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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus (Speaker of the House of Commons): Good morning everyone.

I would like to welcome you to the 35th meeting of the Board of Internal Economy.

We have a fairly busy schedule today. We want to make sure that we discuss some of the items on the agenda, namely the third and fourth items, which will be dealt with in the public portion of the meeting, as well as an item that will be discussed in camera, on which it would be preferable to come up with recommendations and make decisions today.

We'll begin with the first item on the agenda, which is adoption of the minutes of the previous meeting, which you have all received.

Do I have a mover for that?

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille (Whip of the Bloc Québécois): I can move approval of the minutes, but it's the second item on the agenda that I wanted to talk about, which is business arising from the previous meeting.

Hon. Greg Fergus: All right.

Is there unanimous consent to adopt the minutes of the previous meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*English*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Item number two is business arising from the previous meeting.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Chair, I just wanted to follow up on the health care plan for members of Parliament.

We had asked for a comparative analysis of the two MP health care plans, assuming there were changes. I wanted to thank Ms. Evangelidis's team for their work on this. We found that there were indeed major differences between the plans. It wasn't necessarily negative. It was even positive in some cases.

This benchmarking exercise took a lot of work. I think that there's still a small element to work on in terms of pharmacare.

We've had good advice and guidance from Ms. Evangelidis's team as to how we could get recognition for certain drug expenses.

I wanted to congratulate the entire team. It was a lot of work, but I think it was informative for everyone, both the administration and the caucus of each party. So I thank this team for that follow-up.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

I know very well that Ms. Evangelidis's team worked very hard to implement this comparative analysis. Thank you for your comments, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

In fact, if any of the members want to talk about specific things, I'd certainly invite them to speak to us and to the administration. We'll be happy to follow up on that.

Now that we've dealt with the second item on the agenda, we can move on to the third item.

I invite Paul St George, Robin Kells and José Fernandez to come to the table to make their presentation.

Mr. St George, the floor is yours.

Mr. Paul St George (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First I'd like to introduce my colleagues, José Fernandez, Deputy Chief Financial Officer, and Robin Kells, Senior Director Responsible for Asset Management and Procurement.

We are reaching out to the Board of Internal Economy to inform them of the impact of the redistribution following the 2021 Census.

The administration is also seeking approval from the board with respect to policy and funding.

The number of seats in the House will increase from 338 to 343, with the addition of three ridings in Alberta, one in British Columbia and one in Ontario.

The administration considered the principle approved by the board in 2015. Following consultations with the whips, the administration is proposing policies to limit the impact on members.

• (1110)

Ms. Robin Kells (Senior Director, Corporate Procurement and Asset Management Services, House of Commons): The redistribution of ridings represents a significant change that affects not only geographic boundaries but also riding names and office locations. These changes could create functional and financial pressures for some MPs that are completely beyond their control. It's the responsibility of the administration to ensure that members can continue to serve their constituents effectively and efficiently during this transition.

The policy proposals aim to achieve two key objectives. First, the idea is to limit the impact of riding boundaries on members' office budgets by increasing certain costs to the central budget. This ensures that members can focus on parliamentary functions while reducing the negative impact on constituents. The second is to mitigate functional disruptions caused by redistribution by providing clear guidelines and tailored support mechanisms.

[English]

In addition to the electoral boundary redistribution approaches adopted in 2015, the proposed policies introduce practical measures to address gaps identified with respect to the next EBR's scope. For example, as in 2015, assets will follow re-elected members. To ensure a level of operational readiness, newly elected members with no offices or assets to inherit will have access to funding to equip their new constituency offices.

As of today, 57 constituency offices belonging to 49 members are located outside the new electoral boundaries. Depending on election outcomes, some of these offices may need to be closed or reassigned to other members. In these cases, costs related to office moves, lease termination and asset divestment will be charged to a central budget if incurred within 120 days following the election.

In situations where members are affected by constituency name changes, it is proposed that reasonable expenses for the replacement of assets or items displaying the former constituency name be covered by a central budget for 12 months following the general election.

Similarly, other measures grounded in the principles of easing the operational and financial pressures of the EBR on members are outlined in the recommendations before you.

While the administration has attempted to foresee as many EBR impacts as possible, it is proposed that the clerk be authorized to make temporary exceptions to these policies for four months following the next general election, to ensure flexibility to handle unforeseen situations.

Mr. Paul St George: To address funding for the five new constituencies, the administration ensured that the allocation of related member budgets adheres to established budget policies. Cost drivers for the five new members were carefully considered in the development of funding proposals for the administrative budgets. For example, there were 30 new members in 2015, and 49 offices were located outside of the new boundaries. This time, we estimate 57, which is an increase of eight. Fourteen per cent of constituencies remained unchanged in 2015, which is also comparable to the position now.

Other key cost drivers that we considered were tangible costs of \$300,000 for increased licence fees and infrastructure costs, 600 new assets or inventory to manage and support, 40 new members' employees to provide human resource services to, and approximately 11 new suites to maintain. In addition, we considered 10 residences that will require security and relocation.

Funding requested for the administration includes the lowest of three costing methodologies. The first methodology we went through was a comprehensive calculation from all services, and it resulted in approximately \$1 million in permanent funding.

The second methodology involved taking the approved 2015 submission, pro-rating the approved funding for 30 members to five and adjusting it for inflation to reflect current values. This approach resulted in approximately \$700,000.

The third methodology, which is the lowest, started with \$700,000 from methodology two and adjusted for services not impacted by the activities. This would include legal and procedures. The resulting value of \$597,000 reflects this adjustment and is considered reasonable based on the 2015 submission. This lesser amount is before you for approval.

The administration has worked diligently to minimize the funding request while meeting the needs of the five constituencies. It is therefore recommended that the board approve the seven EBR policies included in the submission, the temporary cost of \$2.7 million to be funded within existing budgets and the permanent funding of \$4.8 million to be included in the upcoming main estimates.

This concludes our presentation.

Mr. Speaker, I welcome any questions from the board.

• (1115)

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Are there any questions or comments?

Mr. Scheer, you have the floor.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (House Leader of the Official Opposition): Thanks very much. That was a great, comprehensive presentation.

