



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

---

# Board of Internal Economy

TRANSCRIPT

**NUMBER 036**

Thursday, December 5, 2024

---





## Board of Internal Economy

Thursday, December 5, 2024

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus (Speaker of the House of Commons):** I see that all the members are here, or almost. We at least have quorum, and will now begin the 36<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Board of Internal Economy.

There are eight items on today's agenda, and I hope that we'll be able to dispose of them fairly quickly, if possible.

First on the agenda are the minutes of the previous meeting. Since people have had a chance to read them, it seems that everyone is consenting to their adoption; thank you for that.

The second item is business arising from the previous meeting.

Ms. DeBellefeuille, was your hand raised?

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille (Whip of the Bloc Québécois):** No, Mr. Speaker.

[*English*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Is there any business arising?

I see a consensus for us to move on to item three, the interpretation resources update.

[*Translation*]

I invite Mr. Jean François Lymburner to make his presentation. Accompanying him are Ms. Plouffe and Mr. Ball. I'd also invite Mr. Dicaire and Ms. Cadieux, from the House administration, to make comments if they wish.

I know that my colleagues recently received Mr. Lymburner's speaking notes.

Mr. Lymburner, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner (Chief Executive Officer, Translation Bureau):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

I'm pleased to be accompanied by Matthew Ball, Vice-President of Parliamentary Services and Interpretation, as well as Annie Plouffe, Acting Vice-President of Special Projects. I salute our partners from the House administration who are here.

Honourable members of the Board of Internal Economy, thank you for inviting me to provide an update. You asked me to speak more specifically on two topics.

First, I'm going to talk about remote simultaneous interpretation. Our pilot project is ongoing, and we continue to cover eight committee meetings per week, as was the case in the spring. To date, feedback from our interpreters and committee members has been positive. We are working with the House administration to prepare the next steps.

Second, I'll talk about certification. You also asked me to give you an update on our idea of creating a new certification system for freelancers. We've taken note of your concerns and those of our partners. So we're continuing to reflect on the issue, as well as consulting our international counterparts who have developed different certification levels according to the degree of specialization required.

When we last appeared before the committee, we specified that this project would apply only to federal departments and not to Parliament. One of the objectives is to provide departments with access to quality interpretation for the various needs that we are currently unable to meet. Rest assured that only interpreters who have passed the certification exam serve Parliament. The translation bureau's certification is recognized worldwide as a guarantee of excellence. That being said, our exam is difficult, and talented interpreters sometimes fail. In a context of global scarcity, however, it would be a shame not to tap into their talent. By the same token, we could offer them support towards getting their certification. Without compromising on our standards or the quality of our services, we want to continue investing in the professional development of the next generation, while thinking outside the box to build our capacity.

[*English*]

I would like now to turn to another topic that is closely linked to the bureau's interpretation capacity, which is the interpreters' health and safety.

In June I told you that the number of incident reports had decreased from 128 in 2022 to 74 in 2023. The situation continues to improve. That's the good news. It's not over, I admit that, but the 2024 figures look very encouraging and include a decrease in the incidents leading to sick leave for our interpreters.

Note that over the summer, we refined our figures using a management system to track all the incidents. The system is still quite new for us, but it will ultimately enable us to break down incidents even more precisely according to the nature and the severity of them. More importantly, we will be able to pinpoint the places and circumstances where incidents occur so that we can adapt our protection measures.

[Translation]

This concerns all of our services to Parliament, the House of Commons, the Senate and abroad.

[English]

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for supporting these measures. You have most likely noticed that they have continued improving, thanks in large part to the hard work of our partners in the House administration. Together, we're constantly striving to optimize them and make them less restrictive for you. You may remember the lengthy warning that needed to be given at the start of each meeting in the spring, which we have made less burdensome now.

We also ended the distancing between microphones in committee rooms since they were not proven to have had any impact on the incidents, and it was complicating your use of the room.

We are now focusing on new targeted measures, such as automatic reduction of the earpiece volume after question period and the new awareness video you might have seen already at the beginning of this session.

We're also continuing our work with researchers to better understand the impact of sound on interpreters. Since spring 2020, we have obtained many studies on this topic and related issues. These studies guide our actions, and we make a point of following their recommendations in an evidence-based manner.

Mr. Chair, we know that there is no such thing as zero risk. You need only look at the number of wires, microphones, earpieces, speakers and screens that we have currently in this room to understand that it is difficult to perfectly control the sound conditions of meetings that are interpreted. Nevertheless, each incident is one too many, and we are committed to always doing better.

• (1115)

Controlling the sound chain is a real team sport. Interpreters, technicians and attendees, whether they are working on-site or remotely, all have a role to play, and everyone benefits from ensuring that interpreters can work under the best possible conditions. I said it in June, and I will say it again: For interpretation to be available, we need healthy interpreters.

[Translation]

I'd now like to say a few words about the next generation. We are working hard to fight the shortage of interpreters that's affecting the whole world, including Canada. I'm proud to highlight the concrete success that our minister announced on October 25, when we partnered with the Université Laval in Quebec City to create a micro-program for interpretation. With the University of Ottawa and York University, three universities, including one in Quebec, will now help us train tomorrow's interpreters. We should also be able to announce new programs by next fall. Thanks to our efforts, interpretation is recognized as an important profession and the number of institutions that teach it will soon no longer be a barrier to careers.

The fact remains that we also need students to fill classrooms. That's why we're also actively promoting the profession of interpreter on social media and elsewhere. We are also very much look-

ing forward to soon launching, with Canadian Heritage, the Interpretation Scholarship Program announced in Budget 2024 to ensure the Government of Canada's strategic capacity in interpretation.

Besides stimulating the next generation, we're harnessing technology to maximize our efficiency, while relying on the skills and judgment of our professionals to guarantee quality. As a centre of language expertise, the translation bureau has been asked to draw up a plan for the government on artificial intelligence as it relates to languages. This plan includes an analysis of the tools available on the market to support the work of interpreters and language professionals at the translation bureau.

