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Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger



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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the fourth meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The Committee is meeting today to hear from representatives of the House of Commons, as well as Public Works and Government Services Canada, about the renovation of Centre Block.

Today's meeting will be hybrid, pursuant to the order passed by the House on Thursday, November 25, 2021. MPs may attend in person or by using the Zoom application.

Proceedings are broadcast on the House of Commons website. For information, I would add that the webcast will always show the person speaking, not the entire Committee.

I will use this opportunity to remind all participants and observers that taking screen shots or photos of their screen is not permitted.

Due to the pandemic, to properly ensure health and safety, all those who participate in a meeting in person must maintain a physical distance of 2 meters and wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room, as per the recommendations of public health authorities as well as the Board of Internal Economy's directive on October 19, 2021 and the order of the House on November 25, 2021. It is strongly recommended that a mask be worn at all times, including when in at your seat. Good hygiene must also be practised by using the hand sanitizer at the entrance to the room.

[*English*]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French audio. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately and we will ensure interpretation is properly restored before resuming the proceedings. The "raise hand" feature at the bottom of the screen can be used at any time if you wish to speak or to alert the chair.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a com-

mittee room. Keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines for mask use and health protocols.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphones will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

I remind you that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses. They will be providing us with a presentation to update us on the progress of the Centre Block rehabilitation. Their presentation goes on longer than the usual five minutes afforded for an opening statement. I believe that in this instance that is justified so that we may be fully briefed on the current status of the work. They will be with us for up to 90 minutes. Then, as I indicated, the committee will move in camera to conduct some committee business.

Mr. Wright, please proceed with your presentation. Welcome to PROC.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rob Wright (Assistant Deputy Minister, Science and Parliamentary Infrastructure Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Hello, I'm Rob Wright and I am the deputy minister of Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC, and I'm responsible for the restoration and modernization of the Parliamentary Precinct.

Today, I have with me Ms. Jennifer Garrett, Director General of the Centre Block Program at PSPC; Mr. Michel Patrice, Deputy Clerk for House of Commons Administration and key partner; Mr. Stéphan Aubé, Chief Information Officer, Digital Services and Real Property; and Darrell de Grandmont, Director of the Centre Block Program.

Today, we have the pleasure of presenting an update regarding the Centre Block rehabilitation project.

Despite the challenges caused by the pandemic, we have made a great deal of progress since our last appearance before the committee in February of 2020.

• (1105)

[English]

Today, we'll walk you through the design work and give an update on construction progress.

As you are aware, we baselined the project's budget and schedule in June 2021 as part of a public technical briefing. The baseline budget and schedule remain unchanged.

The House of Commons will also describe the governance framework that has been established to guide decision-making for the House's functional requirements, as well as provide an overview of some of the key decisions made.

[Translation]

I will now move on directly to the presentation, which starts at slide number 3.

It is important to start by situating Centre Block in a wider context. This project is at the summit of government efforts to restore and transform the Parliamentary Precinct into a modern and integrated campus. This work is guided by the long term vision and plan.

[English]

This work is focused on the twin objectives of supporting the operations of a modern parliamentary democracy and ensuring that Parliament and the parliamentary landscape are open, accessible and engaging for all Canadians.

It is also worth mentioning that, in addition to the Centre Block, the other key priority right now is the redevelopment of what we call "block two", the city block directly across from Parliament Hill. The redevelopment of block two will first serve as swing space to enable us to empty and restore the Confederation building and East Block, and then will enable us to consolidate parliamentary operations into a secure, modern and integrated campus.

We are currently in the second stage of an international design competition. The independent jury, of which three parliamentarians are members, will come back together in April to select the winning design concept.

I'll now turn my attention directly to the Centre Block.

Slide 4 helps to remind us why we are doing the project. While the building may have remained beautiful to look at, its facilities were critically outdated and systems were failing. Stone was damaged by water infiltration and Ottawa's extreme freeze-thaw cycle. Water was also corroding the structural steel.

Also, concealed behind the beautiful heritage finishes were kilometres of rusted-out heating pipes that broke and leaked, causing damage.

Electrical and communication systems were inadequate and stretched to capacity in trying to support modern broadcasting that they were never designed or equipped to accommodate.

[Translation]

Let's move on to the next slide.

To ensure that Centre Block will be able to serve Canada's parliamentary democracy throughout the next century and continue to welcome Canadians, an in-depth restoration is necessary. This is one of the most significant and complex heritage restorations ever undertaken in Canada. The scope and scale of the project are immense. The Project Management Institute recognized its global influence, and it is ranked first in Canada.

[English]

To restore this heritage masterpiece, it needs to be carefully taken apart, undergo an extensive abatement program, and literally be rebuilt to integrate modern standards, including a reinforced structure, seismic upgrading and new building systems, including mechanical and electrical systems and a modern digital backbone and security system.

For example, significant effort is required to transform the Centre Block from one of the government's worst greenhouse-gas-emitting buildings into a carbon-neutral facility that will see a 75% reduction of energy usage and a 50% reduction in water use.

Addressing the many accessibility challenges will also require significant effort.

Although heritage buildings such as the Centre Block can present some extreme challenges, PSPC, in partnership with Parliament, is committed to making the Centre Block a leading example of accessibility. The addition of a "Parliament Welcome Centre" is core to achieving its objective, enabling Canada's Parliament to become both more secure and more accessible to all Canadians.

• (1110)

[Translation]

Let's move on to slide 7.

We had to meet many technical challenges, as we worked to modernize this heritage masterwork and have it meet modern codes and standards.

[English]

For example, the Centre Block had sprinkler coverage in only 20% of the building. It did not have modern heating and cooling, and it met only 30% of the current seismic load.

[Translation]

It is important to recognize that we have developed plans to overcome these challenges and ensure that Centre Block will be able to serve Parliament and Canadians throughout the 21st century and beyond, and that we have done so as part of a vast framework of partners and stakeholders. This is what is shown in slide 8. Above all, this is a partnership with both chambers of Parliament.

I now give the floor to Mr. Patrice.

Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration): Indeed, as Mr. Wright said, this is a highly complex project that must meet the needs of parliamentarians, Parliament and the House of Commons for the next 50 to 100 years that follow. To do so, the Board of Internal Economy has set up a long-term working group for the project's long-term vision and plan.

[English]

The board gave a mandate to that group to examine, study and provide timely recommendations to them in respect of renovations and requirements that are integral to the House of Commons, its members and its operation. Two instructions were given to the working group when it was established, in March 2020. One was that the footprint of the size of the chamber must remain the same. The second important one was that the existing heritage of Centre Block must be protected and maintained, while recognizing that technology and modern equipment are necessary.

In regard to members of the working group, all parties are represented in that group. The chair of that working group is Deputy Speaker d'Entremont. There have been a few changes and adjustments pursuant to the last election. It's a group composed of eight members of Parliament. It's very important to have this group, as they represent the interest, knowledge and experience of members of Parliament. While it's a significant historic and symbolic place for Canadians, being the seat of democracy, it's also the workplace of parliamentarians. It must respond to the needs of the future, in terms of Parliament, as it grows towards the next century.

Obviously, the other authorization the board gave to the working group was to meet jointly with the Senate long-term vision and plan subcommittee, which is composed of senators. Centre Block is one of the buildings most shared between the two Houses. It's important that Parliament respond to the needs of all parliamentarians.

The working group has met over 12 times since its creation. A number of decisions and discussions have taken place with the very active membership and involvement of the members of the House of Commons. Some key decisions were made—obviously, on the chamber size, made by the Board of Internal Economy. The parliamentary welcome centre footprint was the subject of numerous discussions in terms of the needs of Parliament in the future. There were other decisions with respect to the hoarding design and in terms of the tarp covering Parliament during construction, which will go on for a decade, let's say.

Other subjects of importance included recognizing growth in terms of lobbies and galleries in the chamber. Lobbies, as you all know, are quite small and not necessarily comfortable or conducive for members in terms of preparing for the proceedings in the chamber. One of the decisions made was that lobbies in the Centre Block would be on two floors—the main lobby, as you know it, and also a support lobby on the floor below. They would be interconnected and would facilitate movement, allowing you to have meetings and a bit more freedom to manoeuvre.

A big decision that involved many partners and stakeholders, not only in terms of Parliament institutions but also, for example, the National Capital Commission and the City of Ottawa, was the location of the entrance of the parliamentary welcome centre.

• (1115)

It had to be intuitive for Canadians and for the public in terms of how they access their Parliament, your Parliament. I must say that it was a successful endeavour, but quite complex.