I just had a bit of a thought that I wonder if my colleagues might agree with me on. It's on the 120 days for relocating an office. For those of us who have had to move, it can be very time-consuming to find a location, to deal with a landlord who would be willing to enter into the types of contracts that the House of Commons insists on, and to make improvements that need to be made to make a space available.

I'm just thinking that, in the aftermath of an election, we all know what that does to our teams. I just wonder if the 120 days is a little bit tight. I fully agree with the principle of seeking permission from another member to have an office in that riding, but I wonder if 180 days might be a little bit more reasonable for all that comes with. I believe it says in the presentation that you'd have 120 days to wind down operations in the existing office.

I'm just wondering if we could be a little bit more lax with that to give new members or re-elected members who are in this situation enough time to really do a thorough search. Sometimes finding trades to do the improvements in a new building can be frustratingly long because there's still a lack of skilled labour in some markets in Canada.

I just wanted to throw that out there for a little bit more of a permissive period of time.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Do you want to respond to that, Mr. St George?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul St George: We are certainly open to adjusting that. The only conflict is that, with the termination clause within the lease agreements, they're for 120 days.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Right, so a member in a current office would have to give 120 days' notice, but this would give them an additional 60 days to at least start the process before they have to give the notice. I understand where you got the 120 days from, but as I read it, you would almost have to give notice the day after the election, and then you might find yourself in a position of having to rush to find something to satisfy that.

Anyway, I would just throw that out there for a little bit more flexibility.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Go ahead, Michel.

Mr. Michel Bédard (Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The 120 days is built on the mandatory clauses that were approved by the BOIE. After an election, the leases are assigned to the House of Commons. During that period, the lease is under the name of the House of Commons, and members have that duration to close their operation if they no longer want to operate the office, especially if they inherit multiple offices after a redistribution.

After the 120-day period, it's really up to the member, if the member wants to stay longer, to negotiate something longer with the landlord, and we've seen that in the past. In most cases, 120 days is more than sufficient, in that the member will be able to make a decision soon after the election about whether or not they want to keep the office they inherited.

We cannot make any commitment to have a longer period, because what the mandatory clauses state right now is that it's 120 days.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I just want to be clear. If we changed that to 180 days, would that make a difference? Do the clauses say 120 days after an election?

Landlords have signed on to an agreement that's tied to the election date, plus 120 days. I see.

• (1120)

Mr. Michel Bédard: That's correct. In order to implement a longer period, that period will have to be reflected in each contract lease.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Do you want to say something, Mrs. DeBellefeuille?

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: In fact, I didn't hear the interpretation of what Mr. Bédard said.

Mr. Michel Bédard: What I was saying, Mrs. DeBellefeuille, is that the 120 days reflect the mandatory clauses that have been approved by the Board of Internal Economy and are included in members' leases.

If we wanted to extend the term to 180 days, the Board of Internal Economy could make that ruling, but it would have to be reflected in all members' leases. It must be said that what binds owners and landlords is their contract, not a Board of Internal Economy decision.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Julian is the next questioner.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, I see you have a comment. Does that follow-up on that question?

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: I think it's all part of a continuum.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Yes, indeed.

So I'll give the floor to Mr. Julian.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (House Leader of the New Democratic Party): I'm inclined to agree with Mr. Scheer. Just thinking of the sheer practicality—you come out of an election campaign and you're cleaning up your signs and taking down your office because a new member is elected where your constituency office is because of redistribution—21 calendar days is simply not realistic when you have a new member who doesn't even have an office and you're trying to get their permission.

Six months seem to me to be more appropriate and more realistic. That doesn't change the lease termination costs, equivalent to a maximum of four months' rent, but the reality is, I think, that the clerk needs to be authorized for a period of up to six months and the expense window should be 180 days rather than 120 days, just because we understand.... There are a couple of things. Coming out of a campaign, it's quite possible that a new member who actually has that constituency may not even be up and running, so getting that consent will be more difficult. Then, in terms of actually finding another office, in areas like the area I represent the search for a new office is something that takes a number of months, so I think there needs to be more flexibility in this. We can put any date we want, but I just don't see these dates as realistic, given what the reality is on the ground.

I think the BOIE policies, which include the four months' rent, which I certainly agree with, should reflect a framework that actually makes it important for members of Parliament or new members of Parliament to respect what the BOIE has written down. Reading through this, I, like Mr. Scheer, think that it might be very difficult to respect the guidelines, given a number of variables in this.

I would agree with changing it to 180 days in those two clauses and keeping the four months' rent. I would suggest having longer than the 21 calendar days, when a new member may not even be.... The re-elected member may not even be able to contact them in a 21-day period following an election. To make it more realistic, I think a 60-day period would make more sense.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Ms. Kells.

Ms. Robin Kells: In our experience, as the law clerk mentioned, we find that the 120 days adequately cover most members' needs. However, as he mentioned, we exercise flexibility and we support members both through the members' orientation program and just in general.

At election time, and specifically with the upcoming election and the electoral boundary redistribution, we will be working in very close partnership with members and the House administration to assist those who may be struggling with those time frames. Our team is going to be dedicating a few resources to the members affected intensely by the EBR so that we can provide that close partnership to accompany them and support their decisions throughout.

In terms of contacting the new members within those 21 days, the members' orientation program is very much attuned to that difficulty. Staff work very hard to maintain the contact information of the members who are not re-elected and can help bridge that gap. It is something that we are definitely attuned to.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm not really convinced that the extension proposed by Mr. Scheer is necessary. In fact, Ms. Kells just told us that the 120-day deadline has not been a problem so far and that members who needed flexibility to extend their lease, for all kinds of reasons, have received support from the administration.

Also, as I understand it, changing the 120 days to 180 days would mean that all members' leases would have to be changed, even those who aren't moving. Members should negotiate with the owners of their premises when they already have a contract with them. That seems like a lot of work, including for members who wouldn't be moving, because they too would have to take steps to comply with the Members' By-Law, unless I'm mistaken.

I believe that we should keep the 120-day period, since it hasn't been proven to be a problem. In any case, I haven't seen such a problem in my caucus. I can't speak to other caucuses.