In closing, I'd like to mention that, last summer, we met with the heads of interpretation at the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the United Nations, the European Space Agency and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Those discussions showed us that our efforts are consistent with practices abroad. Canada is second to none when it comes to interpretation, and the translation bureau is an employer of choice for interpreters.

[English]

Honourable members of the Board of Internal Economy, I hope I have given you a complete picture of the tangible progress that has taken place in recent months. I've been the CEO of the translation bureau for almost a year now, and I'm always extremely proud to talk about the incredible work of my colleagues. Whether it's for interpretation, translation or terminology in official languages, in indigenous languages, in foreign languages or in sign languages, the professionals at the translation bureau go above and beyond every day. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their dedication, especially, today, Isabelle, Cécilia and Sharon, who are in the back, as well as all the people who are going to be helping to translate the minutes of this meeting.

Thank you, honourable members, for your attention to this pillar of our democracy, linguistic services.

My colleagues and I are now happy to take your questions.

*Merci beaucoup.*

[Translation]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lymburner.

Mr. Julian, you have the floor.

**Mr. Peter Julian (House Leader of the New Democratic Party):** Mr. Lymburner, thank you and your team for this very detailed report. Interpretation is more than a pillar; it's the foundation of our democracy. This is what allows a unilingual member from British Columbia to interact with a unilingual member from Lac-Saint-Jean. So it really is the very foundation of our democracy, our system and the House of Commons. Interpreters do a tremendous amount of work that allows our democracy to function, and we thank them every day.

I'd now like to ask you several questions at once.

First of all, you said that there are currently eight committee meetings a week where interpreters work remotely. I'd like to know how many interpreters are available to work remotely and how many do so in a typical week.

Then, since you talked about the certification process, I'd like to know how many accredited interpreters there are right now. What do you expect over the next year? When will the next exams take place, and how many people do you expect to be involved in the certification process? From what I understand, the failure rate is quite high, which is somewhat problematic. That's why I'd like to have those figures.

You also talked about training programs at the Université Laval, York University and the University of Ottawa. How many spaces will this represent for students wishing to begin that first step in the certification process, starting in January and September 2025?

My last question is about health and safety, which you touched on. I've talked about it a number of times, and Ms. DeBellefeuille talks about it at every meeting as well. We are very concerned about this. You said there were 128 incidents in 2022 and 74 in 2023, if I understood correctly. However, if I'm not mistaken, you didn't say how many there were in 2024. The year isn't over, of course, but how many incidents have there been in 2024 so far?

Those are all my questions. Thank you very much.

• (1120)

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** I'll try to answer the questions, but perhaps I'll turn to my colleagues for more specific figures.

In terms of remote interpretation, which is limited at the moment, as I mentioned, it's a pilot project, and committee meetings are selected by our colleagues. Note that distance doesn't matter; it can be done very near or very far from here.

Since you also mentioned the pool of interpreters in your other questions, I would add that it doesn't necessarily increase because we offer remote service. However, based on the discussions we had abroad with representatives of other parliaments, this practice is beginning to spread. So it's very important for us to learn from what's being done elsewhere and prepare ourselves for the eventuality that we'll need to increase this number of meetings.

There are cases where people are outside Ottawa, and I know where you were going with that question. Those people may not want to travel. Most of our interpreters are on site, but one doesn't preclude the other. There could also be interpreters in the region, in Ottawa, who work remotely to support Parliament.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** How many are there?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** I can ask Mr. Ball to tell you exactly how many interpreters are working on the current pilot project, which covers eight committees a week.

**Mr. Matthew Ball (Vice-President, Services to Parliament and Interpretation Sector, Translation Bureau):** Ten suppliers now provide this service, with two committee meetings a day for a total of eight a week, as we just mentioned. Since the pilot project was set up, with the first meeting taking place on September 28 2023, about 200 meetings have offered remote simultaneous interpretation, or interpretation in dispersed mode, as we often call it.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Okay, thank you.

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** I'd like to elaborate on one aspect in particular with respect to your question about interpreter certification. We increased the number of examinations from one to two per year. So we have increased the pace. Having said that, the pool of people who are interested in coming forward hasn't increased proportionately, so it's still quite problematic. In addition, the failure rate for last spring's certification exam was very high, as only one person passed it. The exam offered in the fall is still being evaluated.

You also asked about university programs. I'll give you an order of magnitude for Glendon University College, for the University of Ottawa and for the Université Laval. There are 10 to 15 students in the Université Laval program. We'll have to wait for them to finish the program, so they won't be available in January. That's still very good news. We're making efforts to attract students to this program, and the Université Laval is doing so as well. The latter already offers translation courses. So some translation students may be interested in interpretation. The school has also begun to offer several courses on technology. Translation and simultaneous interpretation are evolving very quickly. At the University of Ottawa, there are fewer than 10 students. And the program is even smaller at Glendon.

Year in and year out, at the translation bureau, we have about 70 interpreters who are public service employees, and roughly an equivalent number of freelancers. About 100 of our interpreters support all parliamentary committees, just as they do during the spring. Furthermore, the average age of our interpreters who are public service employees is quite encouraging because it has dropped. So we have younger interpreters. We now have a larger pool of interpreters who will be able to fill the public service positions that will be left vacant by retirements.

I don't have statistics on the age of freelancers. However, many of them are former translation bureau employees. Maintaining the pool of bureau-accredited freelance interpreters at an appropriate level to support you is also a concern.

You also asked for the exact number of accredited interpreters. I'm not sure whether you want to know how many accredited interpreters work for the bureau, or how many there are in Canada, but Mr. Ball could give you more details on that.

• (1125)

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** Over the past two years, the bureau has accredited 25 new interpreters to support both Parliament and the Government of Canada. In accordance with the Translation Bureau Regulations, we serve Parliament as a priority, and so those 25 new interpreters are here in Parliament on a daily basis.

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** Mr. Julian, you also expressed an interest in health and safety numbers.

