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• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Anthony Rota (Speaker of the House of Commons): Now that everyone's here and we're all connected, let's get started.

[*English*]

Before starting, I want to welcome our new members.

Mr. Richards, welcome.

[*Translation*]

Welcome, Mr. Deltell.

[*English*]

We'll go through the previous minutes. Are there any changes to be made? Is everything good and acceptable?

[*Translation*]

It's ready to go.

[*English*]

We'll go on to item 2, business arising from previous minutes. Is there anything coming up from business?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. LeBlanc, can you hear me?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada): Yes.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Comb your hair, would you?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: My problem, Mr. Rodriguez, is I don't have 10 bottles of hairspray like you. This being Mr. Deltell's first meeting, we should tell him that, in Quebec, it's the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec that pays for hairspray, since it's considered an innovation.

Hon. Anthony Rota: It's too bad he doesn't have his mask on. I'm talking about Mr. LeBlanc, not Mr. Deltell. Let's carry on.

[*English*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: You walked right into that, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. LeBlanc, we're moving on.

[*English*]

Item 3 is ratification of a walkaround. Everybody had a chance to vote.

[*Translation*]

Was everyone able to vote all right? There didn't seem to be any problems.

[*English*]

Now we have a report....

To the Conservatives, you have two new members.

Mr. Richards, can I get your attention for a second?

For the Conservatives, you have two new people. Do you have an official spokesman whom you would like to name to replace Mr. Strahl?

Mr. Blake Richards (Chief Opposition Whip): I think I reluctantly agreed to be the spokesman.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Thank you.

Mr. Richards will be the official spokesman for the Conservative Party.

Now we're on to number 4. We have a presentation by Mr. Stanton from the working group on the Centre Block.

Go ahead, Mr. Stanton.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Chair, Working Group on the LTVP and the Centre Block Rehabilitation): Good morning, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

Fellow members, good morning.

I'm here today as chair of the working group on the long term vision and plan, or LTVP, to update the board on the work that's been done since our last meeting and to seek endorsement of our recommendation regarding parliamentarians' involvement in the jury for the architectural design competition being organized by Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC, for the redevelopment of Block 2.

Before I discuss the recommendation regarding Block 2, I'd like to provide a brief update on our last meeting, which was held on August 13.

First, PSPC presented its public engagement strategy for the LTVP, encompassing the development and launch of a public survey. The working group is in overall agreement on the proposed strategy to engage Canadians on Parliament and asked PSPC to get back to the group with more detailed information.

Second, the House of Commons administration presented high-level options for the Parliament Welcome Centre entrance and answered questions. Stakeholders will need to review the options in detail, and the working group will continue to be involved in the review before making a recommendation to the board.

[English]

Next is the third item we dealt with. We heard from the House with respect to updates and had some schematic designs and proposals for the chamber, lobbies and galleries in Centre Block. PSPC answered some questions around that. There will be further discussions at our next meeting with regard to lobbies and galleries. Once we've had a chance to look at those a little further, we'll be back to the board with some recommendations and something more detailed for you to look at.

As a final point before I get into the issue of Block 2, all members of the working group have now received complete detailed briefings on the schematic designs for the entirety of Centre Block and the welcome centre. We're looking forward to having further discussions on how the parliamentary requirements fit into all that. I would say that after two meetings, we're making some great progress and we're anticipating getting back together later this month. After we see what comes from that, we'll have some further things for you to discuss.

The only real issue on which we need to hear from you today is with respect to a design competition. What's happening here is that the PSPC briefed the working group on their approach to procuring an architectural design consultant team for the Block 2 new buildings, which will accommodate parliamentary space in the future.

Now, you may not know where Block 2 is. We didn't either. That's the space bound by Wellington Street, Sparks Street, Metcalfe Street and O'Connor Street. It's immediately across Wellington Street from Centre Block. Currently in the planning phase for this Block 2, PSPC is proceeding with a competitive process—it's a major undertaking—and launching an architectural design competition for that. It's a competition that will allow them to choose a team that has the right kind of capability and that is appropriate for a project of this scale and significance.

PSPC has also brought in the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, RAIC, to oversee this competition process. I'm sure their role will be greatly valued. The institute and PSPC will together select an independent qualified professional jury for this competition process. The jury will look at all of the proposals submitted and will come down to first-, second- and third-place proposals. As part of that jury composition, the working group was pitched the idea of having parliamentarian participation in that jury process. We looked at three different scenarios as to how that might work. After some discussion, it was agreed that the working group recommend to you that in relation to this whole process, the chair of the working group—I, in this case—be designated as a juror representing the House of Commons in that jury process.

That's really what you have in front of you today. The idea was to make sure we have continuity with parliamentarian voices through the working group and into that process for Block 2. I'm therefore seeking your approval that in relation to this design competition for Block 2, the chair of the working group be designated as the juror representing the House of Commons.