So let's keep the 120 days and offer some flexibility in cases where it's necessary. I think that's what we're hearing from people who are concerned: they need flexibility. Let's not change the Members' By-Law to extend it to 180 days, because that would require a lot of paperwork not only for newly elected MPs but also for MPs who are re-elected and don't move.

I don't know if I understood the consequences of the proposed change.

First, I would ask Mr. Bédard to confirm whether what I'm saying is true.

Also, would the extension from 120 days to 180 days cost the administration? Would a budget increase be necessary?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Mrs. DeBellefeuille. I think you're right, but Mr. Bédard can confirm that.

Mr. Michel Bédard: You're right, Mrs. DeBellefeuille. If we were to adopt this change, all members' leases would have to be renegotiated. In other words, members would have to start new negotiations with their landlord.

That being said, if the Board of Internal Economy ultimately decided to review the mandatory clauses and change the deadline from 120 days to 180 days, that would be something else. However, this isn't something that would be done in a few months or an election year, as is the case now.

On the financial side, I'd leave it to the chief financial officer to give you specific numbers. However, I would say that this four-month notice, or potentially six months' notice, is also compensation for landlords. So even when members are able to close their offices very soon after an election, their landlord is paid for four months or six months if the proposed change passes. If this is the case, an additional two months rent will be paid for premises not used by the House of Commons or by a member of Parliament.

[*English*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Madame Gould.

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

From the outset, I don't have any issue with Mr. Scheer's suggestion, although it sounds administratively burdensome. If we have confirmation from the House administration that they will demonstrate flexibility in the situations where it's needed, then I'm okay to stick with where we are, but I would like to have that confirmation from the House administration.

The other point that I want to raise is with regard to notifying a member. Given the high number of constituencies that are going to be affected by the redistribution of the boundaries, I wonder whether it doesn't make more sense to just waive the requirement for the 120 days following the next election, understanding that it will just be the case because there are going to be so many ridings where constituency offices are present currently and those offices will change. They will, within that 120-day period, naturally have to move into the existing riding. Of course, if it goes beyond the 120-day period, they should have that agreement between members.

It just feels like a lot of extra administration and management that the House administration would need to do for something that will get sorted out. There are just such a high number of ridings that are changing that it seems unnecessary to do that at this point in time. My recommendation would be, why don't we just align it with the 120-day period in general?

- (1130)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Let's do this in two parts. The first part is to get confirmation of whether or not there's flexibility that can be offered. Second, let's deal with the question of notification. There are as many as 57 cases, I think you said, Mr. St George, of constituency offices that will find themselves outside of the riding after redistribution.

Go ahead, Mr. St George.

Mr. Paul St George: In terms of the confirmation of flexibility, we've included in there that Eric would have the flexibility to make those case-by-case reviews. I think we've demonstrated, throughout the last election and over the last while, that we've been fairly flexible in that, so I would support that it remain as it is, from an administrative perspective.

Within our costing, we did not include anything related to that burden you talked about. I do not know what that is in terms of dollars, but it would be considerable for the 57 constituencies and renegotiations for that, plus the additional, among the 338. To have that done for the election would probably be an impossible task, to be honest.

In terms of the contacting, I think that would be done fairly quickly. We have an MOP office that's in place. I think they are strongly structured to have those support systems in place throughout the entire election process.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Go ahead, Ms. Gould.

Hon. Karina Gould: Why wouldn't we just waive that? Is there an absolute need to do that? Could the BOIE just waive that, understanding that there are going to be 57 ridings where that happens?

Having been a new MP at one point in my career, I know there's a lot going on. Whether it is a new MP who is going into a new rid-

ing or a new MP who is elected in an existing riding, it just seems like it's one extra thing that we don't need to do if we know this is already an issue and if there's a timeline on it.

Every MP, I assume, will want to have a constituency office in their actual riding. Is that not right? It just seems like an unnecessary thing to do when we know this is something that we could just not do.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Go ahead, Ms. Kells.

Ms. Robin Kells: I can answer from a more technical perspective here. There are 57 offices that are currently outside of the boundaries, and there are 49 constituencies to which those 57 offices belong.

The way we are approaching that.... Maybe I could remind the board of the intention behind the board's approval of the original 120-day lease termination period and assignment clause. Prior to 2015, it used to be that we would move all of the assets out of every constituency office at dissolution, and then newly elected members could decide if they were going to assume that office, and if they were, we would move the assets back in. If they were going to move somewhere else, we would move the assets to the new location. The feedback we received from members at the time was that they would like to get up and running a lot quicker, because that forced newly elected members to wait a longer period of time and, logistically, it was an incredible exercise.

The board approved, back in 2015, the notion of assignment clauses so that, for that 120-day period, the leases are assigned to the House of Commons, and the assets remain in the offices. That allows the newly elected member.... Let me add to that. The 21-day closure period was intended to allow the newly elected member to come in and start their operations as soon as possible after those 21 days. What we find happens now is that members are able to get up and running a lot quicker because of that.

For the 57 offices that are outside of the ridings currently, depending on the election results, those offices could be reassigned to the new constituency in which they are located, which would give the member representing that riding the opportunity to take that office, as an example. There are many permutations, depending on the election results. The House administration is tooled now to, on the day that we find out the election results, calculate where all of those permutations are going to land in terms of lease assignment. That's why we are going to be working very closely with all of those members who would be affected and helping them make decisions around keeping surplus assets or offices, or not keeping them, or closing them.

• (1135)

Hon. Karina Gould: That's all fine. I guess my question is, does that still necessitate a member communicating with another member, if the House is going to decide which constituencies those offices are going to be in? What I'm asking for is just waiving the member's communicating with another member, because, from what you just said, it sounds like the House is actually deciding that. It sounds like it's actually moot to have a member get permission and agreement. It just sounds like an extra administrative thing that we don't need to do, from what you're saying.

Ms. Robin Kells: The rule behind that is that a member cannot operate an office that's located in a constituency belonging to another member.