I mentioned earlier that there were 128 incidents in 2022 and 74 in 2023. To date, in 2024, there have been 32. In addition, we added measures during the summer. You'll recall that in the spring we received another instruction from the labour program asking us to strengthen our measures against the Larsen effect, which we did over the summer. Since the beginning of fall, there have been fewer than 10 incidents. That said, I'm touching wood because the year isn't over and an event can always occur.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Is that figure up to date as of October 31 or November 30?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** That is as of today. We compile this data every day and receive reports at the end of the day.

I mentioned the addition of a data collection system. We're asking for more information, and we're finding more. We now carefully comb through all service interruptions. Those interruptions don't always raise health and safety issues, and I really want to make that clear. However, they allow us to understand whether the problem is with the room, participants, technology or the new system. We're starting to be able to make correlations.

So we pay a lot more attention to every service interruption. There were cases where it was simply due to a substandard microphone. We still record that kind of interruption, because it's important for interpreters to have good sound so they can do their work.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Before giving the floor to Ms. DeBellefeuille, I'd like to point something out. As you have no doubt noticed, the bells are ringing to indicate that there will be a vote in the House in 30 minutes. I hope we can vote virtually, as we did last week. If members wish to interrupt the meeting, please let me know.

Ms. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Please interrupt me if you want to deal with the vote. I don't mind voting virtually, given that this is the last meeting of the Board of Internal Economy for 2024.

Witnesses, thank you for your testimony.

Mr. Lymburner, I'd like to ask you a few questions about the remote simultaneous interpretation pilot project. You said that the comments received from interpreters and members of parliamentary committees were positive. What is your basis for that statement? Do you have a dashboard? Have you had any discussions with members of Parliament?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** That's a very good question. I'll go into more detail.

The previous question had to do with acoustic incidents. We haven't had any major incidents in those committees. From an operational perspective, the feedback we receive may be seen as less positive, for example in terms of sound quality or volume. We're working on that since we know that interpreters sometimes work from two locations.

We also received feedback on how interpreters can communicate with each other. Things are going well right now because the interpreters are in the same room and can see each other. Technology is changing a lot and remote interpretation is increasingly being used around the world. That's why we're learning.

I don't have as many comments on the Larsen effect and sound feedback. In talking to other countries, we learned that there are about 10 countries that have more than one official language. What's peculiar in Canada, is that you don't have to put on your earpiece. Right now, I don't have my earpiece and I can hear myself. There are also speakers. In other types of parliaments, everyone wears a helmet, which greatly reduces incidents. Most health and safety incidents occur when we're inside an enclosure equipped with speakers and microphones. If the interpreter is working remotely, those risks are eliminated. There's no feedback or Larsen effect. However, there may be problems with sound quality. However, there have been no stoppages or problems with parliamentary committees. In any case, nothing major has been reported to me.

Mr. Ball, do you want to add anything?

● (1130)

**Mr. Matthew Ball:** We are interested in the feedback we receive from our freelance interpreters. We haven't received any complaints from them. Of course, we work with them to make sure that we provide good service. We've asked for feedback, and the system seems to be working well for them.

Moreover, we're certainly interested in the views of our clients. We'd like to hear your opinion on the quality of service. There's obviously a technical aspect to all this, and we rely heavily on the expertise of our colleagues in the House administration.

Our focus is primarily on interpretation, on the service and the quality of that service.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Lymburner, in your presentation, you said that the members of parliamentary committees made positive comments.

To be clear, 80% of interventions in parliamentary committees or in the House are made in English; that has been documented in dashboards for almost three years. In fact, 80% of the discussions are in English and 80% of the witnesses speak English.

Interpretation is used by the 33 Bloc Québécois members and the francophone members of the other parties. So we're in a position to give you some fairly specific feedback. We often listen to the interpretation. Few people testify in French and few of us speak only in French.

How do you monitor your pilot project? Which quality indicator allows you to conclude that committee members have given positive feedback?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** I'll turn to my colleague, who may have some data for you on the pilot project.

On our side, we support our colleagues in the House of Commons. The pilot project established a limit of eight committees per week. We don't want to cast too wide a net, and we really want to learn.

I see all the incidents in the House and I'm very interested by what's happening with remote interpretation. At first, remote interpretation causes a slight delay, but as far as I know, things are improving. We've heard from members that they don't notice that delay when they're on site. I've heard this before, but I've also seen the team working hard to reduce them. I think we've had good results so far.

Do you have anything to add, Mr. Dicaire?

**Mr. Benoit Dicaire (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons):** As you know, Ms. DeBellefeuille, we're working hard to find technological solutions. The pilot project has been an adventure. In that context, use of this type of service to support the bureau's capacity has evolved.

The feedback we received was much more about the initial delay, to which we found a technological solution. We have two rooms right now that are set up for remote interpretation. We will have more when members return in February.

Most of the feedback we received from parliamentarians on this was really about their experience in committee with the support of a remote interpreter. That's what we've heard over the last two years. We worked with our colleagues in the procedural services and shared all the feedback we received from ambassadors, committee clerks, interpreters and parliamentarians.

A few months ago, Ms. Findlayi gave me feedback here at the Board of Internal Economy regarding remote interpretation. We've set those parameters informally with respect to that. There's also the dashboard, as you know, which has been around for a number of years.

• (1135)

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** I'll give you my own comments on what we find difficult in terms of remote simultaneous interpretation.

When the interpreters are in the same room and there's a change of interpreters, they see each other and signal that it's the other's turn. However, when they work remotely, they're not in the same house and we think that the signal isn't always getting through, which causes an interpretation breakdown. So we have to tell the committee chair that no one is interpreting.

Therefore, we wonder what the process is when it's time to change interpreters. In such a case, we feel that coordination of the interpreter change signal isn't as smooth as it might be.

Mr. Lymburner, have you ever received that kind of comment?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** Yes, absolutely.

In my exchanges with universities, I was able to see how it's taught, because a method for teaching simultaneous interpretation

is being developed. I asked the same question you did, to find out how it's being done. I've also seen different models in other parliaments. Obviously, systems for remote simultaneous interpretation are being perfected and equipped with technological tools.