• (1125)

[Translation]

I would be pleased to answer any questions you have and to provide more details on what I've just discussed.

Thank you.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Thank you.

I believe Mr. Julian has a question for Mr. Stanton. I'm starting a list, so let me know if you have a question.

Mr. Julian, you may go ahead.

Mr. Peter Julian (House Leader of the New Democratic Party): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Stanton, thank you very much for the report.

Of course, I'm in favour of designating the chair of the working group to sit on the jury.

[English]

The coronavirus has had an impact on a lot of projects across the country, so I'm wondering if there are any updated figures that you could give us or if you can let us know when you think the working group would be able to do that.

Thank you.

My question is very simple: Are there any updated budget figures around the overall projects?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

I think we didn't get into budget elements with respect to Block 2. I will look to Michel Patrice. He may have some insights on it that he could share with us. At this point we were only taken up with the proposals around a design competition. As you may well know, this is part of a much more long-term.... So many of these parts of the long-term vision plan are so integrated that these things do come before us as a working group as well.

Michel, I wonder if you have any further insights that we could share with Mr. Julian on that question.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Michel has indicated that Mr. Gameiro would be—

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Okay, go ahead, Rocque.

Hon. Anthony Rota: —best suited to answer that question. Rocque Gameiro, if you're online, you can take it from here.

Mr. Rob Wright (Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC)): It's Rob Wright here with PSPC. Maybe I'll jump [Inaudible—Editor] information.

With regard to costing of the Centre Block and Parliament's welcome centre, what we have done so far is to provide some cost estimates for different options around specific large components of the project.

If you remember the decisions around the chamber and different options around the chamber, we provided costing around different options for that, as well as different size options for the welcome centre. On some specific options around elements that the Senate of Canada is considering with regard to potential infills in the east courtyard, for example, we gave different costings around that. Those elements are now coming together, and as we move forward through the areas....

• (1130)

Hon. Anthony Rota: I'm sorry, Mr. Wright. Would you go back? I'm not sure if you muted yourself. It doesn't show that you're muted, but we lost your voice.

Mr. Rob Wright: I apologize. Are you able to hear me okay now?

Hon. Anthony Rota: We hear you very faintly.

Mr. Rob Wright: I'm not muted. If I really speak up here, is that any better?

Hon. Anthony Rota: It's still not loud enough. We can just barely hear your voice. I'm not sure what just happened there.

Mr. Rob Wright: Well, I could hand it over to—

Hon. Anthony Rota: You're fine now; it's perfect. You can continue.

Mr. Rob Wright: Okay, great.

We're coming at this in what I would call component parts. As we're moving through the decisions and the options that are being put forward to Parliament, those decisions are kind of big boulders that have a really material impact on the baseline cost for the Centre Block and the welcome centre. As we proceed through those this fall, we'll be able to come back with a baseline budget as well as a schedule. That will set us up in a really good situation.

As for the impacts of the COVID situation on the Centre Block, I think we've been able to absorb those really well. At the beginning of COVID in mid-March, we worked really hard to put in place what I would call best health and safety practices on the site. We worked with the Canadian Construction Association, and those became best practices for construction activity across the country.

I would say that we had to make a few adjustments, but it really has not impacted the schedule, as we've been able to move forward. From a cost perspective, that is probably the most important element on a project of this scale. Time is money, so being able to adhere to the schedule has benefited us very much from a budgetary perspective. We've been able to keep track and hit all of the milestones, and as we continue to work with the working group and the Senate LTVP subcommittee on these major decisions that will be recommended back to the Board of Internal Economy as well as to CIBA, that will position us to have a baseline budget and schedule.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Pardon me.

[*English*]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Would you like a follow-up on that, Mr. Julian?

Mr. Peter Julian: When do you think you will be able to bring that to the BOIE?

Mr. Rob Wright: As soon as the board makes some of these final determinations on the options, we will be able to come back with the budget.

It's important to note that there are thousands of decisions that form the scope for this project, but even a handful can swing the project price in hundreds of millions of dollars. It will be difficult to come back to you with a budget without having inputs on those decisions. They have a tremendous impact on the budget.

On the size of the Chamber, we have that. That was an important decision. On the size of the parliamentary welcome centre, we have that. That was an extremely important decision. There are probably another 10 to 15 critical decisions that will really allow us to have a base. There will be more decisions to come. Once we have those big boulder decisions behind us, we'll be able to establish that baseline budget. Our hope would be to move through that by the Christmastime period.

• (1135)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Stanton is next, and then Mr. Richards.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm sorry that I missed that critical element of Mr. Julian's question pertaining to expenses. My sound actually gapped there for a few seconds. My apologies for not zoning in on the expenses related to Centre Block. It was not to Block 2. My apologies.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very good. Now we'll go to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I had some questions similar to Mr. Julian's, but I'll add a couple of brief questions.