Hon. Karina Gould: I understand all of that, but that's exactly... You just said that the House is going to decide, the day after the election, which constituency an office will belong to, so it seems like an unnecessary thing for a member to have to do. I'm just saying, let's suspend or waive that rule for 120 days following the election. It just seems like we don't have to do it, because the House is already deciding that. There are still 120 days, for an MP in the new boundaries, to decide whether or not they want to keep that.

I'm very supportive of the process that you laid out. I'm just saying, let's waive that one rule for that 120-day period.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I'm going to go to Ms. Kells, followed by Monsieur Bédard, if necessary.

Ms. Robin Kells: Maybe I could clarify. The office that finds itself outside of the constituency border now—the new, redrawn boundary—still belongs to the re-elected member, let's say, in this example, so that re-elected member can decide. It's not the House administration deciding. That re-elected member would decide whether they are going to keep that office running. If member A is re-elected in this constituency but now his office is over there, that office still belongs to that re-elected member.

Hon. Karina Gould: I understand.

Hon. Greg Fergus: There are two minutes left for the bells; just keep that in mind.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. Wi-Fi isn't working very well in the room. I'd like to vote electronically, but if I have a little trouble with the network, I'll have to go out to vote.

If you see a problem with the network for voting, Mr. Chair, could you suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow us to vote remotely?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: Okay, thank you.

[*English*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: To just get a little more clarification on the question that you just raised, Ms. Gould, could I ask Monsieur Bédard to intervene?

Mr. Michel Bédard: As Ms. Kells was saying, the 21 days is for the member to get the permission from the other member to have the office in another member's riding, and waiting 120 days could

create some challenges. Permission from the member should not take more than 21 days: It's just yes or no. Then, once the decision is made, the member has to cease to operate the office, but then still has time to move and find another office or maybe inherit another office.

• (1140)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I don't want to get into an argument about what's practical. I think that, for all of us who have gone through elections, especially when you take over a riding where there is change in an area.... I can foresee it being a challenge to get a hold of somebody, especially if they've lost—or even if they've won. Making a decision within 21 days about another MP having their office might be the type of thing that someone wants to reflect on and consult about with their own whips. It might seem like 21 days is a lot, but when you're trying to wind down a campaign, thank volunteers.... If a member has lost, sometimes they just need to go and decompress.

I have some sympathy with what's being expressed for some flexibility, and I understand the constraints that you have, on an administrative level, with the clauses that are in the leases.

Maybe I could ask a quick question. When a member grants approval for another member to have an office in their own constituency, is that in perpetuity, for the life of a Parliament or until it's revoked? How permanent can that arrangement be?

Ms. Robin Kells: The member can operate in another member's constituency as long as the hosting member allows it.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Okay, so grace and favour, as soon as it's....

Ms. Robin Kells: We have one office in that situation now.

Hon. Karina Gould: I'm sorry, but I don't understand why you're so opposed to waiving that rule for a period of time. I can say that, in my own experience, when I was elected and the member lost, they would not return my calls. We came in on day 21, but I did not hear from that member. They refused to engage with me.

I understand that those are the rules, but what I'm saying is that, in this particular situation, because it is so complex, I feel like we should be able to extend it. Mr. Julian said to extend it to 60 days. I would be supportive of that. It just allows for that flexibility. Again, if you are re-elected and your office is in boundaries that are no longer yours, you are still serving your community, and there's an opportunity to have a conversation with your neighbouring ridings. To Mr. Scheer's point, 21 calendar days is not a lot of time. If we can agree on 60 days, I would be supportive of that.

I just think that it seems like you're stuck in this position that is very difficult for some people to act upon because of the nature of the transition that we have, and I just don't see that we have to do that. If the Board of Internal Economy agrees, let's move forward with 60 days, because it would just enable that transition to happen in a way that might actually be possible. You might end up in a situation in which there are people who don't talk to each other and they don't get permission. We don't know the nature of those inter-personal relationships, so I would posit that we extend that period to 60 days.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: I see some nodding heads.

I have Mr. Julian, and then Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Since there's no consensus among members of the Board of Internal Economy, we'll resume this discussion later on, once we've obtained figures to see whether there would be additional costs. The Board of Internal Economy can then make an informed decision. We'll get you the information as soon as possible, hopefully by next week.

Mr. Julian, you have the floor.

Mr. Peter Julian: There will be no additional costs.

I want to be very clear: this has nothing to do with the lease.

The recommendation is twofold.

First, when a member is re-elected and his constituency office isn't in his new riding, the proposal is that the member may charge certain expenditures to the central budget of the House administration if they are incurred within 120 days after the date of the general election. Mr. Scheer is proposing that it be 180 days, and I fully agree. The expenditures in question are as follows:

costs for moving and storage services and setting up offices and equipment [...];
lease termination costs equivalent to a maximum of four months' rent;
costs for the removal, replacement and/or disposal of fixed office signage.

So that doesn't affect the leases.

What we're trying to do is put in place a policy that can be respected.

Further on, the submission states:

The Clerk of the House of Commons is authorized, for a period of four months following the next general election, to make temporary exceptions to board by-laws and policies to address unforeseen situations [...]

The submission talks about a four-month period, but we're suggesting six months. In this case, whether it's 120 days or six months, nothing changes. All it does is provide more realistic flexibility.

It is indeed possible that, in some cases, we may have to come back before the Board of Internal Economy. However, if all the exceptions were to come before the board when they could have been included in the policy, I think it would be a bit of a waste of time.

We must take into consideration all the challenges that Mr. Scheer, Ms. Gould and I have just raised. We need to give the

administration the flexibility to do that rather than having an obligation to consult with the Board of Internal Economy.

It doesn't change the lease at all. Lease termination fees of up to four months' rent will continue to be covered. However, we are proposing to extend the two periods in question to give the administration the flexibility it needs to deal with cases that wouldn't be resolved after four months. We're not talking about leases; we're talking about other costs. It just seems to make sense to me.

With respect to the 60-day proposal, which Ms. Gould referred to, I certainly agree. Why put in place a 21-day policy when, presumably, it won't be followed? The 21-day timeline isn't realistic. Again, these matters can be referred to the Board of Internal Economy, but I think we have to trust the administration. We have very talented administrators in the House of Commons. Rather than establishing a policy that won't be followed, in which case the board will be called upon to look at exceptions, we should adopt a more realistic policy that can be respected and that will help the Board of Internal Economy avoid having to deal with the exceptions.