I'm going a little beyond my level of expertise, but I can turn to Mr. Dicaire, because I understand that there's a way for interpreters to take over from each other even without making visual contact.

**Mr. Benoit Dicaire:** Indeed.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** We're in that situation right now. You have to put yourself in the shoes of a member who is unilingual francophone. When there's a complete interpretation breakdown, no one notices unless the member points it out, because most people work in their mother tongue, which is English. The chair and the clerk don't notice it either.

That's an aspect of your pilot project that will have to be further documented and provided to us. We often experience this weakness in simultaneous interpretation. As you can appreciate, a breakdown in interpretation interferes with our ability to intervene and debate during committee meetings.

Furthermore, it's always up to francophone members to report the problem, since they're the ones who use the interpretation services. In fact, no one else around the table realizes that. Since we're in the minority, it becomes a little burdensome. So I understand that you're going to document this.

The pilot project has been in place for some time, and you told us that you were analyzing the lessons learned. What lessons have you learned from the pilot project?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** I mentioned at the beginning of my opening remarks that it works. I appreciate the feedback I'm getting today, and if my colleagues have anything to add, I'll take it as well. This remote technology increases the possibilities. We've experienced interruptions of varying lengths, notably due to sound problems, but we know that this is a way of offering you a service, and that this technology could enable us to offer you the service if ever it wasn't possible to do so from here.

We already have a team ready to relieve the interpreters if something happens. We've experienced this in the past. It takes a few minutes to move them around. This is a first for us. We realize that we can provide the service without necessarily being on site here, in booths. I think my colleague will talk to you a little later about renovations to Parliament. That gives us a lot of information about how to work without being in the room.

We realize that this also exists in other countries and parliaments. We're learning a lot. You mentioned ways of communicating. As we've heard, there are tools that allow remote interpreters to speak to each other in near real time.

Do you want to add anything to that, Mr. Dicaire?

**Mr. Benoit Dicaire:** There are three major components to remote interpretation: technology, business processes, and the actual interpreter. Business processes play an important role, for example when the changeover isn't done properly, particularly if the interpreter doesn't turn on his or her microphone. We need quality interpreters to ensure that the interpretation meets the needs of Parliament. Those three components are important, since they enable us to provide parliamentarians with quality remote interpretation services.

● (1140)

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker, we rarely get such delightful company. I'd like to take advantage of this, but I don't want to impose myself. If other people want to speak, I can wait for the second round. It's up to you.

**Hon. Greg Ferguson:** Ms. DeBellefeuille, no one else has mentioned their desire to speak.

That being said, I'd like to add something. Your feedback on the changeover between interpreters working remotely is very important. I didn't know that was the reason people were pointing out that there's no interpretation. If there's a clear way for interpreters to signal each other, it will make life easier for people, since they'll no longer have a reason to think that the system is broken. That's a good suggestion.

Ms. DeBellefeuille, I'll give you the floor again.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hope my colleagues don't think that I'm overzealous.

Mr. Lyburner, my next questions have to do with the other pilot project, the certification of freelance interpreters. If I understand correctly, that other project hasn't yet started and you're still at the conceptual stage. Does the project have a timeline? Do you think it will start soon?

Depending on your answer, I'll have other questions for you.

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** Thank you for that very good question. Indeed, the project hadn't yet started when I last appeared here in the spring.

That being said, I don't just want to talk about the project regarding the certification of freelancers, because that might narrow our focus. Right now we have a very limited capacity, and we're working on several fronts. I mentioned that we need to attract more students, but it will take a few years before new graduates join the translation bureau.

There are similar programs for interpreters who are employees. The difference is that interpreters who become translation bureau employees don't get certified overnight. The professors I've met all tell me the same thing: the translation bureau is Mount Everest. They advise their students to seek experience in a less complex environment. For our part, we have a way of accompanying our employees. We also looked at freelancers to increase our capacity.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** I don't want to bite off more than I can chew, as we say in Quebec, but I'd like you to tell me whether or not the pilot project is underway. In your presentation, you said that you were at the conceptual stage.

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** It hasn't started. We are discussing and working with our partners and the interpreters. I personally met with interpreters' associations in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick to get their views. As I mentioned in my presentation, other countries are already doing this. We haven't launched the project yet, but are carrying out analyses. Above all, we took into account feedback from the Board of Internal Economy, which was very useful to me.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** So I understand that the pilot project hasn't started yet and that you're still figuring out how to implement it.

We know that your strategy is sound. If students fail but are very close to success, you said that you would give them the support and experience they need to take the certification exam again. In particular, they could get help from a more experienced peer, which might help them pass the exam.

What concerns me is that you don't seem to have enough personnel for the interpreter mentor to stop working to help the person who hasn't passed the exam. If people who want to write the exam don't get help from a mentor, they're less likely to pass it. However, their being helped by such a mentor would reduce the resources available to parliamentarians, because there aren't enough additional interpreters.

How are you going to manage that support? Perhaps it would be easier for you to answer my question once the pilot project has been implemented. I think that you're currently thinking rather than acting.

● (1145)

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** What you're explaining is already happening in the context of other activities we are undertaking to increase our pool of interpreters.

I talked about the contribution of universities and Canadian Heritage scholarship programs that were announced in the last budget. In that context, we provide training, since our interpreters contribute by teaching in Ottawa. It has the same effect as the one you just described regarding the pilot project for uncertified freelancers. We're already experiencing this on a daily basis. We also provide technological support, such as booths at schools so that students can practise.

That said, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, the interpreters who work in Parliament are always certified, and I never said that we wanted to change that.

Our services are in demand everywhere. My colleagues from other major language companies around the world are all seeing the same thing. Moreover, the demand for sign language interpreters is increasing.