With regard to the recommendations in terms of the design for the chamber, etc., will those recommendations include various seating options? Will there be scenarios for various seating options? Will there be one that's brought forward? Will it have that kind of detail? Will seating options be included as part of those recommendations?

Mr. Rob Wright: Mr. Richards, our first look at this was very preliminary. We looked at different options extending out to 2050. The notions around this planning, especially for galleries and space for members in the galleries in the House itself, are all impacted by the trajectory of population growth and therefore the growth in the number of parliamentarians as well, over literally decades. We just had a first look at that.

You may know that a while back the decision was taken to ensure that the footprint of the House of Commons chamber itself would not be changed. We're going to stay with the existing footprint that's there. Once the working group has had some further discussion on this, we will bring it back to the board with suggestions. We'll see what the working group decides, but we'll bring our best suggestions and we'll let the board take a look at it at that time.

Suffice it to say that as we go forward, the demands and requirements on this space are certainly going to increase.

Mr. Blake Richards: I would like to follow up on that.

Is the understanding that you're going to bring forward one recommendation instead of a set of options? Is that the intention? I also understood that it was indicated in March that the board really wanted to see the chamber remain as close as it is to its current format. Perhaps you can answer both of those in concert.

Also, I'll just throw one more in and let you answer all three.

In terms of the galleries themselves, is there contemplation to ensuring they are more secure? Obviously, we've seen things dropped over, and things like that in the past. Is there thought being given to how those will look going forward?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: On the last point on security, we didn't deal specifically with that point. I think it's certainly a valid one. We did look at some comparisons in terms of the size of the gallery in relation to the number of members in the chamber, and certainly Canada was blessed as we were in the old House of Commons, in Centre Block House of Commons. We had considerably higher numbers of gallery visitors than many other chambers in the Westminster system.

Going forward, certainly there will likely be impacts there. You're right about one of your three points, exactly right. The current footprint of the chambers in terms of the beautiful Gothic revival design and structure is all going to stay put. We have to work within the confines of that existing footprint.

As we look at accommodating more members, it has to be done in favour of a layout that will be in keeping with this board's direction around.... Of course, the ideal preference was to continue with the centre aisle and have government and opposition members opposing one another across that common aisle. That was a preference that has been expressed to our working group, and we'll certainly keep that in mind.

As to whether we'll have just one recommendation for you, I honestly don't feel comfortable speaking for the working group at this early stage. I'm taking a cue from your comments. I suggest that we might want to consider more than one. I'll certainly be guided by the working group and what we think is probably our best preference, but leave open.... I think this is an area that obviously needs vigorous discussion and consideration. We want to make sure we get this right.

● (1140)

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any other...?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deltell, please go ahead.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (House Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Mr. Stanton.

It's always nice to talk to you, in any circumstance, but this is a first for me.

I think I know the answer, but I'm wondering whether we could safely have a guided tour of the Centre Block to see the work under way.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Stanton, go ahead.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you, Mr. Deltell. Welcome to the Board of Internal Economy.

All the working group members toured the Centre Block. For the time being, we aren't planning another tour, but I think it's a good idea. We'll look into arranging one for the members of the board, if possible, in the coming weeks or months.

Hon. Anthony Rota: We'll look into that, then, and try to arrange another tour, in the hope that everyone is available. I know it's worthwhile to see the work that's happening.

Are there any other questions?

[*English*]

Mr. Stanton was seeking approval from the board in relation to the architectural design competition for Block 2 and to the chair of the working group, Mr. Stanton, being designated as the juror representing the House of Commons. Is everyone in favour of that?

Good. It's unanimous. Congratulations or condolences, Mr. Stanton; I'm not sure which, but I'm sure you'll do an excellent job.

[*Translation*]

We'll now move on to item 5, the 48th annual session of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, taking place in Montreal from July 7 to 12, 2022.

Once again, it's over to you, Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Once again, thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I begin, I'd like to thank Francis Drouin, chair of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, or APF, for joining me today. He'll be giving a detailed presentation on the request before you to have the Parliament of Canada host the 48th annual session of the APF. I should point out that the Joint Interparliamentary Council, or JIC, examined the proposal at its July 15, 2020 meeting.

[*English*]

As with all of these international conference requests, the Joint Interparliamentary Council, the JIC, is somewhat limited in the role that we have in reviewing these requests for international conferences. For us, it comes down to ensuring that there are no conflicts with the resources that International and Interparliamentary Affairs has in terms of providing the appropriate support. We realize that of course the spending authority for these conferences rests with you, and with CIBA on the Senate side. However, we still take the occasion of these requests—as has come from APF in this case—to discuss some of the issues around that conference.

In this case, we talked about the challenges involved with doing a large-scale event of this nature in the era of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Admittedly, the conference is intended for July of 2022, but nonetheless we have no clear idea as to what conditions may prevail at that time. To that end, we had a discussion and gave direction in terms of the planning for this conference that due to the uncertainties around COVID-19, they be prepared to consider revising the format and to changing the format to a virtual or partially virtual format if they're faced with those kinds of restrictions in 2022.