Another item, for example, was a public engagement strategy. PSPC had the support of the working group and the board to do a national survey. I understand this survey has been made public.

Recognizing the growth, there was an opportunity, for example, in Centre Block to infill above the Hall of Honour. The working group made that recommendation to the board, which it approved. There will be three floors above the Hall of Honour. The design in terms of its virtual use is still under discussion and under review, but there was a consensus between the two Houses that the top floor, the sixth floor, would be a gathering place for the parliamentarians of both Houses.

There is still a lot to do.

[Translation]

As for future issues, some discussions are already under way, specifically on the subject of designing new floors for the Hall of Honour, the visitor welcome centre and details of the location and capacity of the public café.

As for the seats in the public galleries, there are some issues to resolve, such as to ensure accessibility. The working group and the Board of Internal Economy have recognized that these needs will cause a reduction of the public galleries' capacity.

Among other upcoming subjects, there is obviously circulation between the tunnels and all three buildings, as well as the design of the parliamentary dining room, which will be reviewed and modernized while maintaining its heritage character.

There is also the issue of parliamentary offices in Centre Block. Give the infrastructure and mechanical needs, among others, the number of parliamentary offices in Centre Block will be reduced. All of these issues will be raised before the working group. The issues of security measures and posture will of course be reviewed by the working group.

[English]

The overall design of the parliamentary welcome centre, the circulation, the Charles Lynch room and MP services, which will be available in the parliamentary welcome centre, are also very important.

I'll pass the floor back to Mr. Wright, but we'll be happy to answer all your questions at the appropriate time.

[Translation]

Mr. Rob Wright: Thank you very much.

The main decisions made by the House of Commons, which Mr. Patrice explained to you, helped the design take shape. The design process is highly collaborative and mobilizes many partners beyond Parliament, such as the National Capital Commission and Parks Canada's Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office.

• (1120)

[English]

Because of the importance of the design work on perhaps the most important public building in Canada, and the complexities involved, PSPC, in partnership with the National Capital Commission and Parliament, engaged the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada to obtain independent feedback on the evolving design. The RAIC brought together a group of eminent Canadian architects and design professionals, as well as a former architect of the Capitol in Washington, to form the independent design review panel shown on slide 15 to provide feedback on the design direction.

The design I will walk through today continues to be shaped through this engagement, and it is helping us find a point of balance between restoring this heritage masterpiece and modernizing it to support a 21st-century Parliament, and making it more open and accessible for all Canadians.

[Translation]

The first point to highlight is this: the key principle of this design is that both the renewed Centre Block and new Parliament welcome centre will respect what was there before. In this spirit, slide 17 shows that the parliamentary lawn is completely restored and lines of sight from Centre Block are maintained. At the foot of the Centennial Flame, Parliament Hill will look a great deal like it did when Centre Block closed. Traditional operation of the Hill will also be respected and traditional access routes will also be maintained.

[English]

Canadians will continue to pass by the Centennial Flame as they move up the central path toward a new, fully accessible front door to Parliament. As well, it is important to note that parliamentarians and visiting dignitaries will still be able to enter the Centre Block through the traditional entryways. As a visitor moves up the central pathway, the universally accessible front door comes into focus. The goal is for the entry to be subtle, but also for it to work intuitively for Canadians visiting Parliament Hill.

The Vaux wall and the central staircase will be returned to their former positions, and the entry will be integrated under the central staircase, with access from both the east and west.

[Translation]

When a visitor enters the Parliament welcome centre, as indicated on slide 18, they first enter a mezzanine. This is a secured area, but an opening allows the visitor to quickly see the layout and function of the space.

[English]

The central feature in this space is also immediately evident; the now exposed foundation of the Peace Tower and Confederation Hall both anchors the space and connects it to the Centre Block.

[Translation]

Stairs and elevators will be accessible from both sides to lead visitors from the main public entrance of the Welcome Centre.

[English]

Visitors will then pass through airport-style security screening, with a bypass lane for parliamentarians and dedicated lanes for business visitors. The majority of the lanes will be used by the Canadian public and visiting school groups.

Once a visitor enters the main welcome hall, there will be dedicated spaces for visitor engagement, exhibition space and an interactive theatre, as well as classrooms for school groups, which will be available for use by parliamentarians to engage schools, constituents and other groups.

Visitors will flow around the foundation of the Peace Tower as they move toward the Centre Block. Two sets of skylights will fill the space with natural light and connect it to two of the Centre Block's most iconic elements: the Peace Tower and the Hall of Honour.

Previously only visible from outside the building, there will now be several vistas of the Centre Block's defining feature, the Peace Tower. The point of interface between the Parliament welcome centre and the Centre Block will be the east and west courtyards. A visitor on a public tour will enter through the west courtyard adjacent to the House chamber and exit through the east courtyard adjacent to the Senate chamber.

As visitors take elevators up into the previously unused courtyards, they will ascend into new, light-filled spaces. The use of the courtyards will have multiple benefits, making the Centre Block more energy efficient and much more accessible. Leveraging the courtyards is critical to ensuring that the Centre Block can continue to operate both as the Parliament building and as a public building, open and accessible to all Canadians.

• (1125)

[Translation]

Visitors participating in a guided tour, those attending a committee meeting or leading other activities will exit the interior courtyard through the south hallway. Those attending question period or a vote will go up one floor using the stairs or elevator to reach a mezzanine adjacent to the Chamber gallery.

[English]

As visitors move toward the gallery, they will pass through an antechamber that will act as a sound trap to ensure that activity in the courtyard will not disturb chamber proceedings.

As a visitor enters into the new code-compliant and universally accessible gallery, the chamber will look as it always did. The heritage elements will be fully restored, but with fully integrated modern infrastructure to meet broadcasting and acoustic standards.

As Mr. Patrice said, seating design in both the gallery and the chamber floor is an area on which we continue to work hand in hand with the House of Commons to ensure that we're able to align the functional needs of Parliament and the objectives of universal accessibility. Specifically, we are working to maintain as many seats as possible in the gallery and to provide additional seats on the chamber floor to accommodate the increasing numbers of MPs over time. Further consultation with Parliamentarians, including mock-ups, will be part of the process to further develop the seating plans for the chamber.

[Translation]

Using slides 23 to 25, I will provide an update on heritage conservation and construction progress.

[English]

Many of the more than 20,000 heritage assets in the Centre Block have been removed for repair and restoration. Internationally recognized best practices for conservation are being followed to both protect existing heritage elements and design new features that serve modern functions.

Following the careful removal of the heritage layer, much of the building has now been taken down to the studs. The removal of asbestos is 65% completed. Approximately 16 million pounds of asbestos-containing material have now been removed. The painstaking work will be completed on floors one, four, five and six before the end of 2022, while work on the high heritage floors, two and three, including the chambers, will extend into 2023.

[Translation]

The following slides show before and after pictures. You can see the progress made inside the building to prepare the start of the next phase of construction to reinforce the building's structure, meet modern building codes and install new systems.

[English]

The first image is of the chamber after the hand-painted linen ceiling was carefully removed for important conservation work. The second image shows the former fifth-floor cafeteria.

[Translation]

Slide 28 shows progress made at the visitor entrance, located on the first floor of the building. The next slide shows the 6th floor.

[English]

The last slide in this series shows the reading room. It is now being used for rapid testing of all the workers. That has been a key part of a comprehensive strategy, with great leadership demonstrated by the construction industry, to keep the site safe and operational over the past two years.

Slide 31 shows the masonry work progressing well on the north facade. Twenty-five per cent of the north facade is now completed, which represents about 5% of the overall masonry work. This will

involve the complete rehabilitation of the almost 400,000 stones on the building's exterior, requiring the complete removal and repair, and in some cases replacement, of approximately one-third of the stones. This work is extremely labour-intensive and time-consuming.

• (1130)

[Translation]

Excavation of the Parliament Welcome Centre, which we can see on slide 32, are on the right track and progressing well. In fact, 60% of the excavation is now done. To date, 26,000 loads of rocky substrate have been removed. The western section of the excavation has reached its final depth, which is 21 meters. Excavation will be done by the end of this year.

[English]

I will now look forward to some key upcoming milestones and activities. A key focus this spring will be to finalize the schematic design and then seek design endorsement in the form of a federal land use approval from the National Capital Commission.

Turning to construction, we will begin the removal of the floor slab in level one and begin excavation work in the basement and the courtyards. This technically challenging work is key to both advancing the base isolation strategy for seismic upgrading and interconnecting the Centre Block and the Parliament welcome centre.