However, does a meeting of a few people outside of Parliament require the same interpretation skills? There may be an opportunity to help people who aren't yet certified to work in Parliament gain experience.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Did you witness the two events that occurred in the past year, when members began to speak very loudly at a committee meeting at the same time, with the result that the interpreters told us they could no longer do their work due to the cacophony? We're not talking about a five-minute event, but a meeting lasting an hour or an hour and a half, during which interpretation was impossible.

That led to a strange situation, because Mr. Ball told us that the interpreters' reflex in such situations is to carry on with their work. In fact, saying they can no longer provide interpretation isn't something they do spontaneously and quickly. They'll put their health at risk before saying that, because it's in their nature and part of their professional rigour.

Were you informed of those situations? When everyone keeps yelling "point of order" for an hour, what does that do to the ears of an interpreter? Why are interpreters not told to stop interpreting in such cases? As whip, I once had to go into the interpreters' booth to tell them that we were the only francophones at the table and that I authorized them to stop the interpretation.

Based on your experience, what makes it possible to get to that point procedurally? I believe it was my intervention as whip that stopped the interpretation, because no one had that authority. Have you analyzed that situation? I think it could happen again.

If all the people around this table, who represent caucuses from all parties, hear what you have to say, perhaps members will show some restraint in the future and such behaviour won't happen again. Those are human behaviours that have nothing to do with technology or the use of devices.

Ms. Cadieux or Mr. Lymburner, could you tell us how to manage such situations to protect our interpreters?

**Mr. Jean-François Lymburner:** That's a very good question. If you visit our offices, you'll see that the televisions are on and we look at everything. When incidents occur, I listen to them again. In my opening remarks, I also talked about the systems we've put in place to analyze them. I won't name them, but we're starting to get a good idea of the types of committee meetings where problems are more likely to occur.

It's also very true that, while the aim of interpreting is to hear interpreters speak, it's not to hear interpreters speak. Our service is a bit like Wi-Fi: when it's there, we take it for granted. Interpreters don't usually have to leave the booth to report something. I'd even go so far as to say that the physical set up of the rooms doesn't lend itself to that.

That's why we're working with our colleagues in the House, who can advise us of such situations. I've seen cases where a member has actually pointed out to the chair that the interpreter needs to stop working, and we analyze those. We also have computer systems that allow people to chat with the technical team to report incidents. Following Ms. Cadieux's answer, Mr. Ball will probably be able to tell you more. Personally, I don't think the interpreters have

a responsibility to convince anyone. When they can't provide interpretation, they just need to flag it. However, not all rooms are configured the same way.

I'll give the floor to Ms. Cadieux, who may be able to tell you whether, in the situation in question, the committee chair has been notified in terms of procedure.

• (1150)

**Ms. Suzie Cadieux (Principal Clerk, Committees and Legislative Services Directorate, House of Commons):** With regard to what happens in a committee room, we have to consider the procedural aspect and the processes that involve our partners.

As you all know, if there's disorder, the committee chair can use procedural measures to deal with it, such as breaks and suspensions.

More specifically, with regard to the role of partners and interpreters, a protocol has been put in place and adjusted over the past year on the various measures to be taken. All the services that support committee meetings work together, there's a lot of communication, a lot of peer support and teamwork, and everyone, including the interpreters, trusts one another in the process. As Mr. Lymburner told us, a chat system connects everyone who provides services in the room. Communication is very clear among the various players.

In the specific case you're describing, the clerks of that committee had spoken to the interpreters in the booth and indicated that if they felt there was a health and safety issue, they shouldn't hesitate to remove their headsets.

So there's a distinction to be made between the procedural aspect of a committee meeting and health and safety issues.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Ms. Cadieux, I think we should clarify things with the chairs. Even if interpreters say they can't do their job, it's a breach of parliamentary privilege if the speaker's microphone remains on and the obstruction continues, making interpretation impossible. Last time, I was very concerned about the health and safety of the interpreters' ears. There was an incident last year, and there was another one recently at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

I think Mr. Lyburner and the procedural team should agree on a way forward. As soon as interpreters are no longer able to interpret because their health and safety may be compromised, the chair must be able to suspend the meeting immediately and turn off the microphones of those who commit verbal aggression that is dangerous and also breaches the privilege of members who are no longer able to follow the meeting. I don't want to debate it, but I know that if this happens again after the discussion we're having today, we may have to manage the situation better to assure our interpreters that we really care about their health and safety.

In closing, Mr. Lyburner, you told us that you had received funding to establish an artificial intelligence plan to take advantage of the tools available. Could you tell me how artificial intelligence can support or equip our interpreters in the performance of their work?

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** That's an excellent question.

I just want to clarify that I didn't have the money to establish that artificial intelligence plan. However, we were asked to present our plan.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** All right. I'm sorry.

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** The translation bureau has been using artificial intelligence since about 1977. Canada was among the first countries to use machine translation for weather reporting. Since 2017, you've all heard about neurological translation. So our translators are already in the age of artificial intelligence. This is perhaps more evident when you often use tools such as Google Translate or ChatGPT on a daily basis. The translation bureau is extremely well equipped, and we have a plan to provide translation services.

As for the interpreters, they won't have superpowers, but artificial intelligence will help them. Those who watch television have surely seen that the accuracy of the captions is improving at an astonishing rate, which is due to automation and the use of artificial intelligence. In some cases, those subtitles could help our interpreters.

Artificial intelligence also helps a lot when it comes to preparing summaries, which could help interpreters be ready before a committee meeting or a meeting regarding a very specialized discipline. For example, we could have had a summary of my speech earlier, which would have allowed the interpreter to see certain things.

Some parliaments provide automated interpretation of certain announcements. We're talking about it, because it's already happening. You can already use your smartphone and hear a translation. So we're very much on top of what's going on, because we want to be at the forefront, as the bureau has always been.

In my opinion, humans will always be at the helm and they can have access to information and be supported by artificial intelligence, which will give them superpowers. We see it that way. In terms of conference interpreters, I don't have any data from all the other CEOs I've met.

In my speech, I talked about Canada's strategic capacity. Should an event occur, whatever it may be, we must have a strategic capability and interpreters must always be able to provide their services,

despite the advances made by artificial intelligence in voice recognition. Large companies that were very well known in terms of written text are all migrating to voice recognition.