The council also recommended that the conference planners ensure that things like contracts for hotels, conference space, AV, interpretation and transportation have the appropriate escape clauses for *force majeure*, exit clauses that will help them have contracts in place that can be modified should those situations prevail.

All of us on the JIC, to a person, stand behind the necessity of ensuring that Canada stays engaged and involved in interparliamentary work, even in a time of pandemic. We also noted—and, members of council, I should note to you—that we were satisfied that the approach APF took to their budget proposals was certainly in line with the usual practices and parameters that JIC considers for conferences of this type.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Therefore, it was agreed that the proposal be submitted to the Board of Internal Economy and the Standing Senate Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration.

I will now turn the floor over to my colleague Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Stanton.

As Mr. Stanton mentioned, I am here today to formally request that the Parliament of Canada host the 48th annual session of the APF. At its May 7 meeting, the executive committee of the Canadian Branch of the APF adopted a motion recommending that the JIC study the matter. As Mr. Stanton pointed out, at its July 15 meeting, the JIC studied the proposal and recommended that it be submitted to you and the Standing Senate Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration for study.

If the Board of Internal Economy and the Senate committee approve the request, it will be the third time the Canadian Branch of the APF hosts the annual session in 25 years. The Canadian Branch has hosted the annual session every time it has held the international presidency, usually on an eight-year rotation, and the Canadian Branch will hold the presidency from July 2022 to July 2024.

The members of the board should know that this is not the result of Canada volunteering to host the annual session. The responsibility of hosting merely rotates every eight years, and Canada must assume its role in parliamentary diplomacy.

The annual session of the APF draws between 350 and 500 delegates each year, giving Canada an opportunity to showcase its leadership within the Francophonie. Internationally, the Canadian Branch promotes Canada's parliamentary expertise at every level of the APF and plays a leadership role. International parliamentarians

often seek out our expertise to successfully complete major projects and ask us to assist with seminars, debates and training.

The Canadian Branch also fulfills numerous key roles within the APF, including chairing the Parliamentary Affairs Committee and holding five rapporteur positions, helping to highlight Canada's priorities in relation to important issues such as cyber-violence against women and children, cooperation to address climate change and youth parliamentary involvement.

In terms of scheduling, the annual session always begins on a Thursday and ends the following Tuesday, at the end of the day. Consequently, the provisional dates for the annual session are July 7 to 12, 2022. The conference will have multiple parts: a Bureau meeting; an APF session, including meetings of the women's network, the young parliamentarians' network, the four committees and the plenary assembly; the accompanying persons program; and the Ordre de la Pléiade award ceremony.

The budget estimate before you has been studied and approved by the Canadian Branch of the APF and by the JIC. Every effort has been made to keep costs low, and everything possible will be done to protect the Parliament of Canada against the risks associated with holding an event during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are recommending that the funding be shared according to the usual formula for these types of conferences. In other words, the House of Commons would cover 70% of the costs, and the Senate would cover the remaining 30%. The House of Commons' share for fiscal 2022-23 would be \$767,905. If approved, this request for additional temporary funding would be included in the main estimates for fiscal 2022-23.

This estimate is based on the assumption that approximately 450 delegates will participate, and the temporary funding for fiscal 2020-21 and 2021-22 is \$19,564 and \$124,671 respectively, to be absorbed from the anticipated budget surpluses of the parliamentary associations.

In closing, thank you for listening and for considering this request. Canada has always played a leading role on the international stage, and the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us how interconnected our world is and how important strong relationships with our neighbours and allies are.

I would now be happy to answer any questions you have. For budget details, I'll refer you to my colleague Jeremy LeBlanc.

• (1150)

Hon. Anthony Rota: The next speakers on my list are Mr. Rodriguez and Mr. Julian, but Mr. Stanton may have something to add.

Mr. Stanton, did you want to add anything to Mr. Drouin's statement, or did you have a question?

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Chair, I'm ready to answer the committee's questions. However, Mr. LeBlanc and Mr. Drouin may answer as well, depending on the topic.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Great. Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Rodriguez, followed by Mr. Julian and, then, Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Rodriguez, the floor is yours.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Mr. Drouin.

I ask this out of curiosity more than anything else. This time, the conference will be held in Montreal, but which cities was it held in the other two times?

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'll answer that. In 2013, it was in Ottawa, and before that....

Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc (Clerk Assistant and Director General, International and Interparliamentary Affairs): It was also in Ottawa.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you.

You mentioned the ongoing pandemic. I thought I heard you say that, given the circumstances, all the contracts for the event would include a force majeure clause so they could be cancelled without triggering significant penalties. Is that right?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Yes.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: At line 3, the budget lists logistics, transportation and accommodation. For the 2022 conference, \$465,000 is allocated for transportation and accommodation.