[Translation]

In 2023, main excavation of the Parliament Welcome Centre will be behind us, and we will come to the end of our demolition and asbestos removal inside Centre Block. By the end of 2023, after the creation of a series of geothermic wells, we will start to pour concrete for the Parliament Welcome Centre.

[English]

In closing, the restoration and modernization of the Centre Block and the insertion of a new Parliament welcome centre into the heritage landscape is complex and challenging. At the same time, it provides a number of opportunities not only to restore this Canadian masterpiece but also to digitally equip Canada's Parliament and make it more secure, sustainable and accessible to all Canadians, enabling more Canadians to engage in our country's parliamentary tradition and democratic process. This work will ensure that the Parliament buildings are ready to serve Parliament and Canada for another century.

Thank you for your attention. We'd be pleased to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you for that thorough presentation, and thank you to you and your team for being here with us today.

We will now enter into six-minute rounds for questions, starting with Mr. Duncan, who will be followed by Mr. Turnbull.

[Translation]

The next turn will be Ms. DeBellefeuille's, then Ms. Blaney.

[English]

Mr. Duncan, we go to you for six minutes.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you for the information. I have a few different things, and I think I'll go over some of the questions I have about project benchmarks, then some of the governance. Since I have been a member of PROC before, you won't be surprised by some of my questions on that. Then I'll talk a bit about the contingencies or variables.

It was good information and a good presentation, but there are a couple of things.

When are we going to get back into Centre Block? We talk about the time frame: on time, on budget. What is "on time"—

The Chair: I know it will be difficult, as I'm not in the room, but I would just remind us to go through the chair. If we maintain a good pace, I will not intervene as often.

Go ahead, Mr. Wright.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I was asking you, Madam Chair, but anyway, it's noted.

Mr. Rob Wright: In June 2021, when we baselined the project as part of the public technical briefing, we stated that the substantial completion of construction would be—and we gave a range—in 2030-31. I'll come back to the rationale for that.

Also, then, working hand in hand with Parliament—the House of Commons and the Senate—we also indicated that there would be an approximate one-year period of commissioning and testing to ensure that the Centre Block is ready for use for parliamentary proceedings. That baseline remains. We continue with a construction schedule of 2030-31 and then a period of time for Parliament to be able to properly commission the building.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Yes, that is good. I think I would say that there's about a decade left before we may get in, between finishing at that point....

The other thing is that we have to ask about money. I ask about that every time. Where are we in terms of a budget? I'll start with Centre Block and I'll expand a bit, but what's the budget figure, as of today, for the cost of the Centre Block renovation?

• (1135)

Mr. Rob Wright: I'll return to the baseline we established in June 2021. We established a baseline budget for the Centre Block and the Parliament Welcome Centre. Again, we gave a range of \$4.5 billion to \$5 billion. That is the established budget for both the Centre Block and the Parliament Welcome Centre.

Mr. Eric Duncan: That's just the Centre Block building itself, so pulling it back out into the presentation about the parliamentary

precinct, I have two questions on that when it comes to budget and time frame. What's the overall number that you have at this point for all those blocks and buildings—Confederation, East...? What's the total number you're looking at as of today?

Mr. Rob Wright: It's important to maybe take one step back. The long-term vision and plan we implement on rolling programs of work, so essentially what we do is.... Again, I'm going to take you back to that baseline in June of 2021. There's a lot of work that we do with Parliament to develop the functional requirements for individual projects, and then we baseline both the budget and the schedule for each one of these.

The next big piece, the baseline, will be block two. Once we come out of that international design competition, we would then move to baseline that from a budget and schedule perspective and then hold ourselves accountable for the delivery of that.

We just completed a major recapitalization of the East Block. We hit that on time, on budget, at just under \$100 million.

We have a good record of hitting our baseline budget and schedule, but we don't have an overall estimate for all of the work, because the priorities and the sequencing are subject to adjustment—

Mr. Eric Duncan: Would you be willing to share—in the interests of time—with the committee, perhaps in writing, which buildings you do have estimates on and which ones are to come, perhaps? Do we know at this point?

Mr. Rob Wright: Sure thing.

Mr. Eric Duncan: The other thing is the timeline to that, where people look at Centre Block and we get the briefing today as part of that, but would it be fair to say that the parliamentary precinct is going to be under construction—I'm going to guess—for the next 20 years?

Mr. Rob Wright: I would say that we are really in about mid-stride of the overall restoration and modernization of the parliamentary precinct. There are a lot of projects behind us.

We've completed 25 very large projects, but you're exactly right: There's a lot ahead of us, right now with the Centre Block and the Parliament Welcome Centre, and then moving into block two, and there are also block one, Confederation and East Block.

We would really be starting to bring things together in a consolidated precinct, with most of the work behind us, in the mid-2030s.

The Chair: Mr. Duncan, you have 45 seconds.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I'll get to this. The Auditor General, as an example, the magnitude of this, perhaps.... The work around Centre Block and the precinct has been in discussion for 20 years in terms of planning. Going back to Speaker Milliken, I think, is the first time this was discussed.

Has the Auditor General ever done any reports or made any findings in those 10 or 20 years? If so, when was the last time?

Mr. Rob Wright: The last time the Auditor General issued a report on the long-term vision and plan and the work was in 2010.

Mr. Eric Duncan: It was in 2010.

At this time, then, I'll go back to my last question, which is where we originally started in terms of how timelines and budgets have grown and stretched.

Has the Auditor General expressed anything in terms of looking at this again or the governance aspect? I'll say both, because my time is up, but perhaps some other colleagues can get to this.

Have there been any concerns raised about that or changes made since the last AG report?

Mr. Rob Wright: The last Auditor General report in 2010, to boil things down.... A clean bill of health was given to project management and the delivery of the projects. The finding on the governance was issued as part of that report in 2010. A recommendation at that point in 2010 was to transfer the accountability of the work from the executive branch to Parliament.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wright.

We'll now be moving on to Mr. Turnbull for six minutes.

I'm going to ask, to maximize our time, that after a person finishes speaking, we take a breath before the next person goes. This is not an interrogation; this is a questioning. We're here to find some information and to respect the interpreters.

Unless I feel the pace is getting too quick, I will let the conversation continue to flow through the chair.

• (1140)

Mr. Eric Duncan: I had only six minutes. I apologize. I got through only a third of my questions.

The Chair: I'm not talking just to you, Mr. Duncan, but if you feel that I am, I will leave that with you.

I want to try to run a meeting as thoroughly as possible and to ensure that we get as much information as possible.

With that, Mr. Turnbull, it's over to you for six minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thanks to the panellists for the incredible presentation and updates. I had the opportunity of sitting on the working group in the last session of Parliament, and I grew to appreciate the size and complexity of this project. There's incredible work being done, both to preserve the heritage features and to ensure a great design that's going to meet the needs of parliamentarians and senators for many years to come. It's incredible work. I want to say thank you for the presentation.

I have a few questions.

One of the questions that is important to me and to Canadians is about getting to net zero. Our government has very big commitments around this that we're making lots of progress on.

This is for Mr. Wright, perhaps. You mentioned in your remarks a 75% reduction in energy usage and 50% in water usage, if I heard

correctly. Could you give us a bit more detail on how that will be achieved, and whether that's mostly through mechanical system upgrades or a combination of factors?

Mr. Rob Wright: I will ask Ms. Garrett to add in some details on this.

You're exactly right. The replacement of the mechanical systems is a key part of making this building much more energy efficient. The closure of the courtyards also plays a part in that by removing a significant portion of the building from the exterior elements. We're also doing research with the NRC on how to effectively insulate these types of heritage buildings, which is very complex. One of the areas that will make a big difference is putting insulation in the roofline, which did not have insulation before.

I will pass it over to Ms. Garrett to add some more detail.

Ms. Jennifer Garrett (Director General, Centre Block Program, Science and Parliamentary Infrastructure Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'll just add to what Mr. Wright said. Think about the standard things you like to do in your house, such as replacing windows and adding insulation. We're doing all of those things in addition to the systems that Mr. Wright is putting in place. Also key to achieving the strategy...and it is a very robust strategy. It goes from the planting to the mechanical systems. I think it's worth highlighting that we are putting a small geothermal field underneath the parliamentary welcome centre. Key to that is that it will allow us to exchange heat and cooling among the triad of buildings. There's also a very significant water-retention strategy that will be a key contributor to the program.