That's the opinion I wanted to express.

• (1145)

Hon. Greg Fergus: On the speakers list, I already have Mrs. DeBellefeuille. I'm now adding the name of Ms. Gould.

Mr. Bédard, I invite you to give an answer.

Mr. Michel Bédard: With regard to the duration of the delegated authority, Mr. Julian, we proposed a four-month period because it was new. If that were extended to six months, there would be no problem for the administration.

With respect to the 21-day period, which you're proposing to extend to 60 days, it's important to understand that it was in an attempt to reconcile the mutual interests of all members that we proposed this number of days. It may be that the office in question is the only one in a newly elected MP's riding and they want to move there, but they can't because of the 21 days, or 60 days, if you decide to extend it to 60 days, or whatever period the Board of Internal Economy may establish. In some cases, we knew that the 21-day period could be problematic, particularly if there were communication problems. That's precisely why we are proposing to delegate the power to act in exceptional cases to the clerk. It's also important to understand that if the member stays in the constituency office for 21 days, that means that the new member who would like to settle there can't occupy the office during that period.

Obviously, the decision on that policy rests with the Board of Internal Economy, but I wanted to explain the reason for this proposal.

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

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Chair, I somewhat have the same reaction. If the timeline is set at 60 days, the member who was defeated could also take up to 60 days before responding. Extending the timeline doesn't serve one of the two parties involved. It could be used by both sides. A member who wants to cut off contact with the new member who wants to occupy his office could take up to 60 days before responding, if he knows that the deadline has gone from 21 days to 60 days. That would not really solve the problem Ms. Gould described earlier.

For my part, I'm sincerely trying to avoid unintended consequences. I wonder if we're not inventing problems. In fact, I don't think the problems reported to the administration are serious enough to justify making very profound changes that would also have an impact on re-elected members. I'll give you an example. If I'm re-elected and the Board of Internal Economy announces that it has extended the 120 days to 180 days, I'll be forced to renegotiate my lease. The landlord could then take advantage of that to raise the rent, which would have a financial impact on the operating budget I get as an MP.

If there's no problem, if the administration provides us with some flexibility and if the clerk is given the authority to manage exceptions on a case-by-case basis, I don't think any further changes would be necessary. I rely on the judgment of the clerk and I have confidence in the administration. However, I get the impression that there is so little desire to manage exceptional cases that we're trying to establish a regulation covering everything. I don't really agree with making profound changes like that without knowing all the implications. The red flag for me is that even re-elected MPs who keep their offices will have to renegotiate their leases. I don't think that's desirable for members of Parliament or for taxpayers.

On the other hand, I'm thinking that 120 days is sort of the length of notice that members give to landlord. Does that mean that when members sign a lease, they tell landlords that even if they leave after the 10th day, six months' worth of rent will be paid to them? I wonder why we would offer so much money to private landlords, when the real problems are few and far between. If I were told that most tenants have major problems, I'd understand. The proposal is to give six months' notice, which means giving six months' rent to a landlord who might not even need it if the member moved within the established time frame.

I have a hard time understanding what the problem is. Perhaps it's because we don't have that kind of difficulty in Quebec. I think the current regulations are adequate.

I fully agree with the changes proposed by the administration to allow us to recover assets and open an office. Whether members are newly elected or re-elected, they may be able to move into an office the next day where all they have to do is plug in the Internet. The phone will be connected, and they can already start serving their constituents. If members need more time, they can negotiate with the administration.

I don't understand what the problem is with the current proposal. I'm not going to call the question, since this is the first item we're discussing and there are a lot of other things to debate. I don't know what you're going to do with it. Before I give you my consent, I want to understand what's at stake. I don't seem to understand that.

At least, I haven't heard from the administration that there's a problem with the current rules.

● (1150)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Ms. Gould, you have the floor.

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I think it's important to clarify what I was suggesting. I'm not saying to change the 21-day period in general. I was saying to give longer for those 49 ridings where there is going to be that issue of who is there. If you are saying, with regard to riding A, that the constituency office of the person who is re-elected or newly elected in that riding is in riding B, well, allow them to start within those 21 days, but provide more flexibility to decide where that office is going to be, as opposed to saying that in that 21 days they have to come to an agreement.

I think, as Mr. Scheer said, there may be broader conversations that are happening. It's only with regard to extending the period of time or waiving the need to come to an agreement with another member of Parliament in terms of those offices that find themselves in new boundaries, as opposed to the 21-day period where a new member of Parliament takes over at that riding office. That's the only thing I'm asking for.

I think that, given the high number of members of Parliament and electoral districts that are going to find themselves in this situation, it doesn't make sense to limit their ability to have those conversations in the immediate period following an election.

With regard to your question, Madame DeBellefeuille, it is actually about trying to reduce the administrative burden that will come because of this change. We don't face it right now, because we don't have this high number of boundary changes, and we haven't had this high number of boundary changes in the last number of elections. That's why I'm suggesting it. Because we know that there are going to be approximately 50 ridings for which this is going to be a challenge, let's provide, as Mr. Julian said, that flexibility in advance, as opposed to having to reconvene this table to deal with problems that will arise. As much as I want to say that there will be positive relationships and that this will go well between neighbouring ridings, I don't know if that will be the case, so why don't we provide you that flexibility in advance and enable that to happen?

That's the only suggestion I am making. It's with regard to those specific ridings, and that's why I asked why we don't waive that requirement for a longer period of time. It's not that MPs shouldn't be able to take over the office within 21 days.

I hope that clarifies what I was proposing.

● (1155)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you for that.

I'd like to reassure you and all board members that this flexibility actually does exist right now with the administration in those cases where it does pass over 21 days.

I will let Mr. St George talk about that.

Mr. Paul St George: I'll be quick.

The 21 days is also embedded within the lease agreements. Like I said, certainly, on a case-by-case basis, depending on the member, depending on the instance, we can have that conversation with the landlord to negotiate an extension.

