by my colleague, Mr. Stewart, and the Governor General's expenses on the whole. In this case, the expenditure is for the renovation of a residence for an office that we consider unnecessary.

I do however have an amendment to propose in order to maintain some decorum considering the neutrality of this committee. We must not reach a conclusion before the study in question has been conducted.

This is what I propose. I will reread the motion with the proposed amendment.

That, given recent reports that the National Capital Commission (NCC) paid over \$8 million to replace a barn at Rideau Hall, the committee:

a) undertake a study of one meeting on this imprudent spending, especially considering the cost of living crisis Canadians are facing, and invite NCC, Treasury Board and Public Services and Procurement officials to testify on the matter;

b) report its observations and recommendations to the House.

• (1215)

The Chair: The phrase “recognize that this is an egregious waste of taxpayer money” is therefore deleted.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: The study will probably reach that conclusion, be we will see in due course.

The Chair: Very well.

[*English*]

Did everyone catch that? I want to make sure everyone has caught it before I seek comments on it.

Would you be able to provide it in English, or should I have Madame Sinclair-Desgagné repeat it in French again?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I will repeat the motion.

The Chair: Very well.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: There is no change to the main part. The changes are in parts a) and b).

a) undertake a study of one meeting on this imprudent spending, especially considering the cost of living crisis Canadians are facing, and invite NCC, Treasury Board and Public Services and Procurement officials to testify on the matter;

b) report its observations and recommendations to the House.

The Chair: Do you have anything further to add, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné?

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Nothing further. I would just like it to be translated into English.

The Chair: It is an amendment to a motion.

[*English*]

Mrs. Shanahan, go ahead.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

I want to thank my colleague.

I had doubts about the first translation that Mr. Stewart provided. It is always helpful to get clarification, but since this amendment—

[*English*]

The Chair: Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor, but wait one second.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, can you send your amendment to the clerk, please?

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Yes, of course.

[*English*]

The Chair: If anyone wants to speak, just put your hand up.

Mr. Stewart, I will recognize you after Mrs. Shanahan, and then Ms. Khalid.

Mrs. Shanahan, I apologize for interrupting you.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I want to thank Mr. Stewart for the notice of motion. We will certainly have something to say about his motion.

Mr. Chair, I suggest we suspend for five or ten minutes so we can discuss the proposed amendment. I think we can look it over together.

[*English*]

The Chair: I want to hear from a few more people, Mrs. Shanahan, but I will take that under advisement. There's a speaking list right now. I know that one certain member wants to speak, and so does Ms. Khalid. I'll be open to that in just a couple of minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I asked that we all take a break for a few minutes. I think everyone would appreciate that.

The Chair: I agree. We have already seen that can be very helpful.

[English]

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I agree with Mrs. Shanahan. I think there are a number of amendments that we would like to propose. It will be easier for us to be able to work out that language among ourselves once we've been emailed Madame Sinclair-Desgagné's amendments. We can work out that language along with all members around this table and then come to a consensus, hopefully, as to how we want to move forward on Mr. Stewart's very excellent motion.

• (1220)

The Chair: Very good.

Mr. Stewart, you have the floor, please.

Mr. Jake Stewart: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to say that I thought we were debating the Bloc motion, and I wanted to indicate that we were fine with the motion.

I meant the amendment, sorry. We're fine with the motion anyway.

The Chair: It is the amendment to the motion.

Mr. Jake Stewart: Yes. I thought we were debating the amendment to the motion, and we're fine with it.

The Chair: Yes. That's what we're looking at now.

There is a desire on the government side to suspend.

I'm going to let Mr. McCauley say a few words first.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I echo my colleague Mr. Stewart's comments, but I think we're getting ahead of ourselves with the Liberals wanting to suspend to discuss the motion. I think we first need to deal with the amendment, debate that, and settle that before going into suspension to discuss the motion. I think we're getting a bit ahead of ourselves.

If they are proposing amendments, are they proposing subamendments to the amendment or amendments to the original motion? If it's subamendments to the amendment, we should just get on with it and discuss it. The Liberals have had it on notice. They've had the time.

The Chair: I'm going to suspend here, for two reasons. One, I have a request, but more importantly, the clerk needs a few minutes to prepare the translation of the amendments to the motion.

I will suspend for four minutes, unless the clerk needs a little longer. If I get a signal from the parties that the suspension needs to go on a little longer for you to discuss it, that's great.

I will suspend for four minutes.