Does that mean we're paying the expenses for all the delegates or those from less fortunate countries? How does that work?

Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc: We don't cover the logistics and accommodation costs for delegates from other countries. That line covers the travel and accommodation costs for staff who have to be at the conference. It also includes the cost of taking delegates from the airport to the conference centre and hotels, not to mention the audiovisual costs, including the rooms and equipment to put on the conference, which actually make up the bulk of the logistics costs.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you.

I have one last question.

Do we ever give delegates from less fortunate countries a helping hand? Not every country in the Francophonie is wealthy, after all.

Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc: There is no fee for delegates to participate in the conference, but the travel and accommodation costs are assumed by their branches. I'm not sure whether the international secretariat has any assistance programs, but there may be other funding available. It's not part of the budget request before you today.

• (1155)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Julian, you may go ahead.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This presentation matters. The number of francophones around the world is rising dramatically, so it's vital that we maintain these ties with countries that have the use of French in common. Not to mention, ours is a bilingual country, with an English-speaking population. I know a conference will be held next year for Commonwealth countries.

I have two questions. Are the budgets for the two conferences similar? For that conference, the budget is \$1.3 million. In both cases, what happens if COVID-19 is still wreaking havoc come conference time? Should the conferences have to be cancelled, what would the financial repercussions be in each case?

Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc: Allow me to answer the first question regarding the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, which will be held in Halifax next year. Those are actually the same budgetary requirements. The budget you approved for that conference was \$1.3 million, which is very similar to the request we are putting forward here.

As Mr. Drouin and Mr. Stanton said, for the contracts we will sign with suppliers, both for that conference and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference in Halifax, we worked with the Office of the Law Clerk and our contracting experts at the House to ensure that the wording would allow us to invoke a force majeure clause should the pandemic force us to cancel the event, and also to protect us financially.

Mr. Peter Julian: What would be the financial repercussions?

Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc: The goal is to remove the obligation to pay for the hotel rooms we are not using should we decide to cancel the conference in advance by a certain amount of time—60 days, 90 days or 120 days. However, we will align ourselves with international secretariats to ensure that, if we had to decide to cancel or significantly modify the conference, we can do so within the required time frames without having to pay needlessly.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, but that does not quite answer my question. Let's assume that, in both cases, we have to cancel six months in advance. Will the financial consequences be to the tune of \$100,000, \$200,000, \$500,000 or \$1 million? Do we have a rough idea of the costs even if we were to cancel six months in advance?

Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc: No, but there will be some costs.

I think that most of the costs incurred would not be related to contracts, but rather to human resources. In the requested budget, we included a request for staff who will work on planning the conference. Those people will do work and will be paid their wages. So we will bear those costs.

However, when it comes to contracts with hotels, suppliers and bus companies, there should not be any associated costs.

If we use the example of the Conference of the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE, which was supposed to be held this summer in Vancouver and which we had to cancel for obvious reasons, there were no costs associated with cancelling it or there were very minimal costs for the Canadian Parliament, in the amount of less than \$10,000.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Deltell, go ahead.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Drouin, I am very happy to see you. My questions will be for you. First, I think that choosing Montreal is a very good thing. I thank you for that decision and commend you on it.

My first question is about the budget. You say that, in the first two years, the budget will come from the budgetary surpluses anticipated by the associations.

How can you assure us of that? The amount is obviously not \$3 million, but how can you assure us that the associations will not spend the money set aside for them?

Mr. Francis Drouin: I will add a comment, and Mr. LeBlanc can correct me.

Normally, in our associations, we always anticipate travel costs associated with the participation of Canadian parliamentarians.

Mr. Deltell, you can imagine that those costs will not be incurred for obvious reasons this year.

Mr. LeBlanc, correct me if I'm wrong, but most of the associations will probably have budgetary surpluses if those costs are taken into account.

• (1200)

Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc: Yes, absolutely. The surplus will obviously be pretty high this year.

If we consider the associations' historical spending, although the requests often exceed the budget envelope total, there are normally surpluses for all sorts of reasons in terms of the actual spending from one year to another. For example, we are anticipating the participation of 10 parliamentarians in an activity and, finally, owing to activities on the Hill, only six parliamentarians are able to participate. So that leads to savings.

We have looked at the historical spending in terms of the budget envelope of the Joint Interparliamentary Council, or JIC, and we are very comfortable with saying that there will be a surplus. There was a surplus on average in the past. Over the past three years, for example, that surplus was \$300,000. That's well within the parameters we are putting forward in this year's budget requests.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I now have more of a substantive question.

The meeting is being held in 20 months. We all want life to get back to normal in 20 months. The least we can say is that no one can be sure of that.

Why not work right away on preparing a hybrid meeting?

Mr. Francis Drouin: I can say a few words on that.