That's happening right now, and the bureau remains at the leading edge to stay relevant. I hope that answers the question.

• (1155)

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you for your very important questions, which revealed a number of things.

There are two things I take away from this discussion.

[*English*]

One of them is for the interpretation bureau. The other one, I believe, is for us around the table.

It think it's important, given what Madame DeBellefeuille raised, that in terms of interventions, when people speak over one another at committee, it makes it very difficult and poses a danger to our interpreters.

Colleagues, I'm wondering if this is a matter that should be raised at the Liaison Committee so that members understand, when they engage in such tactics, that it will physically harm our interpreters. As Madame DeBellefeuille also pointed out, it could pose a question of privilege to members who rely on these services to understand what is being said and what is going on. It comes right back down to the importance, again, of one person speaking at a time and exercising restraint in order to be able to ensure that everyone participates fully in all of this.

Mr. Julian, I'll recognize you after I address this next issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lyburner and your team, thank you for your presentation.

I see that, based on the trend, we're heading in the right direction, which reminds me of a question I'd already raised before the summer break, namely the six hours of interpretation per day. When do we expect to return to that? This would greatly increase our capacity to provide interpretation services. It's very helpful in terms of not limiting the services to members who have other parliamentary activities.

**Mr. Jean-François Lyburner:** Thank you very much for the question.

We went from six hours of interpretation a day to four because of the hybrid Parliament, even though everyone is attending this meeting in person, which happens more and more.

Increasing interpretation hours may not be that easy, since a number of factors come into play, such as the number of interpreters in the booth, the length of committee meetings and the complexity of the task. As you can see, the interpreters relay each other.

We're looking at some factors, working with the associations, to see what other countries are doing in that regard. The translation bureau decided that interpreters would work four hours, for health and safety reasons. Representatives from the labour program gave the bureau instructions, and they're satisfied with the tremendous progress we made last summer, as is clear from data in that regard. There should be a few new features at the next session, or sometime in the future, which may allow us to dispense with those instructions. The data we'll have will allow us to make a decision on the number of work hours, depending on the type of committee. We're working on it.

We're not in a position to do so at this time, but I'm pleased to say that we've accepted all the requests made during the session. We compete with originality to properly schedule everyone's work in a safe manner. There has to be a balance. There are some coefficients to consider, but I won't go into the details. For example, I'm thinking about the length of committee meetings and the number of people who participate online, which can have an impact. Returning to six hours of interpretation may not be that easy, but the important thing is that committee meetings run smoothly.

Most of our Senate colleagues attend meetings in person. If we control the environment, we can expect an increase in interpretation hours. However, there are committees where many people participate online. So we must be a little more specific and put measures in place.

• (1200)

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** As you can imagine, I am going to ask this question again at a later meeting. However, it seems that you are opening a door: depending on the situation, the solution may be unpredictable. I will come back to that later.

Mr. Julian, you have the floor.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You suggested writing to the Liaison Committee about the very valid question raised by Ms. DeBellefeuille. It seems to me that it is also important to write to all committee chairs, because this behaviour is happening a lot and it is not acceptable. There is a tighter approach in the House and I am very relieved to see that there has been a decline in the number of incidents. Committee chairs should therefore be reminded to ensure that it does not happen in committees. I think this is an important point.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Absolutely. I would point out that I was not proposing to write to the Liaison Committee; rather, I was proposing that this question be raised at the next meeting of that other committee.

Thank you and happy holidays, Mr. Lymburner, Mr. Ball, Mr. Dicaire, Ms. Plouffe, and Ms. Cadieux.

We will now move on to the fourth point, the proposed 2025-2026 main estimates.

Mr. St George, Ms. Côté is with you, and you pass the floor to you.

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

I present for your approval the proposed 2025-2026 main estimates for the House of Commons.

The total budget of \$777.9 million includes \$656.5 million for the main estimates and \$121.4 million for services received without charge. It represents an increase of \$32.8 million, or 5.3%, over the previous fiscal year.

This increase is primarily attributable to initiatives approved by the Board of Internal Economy totalling \$13.2 million, which is 2.1% of the total budget. Examples of these initiatives are security support, electoral district redistribution, and lifecycle of technologies. The details of the initiatives are shown on page 2 of the submission.

• (1205)

[*English*]

Total cost of living and inflationary increases account for \$11.6 million, or 1.9% of the total budget, and mainly include increases in members' and House officers' budgets and salaries, as well as economic increases for various administration groups. Other items increased by \$8.1 million, or 1.3% of the total budget, for employee benefit plans and adjustments to pension plans.

Mr. Speaker, this concludes my presentation.

I welcome any questions the board may have.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Are there any questions?

Mr. Scheer.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (House Leader of the Opposition):** Thanks very much for the presentation.

I have a question on appendix F. It's on page 15 in my briefing book. It's with regard to the Office of the Clerk and Secretariat. There are 33 FTEs in corporate communications. I notice that last year there were 26 in corporate communications. That seems like a pretty substantial increase.

I'm wondering if you could speak to what corporate communications is and why it needs 33 FTEs.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I'll invite Natacha Flanagan to speak to this issue.

[*Translation*]

**Natacha Flanagan (Chief of Staff, Office of the Clerk and Secretariat):** Good morning. Thank you for that question.

[*English*]

Corporate communications offers services in terms of informing the House administration and members of various matters. We also have websites, the internal websites and external websites. We also manage, through the Speaker's office, supporting the Speaker's office in terms of media requests. There's social media as well.

I think that covers it.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** The Speaker's office does also have a director of communications. Is that true? The Speaker's office has at least a communications person, if not more, who supports the Speaker.

**Natacha Flanagan:** We support the Speaker's office in terms of, yes, they are the main link to the media, for example. We would provide them with support in terms of providing that information to the media. That has been the case, I understand, for a significant amount of time.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** What has changed between last year and this year that you need seven more FTEs to deal with corporate communications?