• (1220)

(Pause)

• (1230)

The Chair: Order. I'm going to resume this meeting.

Is there someone who would like to bring us all up to speed?

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor.

If other members want to speak, just put up your hand while Ms. Khalid is speaking, and I'll record it.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: We propose a subamendment to Nathalie's amendment. The first part is fine: "(a) undertake a study of one meeting", etc. Then we add, "and invite the NCC, including CEO Tobi Nussbaum and Treasury Board and PSPC officials to testify on the matter". Then we have "(b) report to the House and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response".

[Translation]

The Chair: I would like to start with a reaction from Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné.

Just a moment please. I am hearing that it is not quite right.

[English]

In the meantime, Ms. Khalid, would you or one of your colleagues be able to send that subamendment to the clerk? We're just going to review this to make sure we're on track.

The challenge we have from a procedural point, Ms. Khalid, is that part of your amendment amends Madame Sinclair-Desgagné's amendment, which is in line and appropriate, but the other part amends the motion. I have to deal with one of them at a time, unless there is agreement from all parties to accept your changes. I can do that if there's agreement all around. Otherwise, we just have to take it apart and it will take a little more time.

Ms. Khalid, do your changes include what Madam Sinclair-Desgagné...?

• (1235)

[Translation]

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes, I want to propose subamendments.

[English]

What we tried to do in this exercise, Chair, as you suspended—thank you for doing that—was for all of us to come together to agree on language that would just tweak Nathalie's amendment.

What we're proposing here is basically a subamendment to the amendment presented. That's what you have before you. I'm happy to read out the specific subamendment if you'd like.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead from the top.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Do you want me to read the whole motion?

The Chair: Yes. That's just so everyone is crystal clear on it.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Chair, to be clear, are we going to vote on the subamendment to the amendment first and then get to the amendment, or is it your intent to have UC to have her read in a whole new motion to override the amendment?

The Chair: If there is UC, then we will just adopt this. If there isn't, we'll have to go piece by piece.

You will each have the final say on that.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: When will we hear the final motion to vote on?

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: It reads:

That, given recent reports that the National Capital Commission (NCC) paid over \$8 million to replace a barn at Rideau Hall, the committee:

(a) undertake a study of one meeting—

There's some language here that Nathalie proposed, but I don't have it in front of me.

—and invite the NCC, including CEO Tobi Nussbaum and the Treasury Board and PSPC officials to testify on the matter; and

(b) report to the House and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response.

That would be the complete text of the motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay, here is what I'm told. I can deal with this in one of two ways. If members are in agreement with this change on a UC, I can accept it and it will replace what is already on the table.

If, however, you want to debate it, Ms. Khalid is making two changes. The first, dealing with the CEO, addresses the subamendment. We'll deal with that first, and then we go back to the amendment to the motion. Then we will deal with the change to that second line, because that really is an amendment to the motion.

They're both in order. I just have to deal with them either all at once.... If MPs agree with this in UC, you probably agree that the motion would pass. Of course, we'd still have a vote on it. If you want to debate it, first it's the subamendment and then the amendment to the motion.

• (1240)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: To be clear, this subamendment replaces the amendment and would become a new motion.

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Can we have someone read it out? Ms. Khalid referenced some new wording from Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné.

Can we have someone read the final motion so that we're all clear? I'm sure we'll have UC on it, but we should have that final motion.

The Chair: All right, then I'm going to suspend again for a few minutes.

Ms. Khalid, could you come over and speak to the clerk directly, so we have it all?

We'll suspend for two minutes.

• (1240)

(Pause)

• (1245)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

If members could listen attentively, I'm going to have the clerk read the new motion that I'm looking to get UC on. If there's no UC, we'll deal with it step by step.

Mr. Clerk, you have the floor.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Cédric Taquet): The motion would read:

That, given recent reports that the National Capital Commission (NCC) paid over \$8 million to replace a barn at Rideau Hall, the committee:

(a) undertake a study of one meeting on this seemingly imprudent spending and especially considering the cost of living crisis Canadians are facing and invite the NCC, including CEO Tobi Nussbaum and Treasury Board and Public Services and Procurement Canada officials to testify on the matter; and

(b) report to the House and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response.

The Chair: The motion you just heard will replace the amendment that we have been debating.

Is there agreement on that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I am going to ask for a roll call on that motion now.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

The Chair: All right. That has passed. The subcommittee will be meeting later this week, and we will take this up as well.

I'm looking now for your agreement to adjourn this meeting.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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