Mr. Michel Bédard: The delegation that is proposed in the submission—to entrust the clerk with the power to make exception to bylaws and policies during a four-month or six-month period—is proposed exactly to deal with those situations where there might still be ongoing negotiations or discussion between members and where the 21 days is not enabling but is rather an obstacle. This is exactly why the delegation was put in.

If there is a refusal within the 21 days, a clear refusal, then the member will have the rest of the four months to close and to move out, and then the other member could move in. It's not the intention of the administration to implement the 21 days in a way that could prevent an agreement or consensus between members. It's quite to the contrary. It will mean more efficient operation, because the member will stay in the premises, in the same office.

So, as long as there is a possibility that the member stays and there's no refusal from the member, the clerk, I trust, will exercise his discretion to extend the 21-day timeline.

Hon. Greg Ferguson: Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I am going to live through this, coming out of the next campaign. There's a constituency office neighbouring my riding that is currently in the heart of that riding, but with redistribution, it would be in my riding. That member then contacts me and says that they want to maintain their riding office, and I send a note within 21 days saying “no”. Tell me what happens after that.

Ms. Robin Kells: After that, the member has to clear out of the office within that 120-day period, and it has to cease operations immediately.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. Let's say that the person tries to contact me, and I just don't respond. What happens then?

Ms. Robin Kells: It's the same scenario.

Mr. Peter Julian: After 21 days...?

Ms. Robin Kells: Yes.

Mr. Peter Julian: So, I basically veto if I don't respond within 21 days. That's exactly the point that Ms. Gould was making, and Mr. Scheer as well: that that's not a practical and intelligent response to how we should be managing this in a post-election time, when we're often busier than we are during the election campaign. We have campaign offices to clean up, signs to clean up, etc. That's why the provision to allow for some flexibility makes sense. What you're saying is that, regardless of whether, in the 21 days, that person is able to get in contact with me, it's the same result. Do you see?

That's the problem that I think Ms. Gould and Mr. Scheer expressed very eloquently. I don't understand the reluctance to put in place something that makes sense rather than having this all go to the BOIE.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

I'd also like to come back to what Mrs. DeBellefeuille said, that we're in the process of changing our leases. The leases aren't being changed in any way. In all of our comments on this today, Mr. Scheer, Ms. Gould, and I have said that the lease cancellation fee for up to four months of rent remains in place. All we want to do is give the clerk more flexibility to authorize expenses related to that and give members more flexibility to request reimbursement of their related expenses.

Once again, I don't understand the reluctance to having a policy that can be more easily respected, rather than a more restrictive policy that won't be respected in all cases and that will have the effect of referring all exceptions to the Board of Internal Economy. What Ms. Gould and Mr. Scheer have said makes a lot of sense. I don't understand the resistance to that. On the one hand, it doesn't change the leases. On the other hand, it gives more flexibility to a member who, for whatever reason, can't communicate with the member who, in the meantime, has the opportunity to keep the office that's in a riding that's no longer his or hers.

It's a good policy proposal. We're talking about real challenges. I don't understand the resistance to tweaking the proposal so it can be better followed and not have all these exceptions before the Board of Internal Economy. It must be said that we'll have other things to worry about after an election.

Hon. Greg Ferguson: Mrs. DeBellefeuille, the floor is yours.

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, it's not a question of resistance. To me, it's a matter of common sense.

For about an hour now, what I've been hearing from the House administration is that there is flexibility. Maybe I'm wrong, but that's my understanding. What I'm hearing is that the exceptions are really rare. I'm hearing that it's not a generalized problem. I'm not a lawyer or an administrator, so I have confidence in the administration. I'm not convinced by the proposed amendments.

That's not resistance. I'm trying to base my decision on facts, but I don't have any facts. I understand that, under the proposal, a member who's in a bind can request an exception, and then the clerk and the administration will have all the necessary powers to act. I also understand that exceptions are not generalized. So I don't understand the problem.

If my colleagues have a serious problem with that, I don't know whether they will want to put the question to a vote, but I won't ask for a vote to go against my colleagues. That being said, I think we're on the wrong track and are not properly analyzing the situation. I suggest that we suspend this aspect of the discussion so that we can talk to each other and understand each other, because I have the impression that we don't understand each other.

That isn't resistance. It's more about my never making a decision without understanding what I'm going to decide. Mr. Julian may be interpreting my language as resistance, but that's not the case. I want to understand, but I can't.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Based on my interpretation of the events, Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you're right to say that there is some flexibility.

Mr. Julian, you say that increasing the 120 days to 180 days wouldn't have any financial consequences, but I don't agree. If we now include in leases...

Mr. Peter Julian: We're not talking about leases. The leases remain the same.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Ms. Gould, you have the floor.

• (1205)

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, what's different in this case, in my opinion, is that it's the first time in many years that such significant changes have been made to ridings. As a result, 57 members' offices will be outside the boundaries of their current ridings. A total of 49 ridings will have offices that weren't previously theirs. This hasn't happened often in the past.

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: But we've already experienced that.

Hon. Karina Gould: It's happened in the past, but it wasn't as extensive as what we're experiencing now. There will really be major changes in the next election.

The clerk will have the necessary flexibility to manage those situations. However, in the past, this type of situation after an election could occur in at most three cases. This time, it could happen in 50 cases. What I'm proposing will save the clerk from having to intervene 50 times to settle disputes between members. He may have to do it five times. If we extend the period to 60 days, there will be more opportunities for those conversations.

With all due respect to the House administration, if you haven't had the experience of the post-election period, it's hard to understand all the things that a member needs to do at that time. The only reason I'm proposing to extend this period in the exceptional circumstances where members will be in offices that are no longer located in their riding is that it will give more flexibility and time for members to negotiate a solution among themselves, without the need for the clerk and the Board of Internal Economy to intervene. It's also a way of preventing future problems.

I agree with Mr. Scheer and Mr. Julian about extending the period after the election from 120 days to 180 days. However, I understand why we might think that's not necessary and that it could give the House administration more work. That being said, since we know there will be complications and disputes, why not give members more time to settle those disputes among themselves, instead of having the clerk or even the Board of Internal Economy intervene directly?