Between building systems, the normal kinds of things you do in your home, the geothermal field, and the heat exchange, we are going to go a very, very long way to achieving carbon neutral. We get very much all the way there just as a program, and then on top of it we're going to be buying clean energy off the grid. The grid is cleaning itself up as well, and that's the last little part that gets us there.

I'm happy to provide any further details. I'm cognizant of the time, so that's it in a nutshell.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you to the panellists for that response. That was great. I'm very happy to hear that geothermal is being considered and is in fact being used.

You mentioned that the working group was going to be discussing numerous topics to come. One of them was security issues. Obviously, with things we've seen in the last week or so occurring on Parliament Hill, and certainly some undertones of anti-government sentiment, I think all of the MPs, certainly in our caucus, are concerned about security. I wondered if there were new security concerns or considerations that would come up for that working group, and if you could give us some idea of what those might look like.

• (1145)

Mr. Michel Patrice: When speaking about security, I will remain very general. Let's just say that we are observing, learning from every situation that is occurring, and adapting in terms of plans, which will be discussed in camera, in relation to security.

One good example in terms of learning lessons, and Mr. Wright alluded to it, is the operationalization of the building that is needed after construction is completed. We learned quite a bit in terms of the move when we closed down Centre Block to go into West Block. It's very important for us as the House administration, and for you as parliamentarians, that the continuity of Parliament be a key feature. It must always be our first priority.

We learn every time. We adapt and we try to do better each time. A good example would be the transfer from the Centre Block to the West Block. We'll apply that same principle when it comes to security.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: On another train of thought, the independent design review panel is just incredible in terms of the expertise it brings to this project. Could members of the panel speak to any impacts they've had so far on the design? Moving forward, it seems that having that group doing that independent review is a really positive thing for us to have. Could you speak to the impact they've had so far?

Mr. Rob Wright: I'll highlight maybe three areas where they've had a significant impact. It's also important to note that their focus has really been on the public components of the building, not really on the core parliamentary aspects of the building.

With regard to the interface between the great lawn, the parliamentary welcome centre and into Centre Block, they've had quite a significant impact on how the welcome centre is essentially acting as a bridge to connect the public environment of the lawn into the welcome centre and then into the Centre Block. I think we have found, with their help, a good balance point between the public and the parliamentary side of the buildings so that it can work.

On that central entry, as Mr. Patrice underlined, there was a lot of hard work to get that in the position it is in today. I think we're on a very solid foundation. The—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I have to interrupt you. I would like to continue this conversation later. I think that you are speaking at a good pace; I hope the interpreters agree.

I will now give the floor to Ms. DeBellefeuille for six minutes.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to add my voice to that of my colleagues and highlight the quality of this morning's presentation, which summarizes the broad steps of delivering this major project.

From what I understood, there is no plan to make the House of Commons larger.

Are you still planning for about 420 seats?

Mr. Rob Wright: Thank you for the question.

We are indeed developing plans to add seats to the House of Commons. This will allow all MPs to be in this important place.

I will give the floor to Mr. Patrice so that he can give us more details on the matter.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Thank you very much.

An increasing number of elected officials is indeed a reality, which I consider to be positive, within our democratic system. Given the potential growth of the number of MPs over the next 100 years, various plans and scenarios were studied.

I will ask Mr. de Grandmont, the architect of the Chamber, to give you an overview of the options considered. We are aware that the number of MPs will increase over the next 100 years.

• (1150)

Mr. Darrell de Grandmont (Director, Centre Block Program, House of Commons): Thank you.

The scenarios we have considered will be able to include a larger number of MPs. We are currently looking at reusing the furniture currently in the House of Commons. In the various scenarios, we are opting more and more for reusing heritage furniture. There is also the issue of integration.

As you have already seen in the past, one possibility under consideration is that some furniture would be set up in rows further back. We could also consider a complete fit-up of the House of Commons and determine if it would be possible to use new furniture, considering the number of MPs.

To date, there is no plan or direction we are favouring over another, but we know that it will be necessary to develop scenarios to deal with this growth over the years. We will not necessarily limit ourselves to a single option. We will work, from one year to the next, based on the increasing number of MPs. This could include a scenario based on reusing the furniture, especially heritage assets. I believe that there is an interest in conserving them. We are therefore making significant effort to do so.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much.

My next question is for Mr. Aubé.

Mr. Aubé, due to the pandemic, we have had to deal with technological challenges. For example, the limits associated with the rooms and technology will impact committee meetings. In the new Parliament, there will be space reserved for interpreters, booths, a certain number of rooms and technological equipment. That could allow us, without feeling limited by technology or room availability, to go through another period where operating in hybrid mode would be necessary.

Is what we are currently experiencing influencing the development of information technologies for the future Parliament?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé (Chief Information Officer, Digital Services and Real Property, House of Commons): Thank you for the question, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

As you know, and as Mr. Patrice mentioned earlier, for us, business continuity is a very important principle when it comes to parliamentary activities. Consequently, for all of the infrastructure we will put in place inside the building, we will make sure to be able to function if ever there is another pandemic or other incidents that require us to work differently.

In addition, this building includes many challenges. Among other things, we have less space than before. We are considering various strategies to make sure to be able to offer the same level of service, but maybe in a different way. As part of the pilot projects, we are assessing the possibility of remote work to provide certain services. However, we want to make sure to offer the same level of service.

We must also respect the rules and procedures you will establish through this committee. Based on the choices you will make about how to function on a technological level, we will make sure that the infrastructure is in place and able to support you, and that it lines up with the way you want to work in the future.

The Chair: You have 40 seconds left.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: I have just one last question, Madam Chair.

Mr. Aubé, I am rather curious about your process. We are a modern organization. I imagine that you will confirm that your process includes consultations with users, namely the interpreters, so that they may participate actively in developing infrastructure that will suit them and allow them to offer high quality interpretation services in both official languages.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Mrs. DeBellefeuille, I can guarantee you that interpreters are full partners who collaborate on the implementation of any solution.

For instance, under this initiative, we have pilot projects on various ways to provide interpretation services. The translation bureau is our partner and any final decisions in terms of solutions are made in partnership with the bureau to ensure that their needs and yours are met through the services we will implement.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. DeBellefeuille, for joining us in committee today.

We will now go to Ms. Blaney for six minutes.

• (1155)

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that.

I'd like to thank everyone who is here presenting to us. It has been very informative, and I appreciate your summing up in such a short time such an enormous project.

I have a few questions.

One that was mentioned several times was about accessibility. I guess I would just like a bit of clarity about what that looks like, not only for visitors, which is incredibly important, but also for MPs. This is something I am personally really passionate about, because when spaces are accessible, we see more faces around the table, which we may not see traditionally.

I'm wondering if you could talk a bit about focusing on how we're making this more accessible for MPs. You spoke about having two floors for the lobbies. I think it's something to think about very carefully so that we don't send people who have a disability somewhere else to get to the same place as everyone else. I also think about walking in through the MPs' door in Centre Block, where there are stairs you can go up. I really enjoyed that experience, but I also think it's important that we look at it in terms of accessibility. Could you just clarify for me how we are making these spaces more accessible for MPs to be able to do their work regardless of their ability?

Mr. Rob Wright: I'll ask Ms. Garrett to add details again, but at a high level, to begin with, we're working closely with an accessibility advisory group on the designs. I can come back to the public experience, but the question was mostly around parliamentarians.

One important element is that with the Parliament Welcome Centre, the Centre Block, West Block and East Block will be interconnected with essentially a parliamentary promenade, which will really shift these three buildings to become one integrated complex, with a universal accessible pathway interconnecting the three buildings.

Universal accessibility from the exterior is a key part of this as well. We're really trying to ensure that the pathways are the same pathways for all people and that the means of moving through the building is the same for all people. There's been a tremendous amount of study around the placement and sizing of elevators, for example, to ensure that it's a very inclusive experience, as well as the placement, sizing and approach with washroom facilities.

It's a very inclusive approach beyond pure mobility issues.

I'll pass it over to Ms. Garrett to add details.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I don't want to interrupt, but, through you, Madam Chair, it's really important for me to understand the lobbies.

You're going to have the lobbies on two floors. That's integral to our work, and I just want to say that in the current space we're in, in the West Block, there are stairs to go up if you want to go in the back way, so it concerns me a bit, and that's another component.

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: I'll start with that and broaden out.