**Natacha Flanagan:** It's a good question.

**Mr. Eric Janse (Clerk of the House of Commons):** In part, just to go back to your earlier question, the Speaker's office receives all media requests, and, then, from there they're shipped out or farmed out to the House administration through our corporate communications team and the head of corporate comms. They compile information that then is sent back to the journalists through the Speaker's office.

There has been a significant increase in demand from both the Speaker's office and journalists. Perhaps it's related to the fact that it's a minority Parliament. I don't know why exactly, but there's been an increase in demand for the services of corporate communications both to serve the Speaker's office and also internally to serve the House administration and the members.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Corporate communications are like internal memos, such as, "Please be aware this maintenance is going on," or, "There's been a change in policy." Is that correct?

**Mr. Eric Janse:** That's part of it, but there's also a large component that's external-looking, like, again, all the social media that goes out. There's an account for committees, there's an account for the House, there's an account for the Speaker and there's an account for parliamentary diplomacy, and all the information that's provided through those accounts is generated and prepared by the corporate communications team.

Yes, you're right that part of corporate comms is internal-looking within the House administration, but there's a large component—I don't know exactly the breakdown in terms of how many people work on what—of the workforce within corporate communications that is working on information that goes outside.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** You mentioned things like committees with social media accounts. Is that new this year? Have they only started this year? They need—

**Mr. Eric Janse:** No. You're right, Mr. Scheer. We've had social media accounts for some time. Again, it's more the increase in demand for information to go out. We've even had, and it's no secret, some chairs who think that each and every committee should have its own Twitter or X handle, and we've tried to say that would mean a significant increase in resources over and above what we already have, so that's why we just have the one account for all committees.

• (1210)

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** It still seems like an awfully big increase—

**Mr. Eric Janse:** It's a fair point. What we can maybe do is get some more details to provide to you and the board members about this increase and when it came in.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Okay.

The other question I have is about the press gallery secretariat. There are 14 people who are paid by the House of Commons administration—i.e., taxpayers—to support the press gallery. Is that right?

**Mr. Eric Janse:** That's right.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** The news outlets themselves, the private corporations that run the various entities that occupy the press gallery, don't pay for those FTEs. Is it the taxpayer who pays for those FTEs?

**Mr. Eric Janse:** That's right. These are House employees who are there to assist, and I would say it goes both ways. If there's a scrum or something, it's as much for the benefit of the journalists as it is for the members who are being scrummed or are doing a press conference to make these interviews, etc., run smoothly and according to the guidelines that have been established by the Parliamentary Press Gallery and the House, etc.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Is that in addition to the space that they're given? They're given physical office space that they don't pay for either. Is that correct?

**Mr. Eric Janse:** I don't know the details on that, but, yes, there is space provided to them. We can get those details for you as well.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Okay.

In addition to corporate communications, there are 14 staff who assist the Parliamentary Press Gallery. I don't know if the comms departments of officially recognized parties have that many people, and they do a heck of a lot more on social media and get way more media requests. That seems like a very large department.

**Mr. Eric Janse:** It's a fair point. Again, I think we can get you some details in terms of what exactly all these people are doing and when the increases came about, but they're a busy group. I take your point about, obviously, the comms people of parties being extremely busy as well, but these employees are a busy group.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Madam Gould, go ahead.

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

Following on Mr. Scheer's point, I think there is an inherent value in Parliament being able to communicate with Canadians. I mean, this is the people's House. I think there's an important role to be played to ensure that the information is getting out to Canadians. Obviously, members of Parliament have a role to play there.

I think when it comes to the Parliamentary Press Gallery, this is something that is extraordinarily important for Canadians. Enabling the press to have access and smooth operations on the Hill is something that has an inherent value to our democracy. I think this is something we need to continue to support. Canadians need to have that access to the goings-about of what is happening on the Hill. I'm a little concerned by Mr. Scheer's questioning here, because I think we need to ensure that the press in Canada continues to have access to Parliament Hill and is able to conduct scrums and interviews here on the Hill, outside of the House of Commons.

I would be curious to hear the reasoning behind the increase in the communications department, but I can understand that as the landscape changes, and as access to media outlets and information changes, the nature of the communications department would likely change as well. I think it would be an interesting thing to come back to us on. I can understand why, as we go more digital and there is a greater variety of outlets and mediums in terms of how information is shared and Canadians access that information, this is something that is important in order for Canadians to be able to have continued access to their democracy.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Madam Gould.

Mr. Julian.

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

This is the non-partisan Board of Internal Economy. We leave our partisan hat at the door when we come in here. I have to say that I absolutely agree with the principle that we need to be providing communication so that Canadians can access the work of members of Parliament. I mean, they pay our salaries. They need to know what kind of work we're doing. They need to have access to those vital non-partisan tools that come through the House administration. Each political party may agree or disagree, but the principle of non-partisan information has to be a hallmark of democracy.

I would suggest as well that in so many parts of the world, even in North America, journalism is under attack. The role of independent journalists who provide, again, that non-partisan information to the Canadian public needs to be reinforced and not attacked. Sadly, it is attacked far too often. We're instead seeing highly partisan vehicles that are designed to push propaganda rather than provide information. The role of independent journalists who represent us in broadcast news and in print media and online needs to be enhanced.

I have no difficulty at all with ensuring both—the independent information that is available through the House of Commons for all Canadians and the role of independent journalists. Impartial journalists who hear the debate from all sides and then make a decision about how to report on that is the very essence of democracy. I wouldn't want to see impeded, in any way, the ability of journalists to access Parliament Hill and the ability of Canadians to access information.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. Julian.

Ms. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker, all questions are relevant when we want to get an idea of where the spending is going.

I am eager to get to the fifth point on the agenda, where we are going to talk about the strategic internal assessment of operations. I think that is when Mr. Scheer's questions will be answered.