We will perhaps experience that for the first time at the annual meeting in January, which will be held in Morocco. I cannot speak for the other associations because I don't know.

However, I do know that, at the APF, for instance, organizers still have decisions to make on the in-person holding of the Morocco meeting. Of course, it is highly likely that the meeting will be of the hybrid variety or even virtual. That will sort of be our pilot project with the APF. Even in anticipation of July 2021, no decision has yet been made on the location or the plenary session that will take place. It remains to be seen how it will be held, but we are working on it in close collaboration with the APF's office and its parliamentary secretary general.

However, Mr. Deltell, the decision has not been made yet. It is a bit too early for us to be able to decide now. I think that, if we are unable to hold the meeting in person, we will force the use of a hybrid or even virtual model if need be.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I am happy to see that this is in the cards, but I am wondering whether we could not immediately come up with a plan B and assess it to see where things are going. I think that major savings could be achieved for all participants. As Mr. Rodriguez was saying earlier, some countries are not as privileged as ours. We could work on this immediately.

Mr. Jeremy LeBlanc: Allow me to reassure you. In our planning, we are exploring those options with suppliers to determine whether we should have a hybrid model or a completely virtual one. That is part of our discussions with them. We are submitting a request for an in-person meeting because it will probably be the most expensive option. Therefore, if it is held and it costs the budgeted amount, we will have the necessary approved funding. If the meeting is held virtually, savings can be made.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any further questions?

We will now consider the request to accept the Joint Interparliamentary Council's recommendation. Does everyone agree?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Anthony Rota: We will now discuss item No. 6 on the agenda, the quarterly financial report for the first quarter of 2020-21 and revised 2020-21 supplementary estimates (B).

Mr. Paquette, go ahead.

• (1205)

Mr. Daniel Paquette (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The next two points, not only the quarterly report, are about financial information, and since the pandemic is influencing the majority of our financial trends, I will present them together. That way, we can get better organized for questions.

To begin, I will present the quarterly financial report and tell you about the decrease we have proposed for supplementary estimates (B) for this fiscal year. It should be noted that a quarterly report generally gives a good idea of spending trends from one year to another. However, in this case, we are comparing an election year with a year that is part of the COVID-19 pandemic context. In both cases, we are not talking about typical years, and so the trends cannot really make it possible to facilitate comprehension as is the case usually.

In the report dated June 30, the approved authorities for 2020-21, in the amount of \$516.4 million, appear to indicate a decrease of \$4.4 million compared with the 2019-20 authorities. That is because the Board of Internal Economy approved the \$17.4-million financial rollover this past July, which could not be reflected in our report dated June 30.

If we look at the overall trends, we can see that there was an increase of \$4.4 million for various important investments, an increase of \$3.1 million for cost of living expenses and an increase of \$1.7 million for budget adjustments following a general election.

On June 30, the expenditures totalled \$114.3 million, compared with expenditures of \$121 million for the previous year. That is a decrease of \$7.4 million.

[English]

The expenditures are also presented by type of cost. The most significant decrease in expenditures relates to the reduction of \$6 million in transportation and telecommunications. This is due to the significant decrease in travel as a result of the pandemic. The expenditures for professional and special services have also decreased by \$2 million, which is also due to the reduction in service contracts, training and hospitality, again as a result of COVID. As well, there is the difference in timing of certain payments to our external partners during this period. This decrease was partially offset by the cost to accommodate the virtual House proceedings. In addition, the expenditures for materials and supplies have also decreased by \$2 million. That is as a result of the temporary closures of the food service facilities and the printing facilities as a result of the pandemic.

On the other hand, expenditures for computers and office equipment have increased by a little over \$1 million. This is primarily due to the purchase of equipment to accommodate the virtual House proceedings and committees and to enable certain employees to work remotely during COVID-19.

Finally, the report provides comparison between the utilization of authorities from one year to the next, and we see a slight decrease of 1.3%, which is not unusual, given the current situation.

It's also important to mention that the administration promotes an efficient use of resources and we continuously strive to minimize the request for incremental funding whenever possible. Given the current situation surrounding the COVID pandemic, we are closely monitoring and considering any financial impact when making funding decisions throughout the year.

Also, given what has happened, we have reviewed our request for the 2020-21 supplementary estimates (B). As you know, the COVID pandemic has resulted in the postponement of the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference to 2021, as well as the cancellation of the 29th annual session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Funding for these conferences had been included in our main estimates for the current year. With the change in plans, this funding will no longer be required this year. As a result, we have offset our request with the current request for a carry-forward for 2021 in the supplementary estimates (B), and as a result, we've revised our request down to \$6.3 million for a carry-forward, instead of the \$17.4 million.

[Translation]

As for the next point, given all the financial trends the pandemic has significantly affected, we prepared you a summary of the major expenditures stemming from decisions made in the current landscape.