There has been a lot of focused work done and there will be a lot of discussion upcoming with the House of Commons working group on this very subject, given the importance of accessibility to the program. When I talk about accessibility, at this point in the schematic design process we're focused on mobility, but it is going to be an inclusive approach that will continue to evolve. We want to make sure, first and foremost, that the building doesn't get designed in a way that it gets in the way. There will have to be modifications to the chamber seating to make sure that we have dignified, inclusive seating and that people can manoeuvre within the chamber itself, from front to back.

In terms of the lobbies, the access from the lobby into the chamber is a key area of interest and study for us on the project to date, and there will be consultations with the working group coming up on that. There are solutions to get mobility-challenged people from the lobby that exists now into the chamber.

In terms of the extension into that two-level lobby, there will absolutely be not only stairs, but elevators within the lobby environment that connect the lobby together. That lower level where you have your food services and where you can meet with somebody will connect up through an elevator or a staircase, should you choose, to the main traditional lobby, which will function as it always has, with the whips and accessible access into the chamber.

I don't want to drive your time down. Is that what you were looking for, or would you like me to continue to broaden?

• (1200)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That helps.

My other question has already been brought up, about the current seating arrangement for members within the House of Commons. Is the chamber going to stay the same? As we went through that transition of having more members in the House in 2015, there were bucket seats.

This is another challenge for many reasons, in terms of having people moving in and out. Are you looking at that when you do it, and making sure people have their own seats, or are there discussions about having more of those seats?

Mr. Michel Patrice: The seating arrangement will be a subject, I'm sure, of many discussions with the working group. You're right that we have to look to the future in terms of benches that we put in to complement the increased number of members in the Centre Block chamber. It was not the most liked addition. Those discussions will be engaged in with the members of the working group, and your representative will be consulted more broadly in terms of the seating arrangement.

For example, with desks, we can anticipate that somewhere in the life of that newly renovated building, because of growth, there

may be less room for desks. There will be many discussions and, hopefully, a vision for the future through the dialogue with and decisions of the working group, dialogue with the members in their own parties and, ultimately, the recommendation of the board.

The Chair: Excellent. That brings us to the time.

I'm going to propose, because things are taking a little longer, that we will get through round two of questioning. I find this to be a very productive conversation, so if we would like to try to get through our third round so that most members are able to ask their questions, would we like to ask witnesses to stay until 1 p.m.? That way, we can get through three rounds. Is there a desire from committee members? Is anyone opposed?

Okay. That would probably take our committee business away for today, but we can do it on Thursday.

This is a notice to the witnesses that we are asking you to stay until 1:00 so that we can get through this conversation and receive this information.

We'll go into round two. We will be starting with Mr. Calkins, followed by Ms. Sahota, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille and Ms. Blaney will then have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[*English*]

Finally, we'll have Mr. Vis, followed by Mr. Fergus, for five minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): To the folks here today, thank you so much for taking the time.

I've never had an opportunity to ask any questions about this. I just celebrated my 16th anniversary as a member of Parliament a few days ago, and I'm happy to ask a few questions here. I'm hoping my career is long enough that I'll see my way back to Centre Block.

When did the shovels first hit the ground? Can you remind me of the date that happened?

Mr. Rob Wright: If you remember, the transition of Parliament happened in early 2019 with the start of proceedings in the West Block. That first year, 2019, was mostly consumed with setting up the construction site and separating the facility from the parliamentary grid.

The real shovels in the ground, to get to the bottom line, started in 2020.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Okay. It was 2020.

I didn't see in any of the presentation a PERT chart, a Gantt chart, or any elevations.... It seems to me, from the discussions we're having here, that we started a reconstruction process without actually knowing what the final project will look like. Am I missing something?

Mr. Rob Wright: This is a traditional approach that we've used on Parliament Hill. It really is a construction management-based approach. We've brought on the design team and the construction management team at the same time.

The key thing here with the Centre Block, as well as the other buildings within the precinct, is that there's a tremendous amount of heavy lift at the front end that is not really dependent on the design, such as taking all the asbestos out of the building, which is a couple of years of work, and doing all the excavation work.

For example, once we locked down the size of the Parliament Welcome Centre, we were able to get going on that in taking all of the asbestos out of the building and getting that done. We try to do things in parallel, rather than in series, rather than waiting to get all of the design locked down and then beginning the construction.

• (1205)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: We still have an estimated completion date and a budget, but we don't know yet.... What percentage of the budget is contingency? What are we looking at? Are we looking at 50% contingency or 100% contingency?

I look around at some of the other procurement projects the government has, and I'm seeing things costing four times more than they did 10 years ago. What's in place to make sure this doesn't end up being something that costs four times more in hindsight than what we planned a few years ago?

Mr. Rob Wright: In June 2021, we had an independent costing firm work with us to establish a baseline cost estimate. All of the contingencies, risk reserve and escalation were factored into the cost breakdown.

If we look at contingencies, we have design contingency as well as construction contingency. It maps out well, given the complexity and scale of the Centre Block compared to other projects in the precinct. For example, the West Block had contingencies of 35%. We're using 45% for the Centre Block, given the increased complexity with all of the additional heritage material in particular.

For the risk reserve, for example, we used 25% risk reserve on the West Block. We're using a range of 15% to 35%. That's how we get to that range of \$4.5 billion to \$5 billion. It's that range in the risk reserve. The reason we've used a range in this case is twofold. One part was that we still did not have all of the functional requirements locked down with Parliament, and the other was that given the pandemic context of escalation rates in materials, equipment and rates of labour, we wanted to make sure we had some additional absorption to be able to take into account the potential that escalation rates would take a while to return back to normal.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left, Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I have just one concern about the notion of a public cafeteria. This or any government would collect taxes from the restaurants on Sparks Street, and I don't understand where the idea or notion came from that we would take those tax dollars from those restaurants and build a competing facility across the street in Centre Block, unless there's something I don't understand. Is it going to be provided by a private contractor, or are we actually now in the business of competing with local restaurants?

The Chair: I'm going to end the time there. Perhaps we can get an answer to that at a later time.

We now have five minutes for Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): I'm a little confused by that last question. Anyway, I did appreciate having cafeteria access when I was in Centre Block, and I'm sure that the new plans will be great.

I want to commend all the witnesses for being really professional. I can tell that from the meeting we had in 2020 to now, things have really come along. There are a lot more details being provided in this plan than there were at that time, so it's wonderful to get this update.

It was mentioned that the LTVP group or the working group has decided that we will remain with two large committee rooms. What went into deciding that? I believe that in Centre Block previously we had one on the Senate side as well, and we also used a room on the lower floor as a committee room.

What were the factors that led to that conclusion?

• (1210)

Mr. Michel Patrice: I will start and then turn to Mr. Aubé to give more details.

We're talking here about committee rooms for the use of the House of Commons. It's a review of the committee rooms for the House of Commons, and it's taking into account our full basket of committee rooms in the different facilities across the House of Commons precinct.

Maybe Mr. Aubé can be more specific about the committee rooms in Centre Block.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Through you, Madam Chair, as you remember, Centre Block had three committee rooms. There were rooms 237 and 253, and there was room 112 down in the basement, but 112 wasn't really functioning as a committee room.

Our requirements basically remain the same for the Centre Block facilities. As you know, through the implementation of Wellington, we did increase the number of committee rooms we had, but based mainly on consultations and our statistics regarding the number of meetings, our requirements have stayed the same.

We see the number of events increasing, and we have sufficient rooms and facilities to manage that. We feel that if ever there is a requirement, we can leverage other facilities. Because we are interconnecting all of these facilities, we will be able to leverage any one of them.

We have to think about how, once we renovate Centre Block, we will go to West Block. As you may remember, the original plan for the West Block chamber was to potentially transform it into committee rooms, so if ever there is a need in future to increase the number of committee rooms in that complex, we will have that capability.

What we're going to do with these spaces will be determined through consultation with members once we get to West Block.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Through you, Madam Chair, I would also like to know just a bit about what you're hinting at. Discussions are continuing on transforming the block across from Centre Block as well in the future.

Can you share a little bit more as to what the status of that part of the project is?

Mr. Rob Wright: The redevelopment of block two, directly across from the Peace Tower, is going to be a really important step for the parliamentary precinct. It finishes off the parliamentary square, if you will, but it will also really help us to empty, for the House of Commons, the Confederation Building, which is critically important as it houses a great number of members of Parliament. It's also critically important for the Senate. It will allow us to empty East Block, so we can fully restore and modernize those two really important buildings.