The only purpose of my proposal is to prevent problems and make things easier, whereas those changes will bring about certain complications, for political reasons or because of the way some

members react when they aren't re-elected. I just want to make it easier for new members.

As I said, we haven't had that in a number of years. At any rate, I think the changes it will bring about this time will be greater than ever.

Hon. Greg Fergus: We've been discussing this issue for exactly 60 minutes, and I have a possible solution to suggest. If you agree, let's increase the proposed period from 21 days to 60 days, as several members of the Board of Internal Economy have suggested, in the case of constituency offices that will end up in a new riding after redistribution.

Is there consensus to change the 21 days to 60 days?

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: You're saying that it will be for those who find themselves in the situation described by Ms. Gould, is that correct?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Yes, exactly.

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: So it won't apply to the others.

Hon. Greg Fergus: In fact, it won't be necessary for the others. This is only for cases where a constituency office, after redistribution, is in a new riding.

• (1210)

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to know what the law clerk and parliamentary counsel thinks about this.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Bédard, you have the floor.

Mr. Michel Bédard: The decision on that policy rests with the Board of Internal Economy.

The 21-day deadline is in line with the time members who aren't re-elected have to leave their offices. That's the basic timeline set out in the Members' By-law.

Now, if the deadline is 60 days and there's no decision within 60 days, in some cases the member can move later. In any event, under the proposed policy, a member who has an office in another riding must cease operations there as soon as his or her application is refused, but he or she has the remaining 120 days to move.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Ms. Gould, you have the floor.

Hon. Karina Gould: I'd like something to be clarified.

[English]

I just want to make sure I understand what you said.

If someone is not re-elected, they would still need to leave their office within the 21-day period. It's just that if that office was found in another riding, the duly elected person wouldn't have to get permission for 60 days from the other member of Parliament as to whether they could be there or not.

I'm not suggesting that we waive the 21 days for moving into the office. It's just while you're negotiating if that office can stay in that new riding or not that you have a bit more time to do that.

That's what I'm suggesting.

Mr. Michel Bédard: Yes, that's how we understood it.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: On the list of people who wanted to speak before I suggested this change, we had Mrs. DeBellefeuille, followed by Ms. Gould and Mr. Julian.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille and Ms. Gould now wish to pass, so I'll give the floor to Mr. Julian.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: Scenario number one, which is where the new member says "no", still applies. We're just giving a few more weeks for the contact so that we don't have the unintended consequence where, because there has been no contact or no confirmation, for whatever reason, the person has to move out after 21 days.

I find that this is a very good compromise that allows for the scenarios that both Mr. Scheer and Ms. Gould raised.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Now that leaves the other part, which is regarding breaking the lease.

Mr. Peter Julian: It's not the breaking of the lease. It is just allowing for the member and for the administration to have expenses up until six months. It is not changing the lease. I insist on this again.

[Translation]

We're still talking about lease cancellation fees equivalent to four months' rent. It's just that there's more flexibility for the administration and for members in terms of certain covered costs, including lease termination fees, which can't exceed four months' rent.

[English]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Just give us a second, please.

Hon. Karina Gould: Did we formally agree on the 60 days? Is that done now?

• (1215)

Hon. Greg Fergus: That seems to have been done.

[Translation]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, do you agree with the 60 days?

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: Yes. We're not going to spend the night talking about it.

[English]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. St George, just so we're all on the same page here, could you walk us through the additional 60 days that members of the board are looking to have as flexibility?

Mr. Paul St George: If we're talking about paragraph c) of the recommendation, specifically the 120 days, we do not see extra or incremental cost to the House of Commons as a result of the change from 120 to 180. As mentioned by Mr. Julian, it would simply be an opening or widening of the number of days allowed for expenditures go through.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Bédard, do you have anything to add?

[English]

Mr. Michel Bédard: My comment is on the 21 days, not necessarily paragraph c) of the recommendation.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Julian.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm sorry, but I didn't hear what Mr. Bédard said.

[English]

Mr. Michel Bédard: My comment is on the 21-day policy, not the proposal that you're discussing right now, so I can wait.

Mr. Paul St George: With regard to the 21 days to 60 days, we don't see any financial impact to that either.

Mr. Michel Bédard: If I may, with regard to the 21 days, the leases that have the most current mandatory clauses have the 21 days stated in the lease. If the landlord agrees that the 21 days be extended, that's one thing. However, there might be a situation where the landlord insists on 21 days, in which case the 60 days that the board agrees on will, in fact, be 21 days because the landlord will be entitled to receive a notice within 21 days. We could adjust the recommendation accordingly to capture that.

Hon. Greg Fergus: All right, so we'll just make sure that everybody is on the same page. If we take a look at the recommendations.... They're on page 6 in the English version.

[Translation]

In the French version, it's on page 7.

[English]

If we take a look at paragraph a), we see that we would be changing that number from 21 days to 60 days. In paragraph c), we'd be changing it from 120 days to 180 days.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: There's a third change, which would be in recommendation (g). The clerk would be authorized to temporarily waive regulations for a period of six months instead of four.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Indeed.

I'll summarize the proposed changes.

In recommendation (a), we would replace "21 days" with "60 days."

In recommendation (c), we would replace "120 days" with "180 days," with respect to expenses incurred after the general election.

In recommendation (g), at the end of the first line, we would replace "a four-month period" with "a six-month period."

Does everyone agree with these amendments?

[English]

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. St George.

[*English*]

Also, I'd like to take an opportunity to thank the House administration for making an important change, which is to help members, rather than have their furniture moved out and held in storage. Then new members have to go through the process, and it takes months before they are set up. I think the new policies, which have been in place now for an election, have been very helpful to get offices started with a minimum delay.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: In fact, Mr. Chair, I'd like to make a comment on the same item on the agenda. As I understand it, we just passed the list of recommendations on that, right?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Yes.

Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille: That's fine.

The administration consulted us on the issue of supplements related to remoteness or riding size. Depending on the riding, supplements are added to the operating budget of certain members. However, I note that the analysis that resulted from consultations isn't included in the document before us, and I strongly believe that we should discuss it. It may be time to discuss a possible modernization of the way supplements are determined, that is, whether we should use a population indicator or an area indicator.