To add relevance, we prepared a summary of expenditures by covering the period up until mid-September, which is a bit more useful for you. Contrary to the report I just presented, this one does not only concern the first quarter. This report includes the following expenditures: \$1.4 million in investments for operating the virtual House; \$1.1 million paid for outside printing; \$287,000 for the purchase of equipment and supplies for members' offices; and the purchase of IT equipment and supplies totalling \$396,000 for the administration.

It should also be noted that a significant realignment of our staff was necessary to support the new ways of doing things and that this did not directly impact our expenditures. We continue to monitor those changes. We will submit a report to the Board of Internal Economy with our future quarterly reports.

This concludes my presentation. I am ready to answer your questions.

• (1210)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Have you finished your presentation, Mr. Paquette?

Mr. Daniel Paquette: Yes.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any questions?

Mr. Julian, Mr. Richards and Ms. DeBellefeuille would like to ask questions.

Mr. Julian, the floor is yours.

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

Thank you, Mr. Paquette. I would just like to compare apples to apples.

There are additional expenditures of \$3.1 million on September 17, but we see that some of the spending was reduced because of COVID-19. Yet, this continues in the financial statement of June 30. If we compare the money saved up until September 17 with the additional costs, what is the impact of COVID-19 on parliamentary operations?

Mr. Daniel Paquette: In terms of updating our expenses, the analysis period just ended last week. We'll give you a more complete analysis in a few weeks. The fact remains that, to date, all trends show that the savings exceed the additional disbursements.

It should also be noted that a portion of the savings relate to travel. However, since the members' travel is included the Members By-law, these funds can't necessarily be reallocated automatically. Regarding the other business expenses, the other travel related to voted appropriations, we can see that the savings exceed the expenses. Existing resources are actually being used to realign and support the new approach.

Mr. Peter Julian: I want to know how many employees on Parliament Hill have been dismissed or laid off since the start of the pandemic.

How many regular full-time employees have we lost? How many aren't working because of COVID-19?

Mr. Daniel Paquette: I don't have an exact human resources analysis on hand. I know that, to date, there have been no layoffs as a result of COVID-19. However, perhaps Mr. Parent could provide some information on this matter.

Mr. Pierre Parent (Chief Human Resources Officer, House of Commons): Good afternoon, Mr. Julian.

We haven't laid off any full-time staff. We simply haven't called back the people who were on call. Under these circumstances, no full-time employees have lost their jobs. I can't give you the exact figures at this time.

Mr. Peter Julian: Could you provide the figures at the next meeting?

Mr. Pierre Parent: We should certainly be able to find those figures.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Is that all, Mr. Julian?

[*English*]

Okay.

We'll now go to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

On the \$3.19 million specific to COVID, is that new spending only, or does it include the value of existing resources that would have been deployed towards pandemic-related items?

Mr. Daniel Paquette: Those are only additional incremental disbursements. They're not the realignment at this point. We haven't

gone down to that level of detail of what people have been doing—maybe different work or different contributions to everything here. Really, just incremental disbursements are what we've presented to you today.

Mr. Blake Richards: Then you haven't been able to do any work towards getting some kind of an estimate of the value of the existing resources.

From sitting in PROC in the summer, I know that an indication was given to us there that on some of the work on virtual sittings and some of the work towards a smart voting app there had been no new costs incurred but a lot of existing resources and a lot of employee time were repurposed.

Do you have any indication—even initial estimates—of what kinds of expenditures or existing resources were put towards virtual sittings or the development of the voting app? I don't know that those things were actually authorized by this board. I don't know who authorized them. Maybe you could indicate that as well. I'm just curious to know if there has been any initial work done on the value of repurposing employees' time and any existing resources.

Mr. Daniel Paquette: At this point, this is the analysis that we're currently working on, given that we do the periodic assessments and details, really, with our quarters. For a lot of the work you've mentioned, in the spring we were very reactive and did what we had to do to make sure everything was functional. Over the summer, those special projects really kicked in, and we deployed the necessary resources and capacity to support those. When we come back and do our second quarter report, this is the kind of analysis we can bring forward to you and bring more specifics related to that.

• (1215)

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. You will be able to bring that to us, then. I could be mistaken, as I'm a new member of the board, but I don't believe that those would have been authorized by the board. They would have been authorized within administration itself. I'm not sure. Can you tell me that? That obviously would indicate that it would be all the more important that we get information to look at.

Mr. Daniel Paquette: There are many items on that report relating to material supplies and even the infrastructure of the MPs' offices, even the external printing, that were brought forward and accepted by the board.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay.

Mr. Daniel Paquette: For the other work that had been brought in directly to our folks in technology to be able to make sure that the chamber was functional, Stéphan or Michel might want to add more about where that request came from.

Mr. Blake Richards: Sure, but at the end of the day, you're indicating that this is something that you will bring back to a future meeting of the board to give us some sense of what the value of the reallocation of resources would look like.