Once Confederation and East Block are finished, we'll then be able to start to reconsolidate the parliamentary precinct into an integrated campus. Mr. Patrice mentioned key elements, such as tunnel connections, to create an integrated campus for the secure and efficient movement of accredited people, as well as material and goods between the facilities. The vision here is an integrated campus of the Hill and the three city blocks facing it.

We are in the second stage of an international design competition. The final submissions are going to be received in early March. The independent jury, which includes three parliamentarians, will come back together to render a decision on the winning concept. Then that project will really launch.

The Chair: That brings us to time. I hope that's okay, Ms. Sahota.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, go ahead for two and a half minutes.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

In recent years, large buildings have been constructed while completely ignoring accessibility standards for mobility-impaired persons. Some examples are the installation of push buttons for elevators at a height appropriate for people in wheelchairs, as well as the height of water fountains and door width. I am talking about all the new standards that enable someone in a wheelchair or someone with severe mobility restrictions to move around, both in the House of Commons and in public spaces.

Have you ensured adherence to this very important value from the project's inception to its completion?

• (1215)

Mr. Rob Wright: Thank you for the question, Madam Chair.

Accessibility is at the heart of this restoration and modernization program. We are working with a group of accessibility experts. This is a key element in the design of Centre Block and the Parliament welcome centre and, of course, of other projects that will be created in the future, such as block 2, which we discussed earlier.

I could ask Ms. Garrett to say more about that, but I can assure you that accessibility is at the heart of this project.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Madam Chair, do I have a bit of time left?

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: That's great.

I would like to ask one last question. We hope that, in a dozen years, women will make up 50% of elected members in the House of Commons and that, today, both men and women want to fulfill their role as parents, be they elected representatives or not.

Have family-friendly spaces and changing tables been planned in men's and women's washrooms, so that elected members and the public can come to Parliament with their young children? That would help provide elected members with the support they need to fulfill their parliamentary duties while balancing work and family life.

Mr. Darrell de Grandmont: Thank you for the question.

We have planned family-friendly spaces, and there will always be a family room in Centre Block. We are still consulting members to find out what their needs are when it comes to Centre Block.

We have talked about lobbies, halls on both floors. We are seeing an increase in the number of members, and we also know that family-friendly spaces are necessary in Centre Block. That is absolutely part of our discussions, and we have already planned a few rooms.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now give the floor to Ms. Blaney for two and a half minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Through you, Madam Chair, I guess my question is around workers.

I see that you have something in here about how many jobs have been created. I really appreciate that, but I also heard a lot in the presentation about specialized skills and all of the different things. I'm curious about how it's going. Are you having any challenges around hiring people who have those specialized skills?

There's another part of that question. Is there any information that lets us know about the diversity of the workforce? Is there any sort of investment in making sure that we're providing opportunities to diverse populations, to women and so forth, and is that represented anywhere in your information?

Mr. Rob Wright: Again, I'll start and then ask Ms. Garrett to add some details.

With regard to capacity, at this point in the industry, given the stage we're at in the project, which is really around the demolition, abatement and excavation work, we've not seen any real issues with capacity. It is a concern, though; there's no question about that. We've had a lot of engagement with the Canadian Construction Association around capacity. As well, we work very closely with our partners on the construction side. If you look 10 years out, there are anticipated retirements in the construction industry. We're working closely with the industry to try to ensure that capacity is provided as we look forward. So far so good, I would say, but there's work to be done there.

On the diversity side of things we're spending a lot of work and effort. I would give some real kudos to the construction industry. Our partners PCL and EllisDon have really been partners in working to try to build capacity and broaden opportunities, whether that's to indigenous communities or to other under-represented groups such as females and others.

We do have a good track record. On the West Block, we had the biggest apprenticeship program for females in masonry in North America. We have done some good things in the past, and we continue to focus on it, but it won't happen on its own.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you. That brings you to time, Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Vis, you have five minutes.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): It's really nice to be here with all of you today and to have the presentation.

I have a couple of really quick questions. I have five minutes, so I'll move quickly. How many contractors are part of the parliamentary precinct rebuild?

The Chair: I'm going to pause the clock for a second, because I know this line of questioning.

To the witnesses, usually the time period that a member uses for a question is the time that is given to you for an answer. Just to respect and keep a breath between speakers for interpreters, I would ask you to be mindful of that.

Mr. Vis, it's great to see you too. Maybe we can give them double the time, because they don't do QP like we do.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll slow down my line of questioning.

Can we restart?

The Chair: Yes. Let's do that.

Mr. Brad Vis: Again, it's a real pleasure to see all of you here today.

How many contractors are involved in the rebuild of the parliamentary precinct?

Mr. Rob Wright: It would be very difficult today to give you an exact number of all the contractors across the whole precinct. There are two really important things. One is the size and scale of this work. On the very, very big projects, we work with some very big firms. Then there's a web of subcontracts.

If you look at the Centre Block, for example, we have PCL and EllisDon as a joint venture for construction management, but over 500 companies have contracts. It spans from coast to coast. It's a very large economic footprint. We have a lot of opportunities for companies to get involved.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you. That answers my question.

The second question I have is this. Given that there hasn't been a report done by the Auditor General since 2010, and we're talking about a very large sum of public money, can you explain to this committee what processes are in place to ensure that contracts are meeting their obligations and, when they're not, what processes are taken to ensure they're no longer accessing these lucrative and very valuable government contracts?

Mr. Rob Wright: We have a quite robust project management regime, with a lot of details. I'll ask Ms. Garrett to add some.

What's really important is that we've had a number of firms over the past decade, since that last Auditor General report, come in and do open book accounting audits. PricewaterhouseCoopers has come in. We've had others come in and do audits of the projects—West Block, Sir John A. Macdonald, etc. We've also had outside firms come in and do audits of the project management practices. We've done a lot of that work. We have open book accounting with the firms that we're in partnership with.

I'll hand it over to Ms. Garrett.

Mr. Brad Vis: Answer very briefly, please.

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: Very briefly, in terms of Centre Block, we had an extensive internal audit of our program execution plan that was conducted by internal PSPC auditors, which includes everything from how we're going to manage money to risk, etc. That audit was completed last year, and it was a very substantial undertaking.

Our financials are constantly spot audited within the department as well, to make sure that we're paying for the goods and services. It's to get a sense of the kind of things that we are doing to ensure there is a robust oversight framework managing the program.

● (1225)

Mr. Brad Vis: I'm from British Columbia. Parliament is very far away for many of the people I represent.

A few years ago, when I was a staffer, my sister came to Ottawa to visit for the first time. She walked up to the front of the parliamentary precinct and said, “Brad, why is there a unicorn with a chain around its neck and its tongue sticking out?” I said, “Well, Maegen, the Canada bondage unicorn is the symbol of Canada, and when anyone walks through the parliamentary precinct, they see all these weird-looking types of creatures.” To this day—maybe you could get back to the committee on this—I have asked the Library of Parliament, but I’ve never received a solid answer about what the unicorn with the chain around its neck and its tongue sticking out in front of Parliament Hill actually means to our country.

If you could report back to this committee, my little sister would love to know what the unicorn means for Canada and why it’s so important to have it on the front of our parliamentary precinct.

An hon. member: You might not want to know the answer to that.

Mr. Brad Vis: I might not.

Mr. Michel Patrice: We’ve taken note of it. We’ll do some research and get back to the committee.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you. My sister is going to be very pleased.

The Chair: Mr. Vis, would you like your last 20 seconds?

Mr. Brad Vis: Yes.

Maybe you could also report back to the committee on how contractors in British Columbia can access the calls for proposals for contracts that will be coming forward. These are really lucrative jobs and I know some of them can be done remotely, especially on the engineering and design side of things, so that would be very helpful to provide the committee as well, if that’s okay.

Mr. Rob Wright: I’m happy to do that.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Mr. Fergus now has five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would also like to thank the witnesses for their update on this extraordinary and extraordinarily complex project of renovating the Parliament of Canada.

Mr. Wright, you talked about the parliamentary precinct and the importance of creating an environment that will occupy Parliament Hill and whose footprint will also extend to the three other streets of downtown Ottawa. I think Mr. Patrice also mentioned this in his presentation or his answers.

For security reasons or in order to create a meeting place for Canadians, have you thought about turning Wellington Street into a pedestrian street, especially in front of the parliamentary precinct?

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

Of course, discussions have been held about Wellington Street over the past few years. Recently, the tramway project once again raised questions about whether the route would be on Wellington Street. There will be opportunities for those kinds of discussions.