As we know, the list of ridings entitled to a supplement is set out in a schedule to the Canada Elections Act, and there are few of them. However, I think that as a result of the redistribution, some ridings with low population densities will have to have several constituency offices. So I think we should take the time to talk about supplements. The changes that will be made to ridings in the next election may provide us with a good opportunity to modernize the way we design these supplements. I propose that we discuss this at a future meeting of the Board of Internal Economy, if you agree. The administration has taken the time to consult us on this, so I think we should be looking at that.

Personally, I want to say that I'm aware of the reality of rural ridings where members have to travel over a large area to meet their constituents. That generates a lot more expense, because they have to have several constituency offices. They also have to pay their employees' travel expenses to get to the various offices, sometimes by car or sometimes by air. Since the number of regional flights has dropped significantly, it's really expensive to meet their constituents.

We also have to look at the issue of population. Does the member for a riding that's densely populated, but occupies a small area, have the same financial obligations as one who has to manage a large riding?

In addition, if the current rule is applied after redistribution, some ridings may experience a budget reduction. So we have to find solutions.

I think we should take the time to study this issue. At the same time, each caucus should be involved in this analysis so that we can be prepared when it comes to discussing it here.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you for that suggestion, Mrs. DeBellefeuille. I think that's a good suggestion. I can promise you that we'll put this issue on the agenda for a future meeting. We won't necessarily be able to discuss it at next week's meeting, but we'll do so as soon as possible. You're absolutely right that it would be useful to have this discussion.

I can tell you that the riding I represent isn't large. It's very urban and has a very dense population. However, this raises another question: in densely populated ridings, rents are often higher.

That being said, there are all kinds of things to consider when you're dealing with large ridings. For example, you're absolutely right about travel costs. Travel isn't only a huge cost, but it's also not always easy.

It will indeed be very useful for the Board of Internal Economy to discuss this issue at a future meeting.

We'll now move to the fourth item on our agenda. Mr. Dicaire and Mr. St George are here to talk about it.

• (1225)

[*English*]

Colleagues, depending on how this item goes, I suggest that after we discuss this item, we move to item number seven. It's an important item for us to get to, as I said at the beginning of the meeting. Numbers three, four and seven are items that actually have a direct impact on our meeting next week.

If we move quickly along with this, then perhaps we can continue, but I would suggest that we do this in order of importance and then come back.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dicaire, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Benoit Dicaire (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good morning, board members.

[*Translation*]

I'm here to brief the Board of Internal Economy on the state of technology in constituency offices, to raise awareness of the development of a technology lifecycle program in constituency offices and to seek approval for one-time costs and a funding strategy to facilitate those activities.

Previous submissions to the board in 2016 and 2018, as well as more recently in the spring of 2024 for telephony, indicated that the House of Commons administration would return to the board for approval of lifecycle funding for technology.

Full technology modernization in constituency offices is essential to meet modern operational demands, improve performance and ensure that the technology aligns with House of Commons cyber security standards.

The program will focus on four distinct categories of technologies used in constituency offices: first, constituency connectivity; second, constituency computers; third, telephony; and fourth, printing devices.

[English]

These core technologies supporting constituency offices are outdated or near the end-of-life stage, increasing the risk of system failures, security vulnerabilities and operational disruptions. The refresh initiative will replace aging technologies, mitigate operational risks and ensure alignment with modern business and cybersecurity needs. The legacy devices will be disposed of in a way that mitigates cybersecurity risks and complies with environmental standards.

For the deployment strategy, following the election, the technology life-cycle actions will prioritize newly elected members as they establish their constituency offices, followed by returning members. The life-cycle program deployment is expected to span up to 24 months following the election. The program will seek to balance the ability of the House administration to concurrently deploy multiple deployment activities post-election and the ability of members to absorb this level of technology change while serving constituents. Members' needs are to be addressed based on priority, each requiring unique technology provisioning sequencing and support following the election.

Phase one will focus on computers and telephony services for newly elected members and their staff who choose to occupy existing constituency offices. As scheduling permits, printers and the network will be replaced in follow-up stages.

Phase two will extend the focus to newly elected members who choose to establish new offices and returning MPs who must move their constituency offices due to the new electoral boundaries. This phase may occur earlier, depending on the lease and occupancy dates. For new members establishing new offices, a full deployment will occur at this phase. For returning members moving offices, the program will focus on the telephony life cycle, as the legacy service might not be available in those new locations. All remaining technology replacements will be targeted in phase three.

Phase three will complete the technology life cycle for returning members who are maintaining their existing constituency offices. The deployment strategy will remain flexible to address unique scenarios and address members' concerns should we need to accelerate or slow down the deployment to a particular constituency office.

This recommended post-election refresh approach leverages a unique opportunity to address constituency office technology needs while capitalizing on the organizational changes associated with the

election. Overall, conducting the technology refresh following the election presents a strategic opportunity to align timing, resources and organizational changes in a way that maximizes efficiency and minimizes disruption while addressing the critical need to update aging IT hardware, systems and services.

● (1230)

[Translation]

To effectively organize technology lifecycle activities, a central team from the House of Commons administration will oversee constituency office participation and on-site transformations. This team will act as a single point of contact for members or their designated representatives and ensure consistent communication of information between deployment projects.

The program's consultative approach aims to simplify the complex sequence of necessary technological transformation while focusing on the client experience. Consistent support from the House administration at each stage of the migration will ensure that constituency office staff are ready to use new technologies and will be productive, while minimizing impacts on constituency office operations.

[English]

Over the course of the last 15 years, the constituency office technology refresh model has been to align these activities with a forthcoming election. The House administration will manage the temporary costs within existing budgets. If additional funding is required, the House administration will seek funding through the supplementary estimates. This approach ensures that available funding is leveraged effectively over the course of the refresh initiative, aligning expenditures with the House of Commons budgetary cycles.

This concludes my presentation. My colleague and I would be happy to answer questions or concerns.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you for that very clear presentation, Mr. Dicaire.

Are there any questions?

Apparently not.

Is there consensus to approve the recommendations presented?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, colleagues.

[English]

Let's go in camera.

We'll just take a brief pause.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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