Mr. Daniel Paquette: Yes, we will look and see what we can bring to you and at what level of detail.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Monsieur Patrice has something to add to that. I'll just defer to him.

Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons): We'll delve into more details later, but just for further information, the virtual chamber and virtual committees were a result of a decision of the House, so yes, the administration did enter into expenditures in relation to that.

In terms of the estimates in the report you have for the expenses as of September 17, it does include overtime costs in terms of the resources that had to be deployed to support the virtual or hybrid committees and the chamber. We'll get more information for you.

Mr. Blake Richards: Great, thank you. I appreciate that.

[Translation]

Hon. Anthony Rota: We'll now continue with Ms. DeBellefeuille.

Ms. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Whip of the Bloc Québécois): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to start by congratulating and thanking today's interpreters for the quality of their work and for their considerable expertise. We hear many interpreters, but I can say that today we have an all-star team. They do their work at practically the speed of light. I want to thank them for this.

Mr. Paquette, thank you for the quality and thoroughness of your presentation. I'm a good student and I do my reading. During my preparations, I ask questions. Today, I want to congratulate you for being very transparent, especially because you clear up matters that are sometimes complex. Thank you for this.

My questions will focus on what happens next. By this weekend, the entire province of Quebec may enter the red zone, probably for several weeks or even months. I'm thinking about all our decisions regarding certain expenses that weren't necessarily routine. I'm thinking of the disinfection equipment, the layout of the offices, the extension of the permission to advertise beyond the percentage allowed by the by-law, and all the changes made along the way to authorize members or their offices to incur expenses related to certain budget items.

At the next board meeting, do you plan to propose an extension of certain measures or other measures that could help members better handle their work?

I'm quite concerned because not all employees in our constituency offices have the furniture, ergonomic chairs and other work tools needed to carry out their work in compliance with health and safety standards. To date, for example, the finance services is still refusing to allow the purchase of a chair for one of our employees who must use the chair at home, since the chair is normally the property of the House of Commons. As employers, we recommend that all our employees work from home, so I wonder about our limitations. How can we better manage and support our employees from a health and safety perspective?

Also, as you may recall, the budget for Internet access increased because, in some rural areas, teleworking incurs exponential costs

in this area. Members were allowed to claim these costs back from their main budget.

If the situation continues over the next six months, wouldn't this significantly affect the budgets of some members?

Wouldn't some members be adversely affected by the fact that they must pay more for Internet access than a member who lives in an urban area, for example, where this additional expense isn't included in their MP budget?

At the next board meeting, or at subsequent meetings, will we be looking at ways to help members carry out their duties in their constituencies in compliance with the health rules and the guidance provided by their governments? In our case, we're talking about the Quebec government.

• (1220)

Mr. Daniel Paquette: Thank you for expressing your appreciation. I'll pass on these words of gratitude to my team, which helps me prepare to answer your questions, as you can see, and to provide this information.

We're monitoring the various permissions already granted by the Board of Internal Economy. During the second quarter, we may determine the usage levels and whether additional permissions or adjustments are needed.

We also conducted a preliminary assessment of the balance between the amount paid out of the organization's central funds and the amount paid out of members' budgets. At the start of this work, we estimated that the savings were enough to cover the additional costs. That said, we must continue to monitor the situation and take into account the reality of each member. I agree with you that the members' realities vary depending on the location of their constituency offices. In any case, we can carry out this monitoring.

In terms of work tools, furniture and other items that employees may need to work from home, if the Board of Internal Economy asks us to do so, we can assess the requests and even draw a comparison with how other organizations support their employees who telework. We can provide this analysis at an upcoming meeting and propose some options for moving forward.

Some expenses were denied because of a reliance on existing policies. However, we know that our reality is different. Should the Board of Internal Economy make the request, we can conduct the analysis and come back with suggestions.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: If my colleagues don't object, we could ask for an analysis, but not immediately, since the analysis is comprehensive. However, the Board of Internal Economy could provide an overview.

I believe that most permissions expire on March 31, 2021. So before Christmas, we could be presented with an overview.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Is this okay?

Yes? Okay. Thank you.

I'll now give the floor to Mr. Rodriguez.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: What I had to say aligns perfectly with the points made by Ms. DeBellefeuille, who raised some extremely important issues.

I just want to make sure that this analysis will identify any changes or adaptations allowed as a result of COVID-19, and until when, and the type of additional authorizations that we must obtain from the Board of Internal Economy to continue running for the duration of this pandemic.

• (1225)

Hon. Anthony Rota: We can expect to receive a report at the next meeting or the one after it.

Is that okay, Mr. Paquette?

Mr. Daniel Paquette: Yes. We'll gather the necessary information.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any other questions?

No? Okay.

We can see that overall spending has decreased in several areas, particularly in the area of travel by members and their staff and by House Administration staff.

We'll take a three-minute break and then continue in camera. We'll then proceed to item 8.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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