Of course, there would be benefits in terms of security, as well as for visitors. However, the city of Ottawa would encounter significant inconveniences, so those discussions would be paramount. This topic has already been discussed.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I will build on the question Ms. Blaney asked about spaces not only for members, but also for senators, to hold committee meetings.

I assume that, once the project is completed, we will discuss what we will do, for instance, with the House of Commons here in West Block. Are there any plans to turn it into committee rooms or offices? Will we keep it to be used as a second debating chamber, or has that not been decided yet?

• (1230)

Mr. Michel Patrice: Thank you for the question.

No plans have been developed concerning the temporary House in West Block. We recognize that, by the end of the construction work on Centre Block, there may be a lot of shifting and changes in terms of parliamentarians’ or committees’ needs.

It is important to say that, when this temporary House was designed and built, we took into account the fact that significant modifications could take place, including the integration of various committee rooms or offices for parliamentarians, or any other use that would meet current needs.

The strength of all participants in the parliamentary precinct rehabilitation project is experience, but also agility. Everyone must be aware that yesterday’s plans will not necessarily be tomorrow’s plans. We have to design for the future while learning from the past.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Indeed, that is in line—

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, you have 30 seconds left.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Okay, I will make a brief comment.

That is in line with your answer to the question Mr. Vis asked about the importance of retaining some flexibility to make adjustments. That is why planning and construction cannot be done in succession because we know that changes will have to be made to the project over time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now begin the third round of questions starting with Mr. Duncan for five minutes. We will then go to Mrs. Romanado for five minutes, Mrs. DeBellefeuille for two and a half minutes, Ms. Blaney for two and a half minutes and, finally, Mr. Gerretsen for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Duncan, the floor is yours.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Madam Chair, before my time starts, I have just a note for the agenda. In looking at it, I see that we have a round left here, but if we have time to go in camera briefly at the end.... I have a couple of questions left, maybe not even the full amount, and if there is time, we're willing to go in camera to finalize our agenda.

I would say, too, as opposed to doing it on Thursday, that we could maximize our time. I know there have been some good questions today, but we want to maximize the time with Mr. Dion on Thursday.

If there's a willingness on your part, I'll just leave that in your hands to perhaps discuss after this round.

The Chair: I'll just chime back really quickly. I'm watching the time closely and trying to keep it moving, but the last round, which is a mirror of this round minus your second slot, has taken over 30 minutes. We'll keep it moving. If it's possible, for sure we'll maximize our time.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Okay.

My questions perhaps are some follow-ups. I believe there was some discussion last year in June, as I was mentioning in my opening round, about governance and some of the concerns. You have the full slide of the many parliamentary partners that you have to consult and get views from. There were some discrepancies with the Senate last year in terms of their requests for several committee rooms. I think it might have been raised in different forms before then.

When it goes to governance, there was a request for an additional \$100 million, I believe, for project work to take place. The minister declined that. My first question is, what's the status of that? Has the Senate dropped that and acknowledged that, or is there a negotiation going on with parts of their side of the building, for lack of a better term?

Mr. Rob Wright: On the issues you've emphasized around finalizing some scope elements for the Centre Block and the Parliament Welcome Centre concerning the Senate on the number of offices, the number of committee rooms and a potential dedicated entry into the Parliament Welcome Centre, those discussions are ongoing. We've had very productive conversations with the Senate. I hope that those will conclude very shortly. They haven't been rendered by the Senate at this point, but we're having productive conversations.

• (1235)

Mr. Eric Duncan: I'd say that you're on time and on budget, unless the negotiations with the Senate go somewhere as well.

We've talked about the completion. This goes back to the governance. As you mentioned, in the Auditor General's report, there were some concerns. The working group that's going on is addressing some of those.

At what point is the answer from the minister or.... Again, who is leading this effort? Where does it end? Is it when a "no" becomes a negotiation or a back-and-forth in terms of that timeline of moving things along and trying to get into the building in 10 years? Is there a timeline for a negotiation? Do you have any directive from the

minister? Have you gone to the minister to say, "Look, this needs to be finalized by X date so we can keep on time"?"

Mr. Rob Wright: This is the nub of the issue, if you will. We have great relationships and great partnerships with the Houses of Parliament. With the governance—and this was something that was pointed out previously—there's not an integrated governance body at the political level. There's no informal mechanism for the Senate, the House and the minister to come together, have conversations and create alignment.

We get requirements from the Senate and the House, not from Parliament. It is a challenge to reconcile those. We are accountable to Parliament. It is a challenge for the executive branch to do that reconciliation on behalf of Parliament to ensure that we have alignment between the Senate and the House and can move forward.

We've had great success in bringing those things to resolution in the past. I'm convinced we will again, but it is a challenge within the governance frame.

Mr. Eric Duncan: The idea today is getting the briefing, the information and updates, but that is something that.... This is the challenge.

I asked the question a couple of years ago, as well, of where you have PROC, you have the Board of Internal Economy, you have a subcommittee, you have the Senate, and you have all of those partners. Yes, the buck stops with the minister at the end of the day, but that is a major portfolio. This alone is a major project.

It continues to where we have negotiations going on one side, while you're trying to keep to a timeframe and a budget, and there are other parameters going on there. That's continued every time you've had this conversation, going back to the Auditor General's report 12 years ago. There continue to be questions about....

I'll say to you for your.... You come to our committee or different work to say, "We're on time and we're on budget," but there are governance factors stretching both of those things out and complicating that. That needs to be known to the players or whoever has the firm decision.

I appreciate the background or an update on that.

I'm good with my time, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you for the 30 seconds back.

Ms. Romanado, five minutes go to you.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Thank you very much for the presentation. I am new to PROC, so I have not had the chance to see all of this project. I have lots of questions.

What will become of the current visitor centre that is located between Centre Block and West Block? A lot of money was put into that, and unfortunately we probably didn't get as much leverage out of it, given COVID.

Mr. Michel Patrice: It's being explored right now. Once the parliamentary welcome centre comes online, the need for that entrance for visitors will be limited and would be costly to operate. One of the scenarios is essentially to repurpose the space, but also to use it as a business continuity entrance.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: You spoke a little about some of the efforts that will be improving the level of GHG in the building. We talked about geothermal. We talked about insulation and water retention. Can you elaborate a bit on using grey water? Is there a plan for composting on Parliament Hill for that? That's something we haven't seen in here.

Given the fact that it looks like we're going to eliminate some courtyards—we did with West Block, and it looks like it might be the same with East Block—there's not a lot of green space for employees who work on the Hill to be able to go outside and have lunch at a picnic table. The House of Commons employs a ton of people, so what are the plans to make this workspace a little greener for the people who work here?

• (1240)

Mr. Rob Wright: I'll pass it over to Ms. Garrett in a second.

There are just a couple of things there, and I'll branch back on the Visitor Welcome Centre to just add a piece to what Mr. Patrice said. The main part of the Visitor Welcome Centre will interconnect with the Parliament Welcome Centre as well, and that is part of making that one integrated facility, so a lot of those investments will be reused, if you will, as well, in addition to what Mr. Patrice indicated.

On the courtyards, it's important to note that those were inaccessible, unused courtyards before, so you couldn't get into them. I would see this as more of a bonus for the building rather than taking anything away.

As far as the greening of the Hill goes, that's a major part of the long-term vision and plan. In the public opinion research that Mr. Patrice mentioned, that was one issue that came back from the public as well.

I'll pass it over to Ms. Garrett to speak more about the sustainability efforts.

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: Maybe just very quickly, about outside—and not necessarily related to sustainability—on the seating question, we will be doing some work to better plan the landscape and opportunities. Seating and obviously shade are often things we get feedback on, and we're going to have to try to address those as we go forward on the project.

With regard to grey water, absolutely, grey water systems are yet another of those tools that we're going to be implementing to achieve that carbon neutrality.

I will make maybe just a minor comment on the courtyards, to supplement what Mr. Wright said. With those opportunities to use the courtyards that were unused, they will hopefully become much better spaces and places for parliamentarians, and we can absolutely look at how we might green those and make sure we put those elements into them. We can absolutely look at that as part of the planning and design.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: It may sound like a bizarre suggestion, but I have been talking about this since I got elected in 2015. Parliamentarians move around the parliamentary precinct, and often we're bouncing from one meeting to another. We don't actually have any space to store our belongings. I have been suggesting for years that we have a locker system—and I know it sounds as though we're back in high school—maybe in a basement along a hallway where we could store our boots and coats and whatever so they're not in the lobby and not using prime real estate. We might also need to put our book or binder from a committee or something like that into a secure location. Is this a possibility? I was hoping it would be in this building. It's not. I'm hoping that in 10 years' time, we could have a little space where we could keep our belongings.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Madam Chair, we've heard that comment, probably from this member and from other members. There will be such spaces within the precinct at different spots.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Patrice, I could not have asked for a shorter answer, so thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you now have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

As you mentioned, this is my first meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I would like to use my time to congratulate you. As chair, you have been very careful about distributing speaking time fairly among all committee members.

As whip of the Bloc Québécois, I want to say that you are a role model who should inspire some of your colleagues who chair committees. I wanted to tell you that you are doing amazing work. I feel that you are really sincere in your desire for fairness. You have given each member of the committee an opportunity to speak today. You did so while complying with our internal economy decisions.

I have no further questions for the witnesses, and I am happy with the answers they have given us. Today's meeting has helped us obtain a number of answers to our questions.

Once again, Madam Chair, please continue your good work and continue to inspire your colleagues who are chairing other committees.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

With a team like ours, it is easy to work together. So I am the one who should thank the committee members for their work and their comments.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, thank you for taking the time to say such nice things to me. I will continue to do whatever I can to ensure the committee's productivity. I think that is what Canadians want, and that is what we will try to give them.

• (1245)

[*English*]

We will continue with Ms. Blaney for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I would like to ask a few questions and then let you answer them, just to conserve as much time as I can.

First, I really appreciate what Mr. Vis said earlier. It would be very helpful to the committee, I think, to have a regional breakdown of contracts so that we understand where across the country they're coming from. The west is always wanting to make sure it gets a component of that, and as a B.C. MP, I agree with that, so that would be very helpful to the committee.

I also have a question around addressing the reality of the environment we live in and having a carbon-neutral facility. I'm really interested in the costs that we will save at the other end of this. I understand that it will cost money to create this, but there was a bit of discussion in your presentation about lowering some of those energy costs. It would be great to get an idea of what that would look like. It's always good to hear that we're spending money to save money in the long run.

The last quick question I have is around the welcome centre and security. I understand that you can't go into details, for very obvious reasons, but of course the welcoming area that we had previously was very cramped and sometimes very frustrating, especially for the amazing staff who were having to address security issues while making sure everybody moved through there. Sometimes it was for MPs who were trying to get people in for a meeting that they needed to get to. I remember sometimes being asked to run down and get people through that lineup as quickly as possible. People didn't always know who I was, and it became this big issue. I'm curious to know how you're addressing that and if there will be clarity about who should go where and in what stream when they arrive.

There you go. Thank you.

Mr. Rob Wright: I will start, but Mr. Patrice might want to add some elements in there.

We can come back with that regional breakdown.

On the sustainability costs, you're quite right that there are savings. It comes fairly close to cost-neutral when you do all of the math. There's still a cost, but certainly with the investments up front you get a lot of savings over time.

On the issue of the Parliament Welcome Centre, I mean, that really is about balance. It's a significant security enhancement for the precinct. It provides secure screening outside of the footprint of the buildings for the first time on the Hill, and that's fundamental. It very much is a significant security feature that is balanced with creating an open and welcoming environment for visitors to come in, more than doubling the capacity for Canadians to be able to engage into the buildings. That's something we heard from public opinion research as well.

Go ahead, Michel.

Mr. Michel Patrice: As Rob mentioned, the old visitors entrance was less than optimal in relation to security. In addition, it was less than optimal for tours, parliamentary business and parliamentarians or accredited personnel. The new design, as proposed right now, will offer obviously increased security in terms of distance from the main building, but also a dedicated lane for parliamentary business

or accredited personnel through the buildings and an increase for the tours.

The Chair: Excellent.

That was quite a good use of that time. Thank you for your approach, Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Gerretsen, you have five minutes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): My first question, Madam Chair, has to do with—and I know it's been talked about—the relationship between members of the House and the Senate and the ongoing work in the working groups, but I know that at the beginning of this discussion in the last Parliament, where I was on PROC as well, we raised some concern with respect to the fact that senators in particular, with whom we will be sharing the building, have a better continuity than members of the House in view of the fact they don't have to get elected.

I know for a fact that the three members from the Conservatives who sit on this committee weren't here in the last Parliament, so we start to lose this continuity. I hate to say this, and I mean it with all due respect, but there comes to be a bit of territorialism around the building and what aspects of the building are used by the Senate and what is used by members of the House. I'm curious as to how you can preserve.... For example, in the last session I received a massive binder with all these pages—you sent it to my house, I think, at the beginning of the pandemic—and I sat there for a couple of hours looking at the diagrams and everything. I don't know if other members have received that, the newer members of this committee who weren't on the last one...?

They haven't, so this continuity is immediately lost, and I think it's very important to preserve that. If this is going to go on for another 10 years, I'm just curious about how you're preserving that for the membership of this committee, because it's going to change a lot more frequently than the Senate membership that's overseeing this.

• (1250)

Mr. Michel Patrice: That continuity for long-term projects is always an issue, but obviously there is continuity, both in terms of elected members and in terms of the continuity and your re-election from election to election. There's also something in terms of the way the working group works. The working group that was created by the board, while it has its discussion and its dialogue in camera, publishes its minutes 30 days after the meeting. That's an important feature, I would suggest, in terms of continuity.

The other thing, too, is that the chair of that working group reports its recommendations to the Board of Internal Economy, and that report takes place in public. That discussion also takes place in public.

I believe there are many additional features, or there have been many improvements, I will say, in terms of transparency and public reporting. Obviously, appearing before this committee creates a public record in terms of continuity that is transmitted from successive committees and continues from parliament to parliament and session to session.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: My other question has to do with the changing environment in terms of how people will commute to the Hill.

I drive from Kingston. I drive an electric car. When I get here, I plug it in. When I started doing that four years ago, there was always availability. Now I'm finding that when I show up here, there's no availability.

We also know that there's a government mandate or policy to have no more fossil fuel...or that all cars must be net zero by 2035. What are we doing in terms of making sure that we're going to be providing for the change in vehicular traffic that comes to the Hill?

Mr. Rob Wright: We'll work hand in hand with the Senate and the House of Commons on determining the requirements for electric charging stations, for example, and then, as part of the long-term vision and plan, develop the strategies to put that in place. That is an important comment, and as far as getting consolidated goes, we wouldn't get out ahead of you and start putting infrastructure on the Hill without working closely with the House and with the Senate as well. Developing those requirements and putting that in place is important. You're quite right.

We've done a lot of work with the parliamentary partners around what parking of the future should look like. When you look 50 years ahead, it's challenging to project, and it's difficult to make some of those choices now, there's no question about that, but we're doing an update to the long-term vision and plan at this point, which is about a gradual transition for the precinct so that it can work today and is also moving towards tomorrow, if you will.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Do I have any time left, Madam Chair?

The Chair: I was just going to say I didn't give you the one-minute warning like I have for everyone else. Would you like a quick word? Sorry about that.

• (1255)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: If I'm out of time, that's fine. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. I appreciate that.

We have come to just five minutes left in the PROC committee. I want to thank the witnesses for being here. There is a bit of work that we've asked of you in order to report back to committee, so we look forward to that information. The clerk, committees members and I will be working to ensure that we can find a time for representatives of each party to come and look at the status of West Block when public health guidelines permit. We hope to have you back after that time for any other questions or comments that we might have.

We appreciate your time and efforts, and we really want to say thank you for extending your time with us today and being so kind to do it on last-minute notice.

Do any of you—Mr. Wright, Mr. Patrice, Ms. Garrett or Mr. Aubé—have any comments, really quickly?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Patrice: Thank you very much for this opportunity to appear before you.

Mr. Rob Wright: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excellent. Have yourselves a great day.

I will be wrapping the meeting up right on time today, but while all members are here, there were two budgets that were shared around by the clerk with all members of the PROC committee. This does not require a motion. There will be a whole budget that will require a motion, but this just requires an approval so that the clerk can continue to do the work that he and the team do to support us as PROC members.

Are there any concerns with the budgets that were shared?

Mr. Eric Duncan: There are no concerns from our end.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: There are no concerns from the NDP either.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I see that Mrs. DeBellefeuille is signalling that she also has no concerns.

Do members of the Liberal Party have any concerns? I see that they don't.

[*English*]

Excellent.

Mr. Clerk, you seem to have approval to continue to do your work.

We will see everyone on Thursday for our next PROC meeting. Please keep well and safe.

[*Translation*]

Have a good day everyone and see you next time.

The meeting is adjourned.

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