We are approving a budget for the next year, but I think the Board of Internal Economy will be undertaking a strategic review process. In other words, it will produce a nomenclature of services and it will determine how much they cost, among other things, whether those services are still relevant, and whether we should maintain them, expand them, or reduce them. We will therefore be able to see, in the next year, what needs to be adjusted for 2026-2027. I think this approach is very responsible.

I therefore move that the estimates be adopted.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Ms. DeBellefeuille.

Mr. Scheer, you have the floor.

[*English*]

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** The point I was making about corporate communications was not that there should not be corporate communications or informing Canadians what's going on. I was just asking people to think all the way back to a different time of last year, and I certainly didn't think that there was a lack of corporate communications. I know that the House of Commons has a Twitter account that lets me know when the House is adjourned and lets me know when members move an amendment, and I think that's wonderful.

It's a very large increase for something for which I haven't seen a massive change that would warrant that. I'm just making the point that, in addition to that, there is the taxpayer-funded, effective subsidy for corporate media entities that operate on the Hill.

I think, if I understand Madam DeBellefeuille's suggestion, she's proposing that we approve the budgets now and get into a more granular review as part of the strategic operation, when members of the board can maybe go through more line items with a bit more information. If that's the proposal, then I think I can support that, and we can have a more holistic approach through various aspects of the House administration.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I see people nodding their heads, so I see that we can approve the 2025-2026 main estimates.

We will now move on to the fifth item, which will also be presented by Mr. St George, but we are going to start with a few words from Mr. Janse.

Mr. Janse, you have the floor.

• (1220)

**Mr. Eric Janse:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are presenting this subject today in response to questions asked earlier by the Board of Internal Economy regarding the House administration's strategies in respect of cost containment initiatives.

[*English*]

The House administration has proactively been looking at its operations with a focus on strong stewardship, efficiencies and sustainable resource management. We continuously strive to meet our strategic priorities and our service goals and to provide members and their staff with simplified, customized and quality services. Mindful of the economic climate through our commitment to the prudent stewardship of public funds, we are also making a dedicated effort to control growth by identifying efficiencies in all areas. This has been a top priority for me since becoming clerk, as well as for my senior executive team, the clerk's management group, or CMG.

The House administration is achieving this work in part through a comprehensive strategic and operational planning process stemming directly from our strategic plan. All teams are working diligently to assess their services, costs, priority projects and key priorities in support of excellence in members' services. Lower-priority and non-urgent initiatives may be deferred or scaled down to stay within budget, thereby allowing us to redirect resources towards high-priority and high-impact projects—for instance, election readiness.

[*Translation*]

We are also proposing to extend our strategic plan by one year in order to have additional time to move ahead on and complete the organization's primary initiatives and make sure we achieve the best possible results.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues in the Clerk's Management Group, and in fact all House administration employees, who are constantly exploring ways of providing our services more efficiently while not impacting services to members.

That said, I will now give the floor to Mr. St George, who will present the strategic internal assessment of operations, which was developed to continue this work that will enable us to address current and future financial pressures.

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul St George:** Thank you, Mr. Janse. We also appreciate the board's unwavering commitment to strong stewardship, which is key to the success of our growth management strategy.

[*Translation*]

As the clerk said, we are continuing to focus on achieving our objectives while controlling growth in the size of our staff.

Full-time equivalents, which represent the use of resources, have increased by only 1.6% since 2018. This attests to our commitment to wise resource management. The increase in the number of full-time equivalents and budgets is directly attributable to submissions approved by the Board and offset by operational efficiencies.

[*English*]

Forty-two per cent of the House budget is dedicated to the administration, of which 76% is primarily allocated to directly support members.

As we progress on the initiatives within the strategic internal assessment of operations, the SIAO, we remain committed to consulting with board members on any service-level impact. This collaborative approach ensures that we maintain the high standard of support that members rely on.

The administration proactively began developing the SIAO framework in response to the economic climate and its ongoing commitment to maintain prudent stewardship of public funds. The SIAO framework is a multi-year plan currently focusing on the administration. It was developed through a consultative approach between the clerk and the senior leadership. Extending this to the members' budgets would require a mandate from the board along with consultations with its members.

The framework has four pillars: governance, stewardship, operational efficiencies and risk profile. Within each pillar, our targeted initiatives aim at improving efficiencies and driving down costs. To do this, we are building a robust decision support system to have the information for those discussions.

Some of these initiatives are well under way. Some examples of these activities are the development of a service catalogue, including full costing, key performance indicators, dashboards, benchmarking, and performing a governance and structural review to align resources with priorities, as well as several continuous improvement projects to drive efficiencies.

We are seeking the board's endorsement of our pathway forward, which we believe will achieve cost reductions through efficiencies while maintaining high-quality service delivery to members. We're also seeking approval of our proposal that the administration work with members of the board to establish a plan to engage and report on the SIAO activities.

Lastly, we are seeking the board's approval for a one-year extension to the House's strategic plan from March 31, 2026, to March 31, 2027. This would allow the administration to make noteworthy progress on key corporate initiatives and to ensure that it has capacity to deliver on the SIAO.

Mr. Speaker, this concludes my presentation. We welcome any questions.

● (1225)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. St George.

Questions or comments?

Ms. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am quite taken with the exercise that the clerk and his team have invited us to participate in, because it is indeed always good to review what is being done, how it is being done, and how much it costs. It is a good idea to determine whether it is always useful and effective. I think this is an excellent presentation and I approve of what is being done.

Mr. St George, I find your four pillars interesting, because we see where the services being provided to members will be assessed. I find this very interesting, and in fact very responsible. I want to congratulate you, because this will not be an easy exercise to carry out. It is not something we are in the habit of doing, so to speak, but I think it is necessary.

I think the members of the Board of Internal Economy should be a bit more closely involved. What do you think about the idea of creating a small working committee with a few members of the Board to help you progress a bit faster in your review, by providing you with feedback from ground level?

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I'm going to invite Mr. Janse to answer.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** My apologies, Mr. Janse.

**Mr. Eric Janse:** No problem.

Thank you for the question and your comments, and also for the suggestion. We had actually been discussing among ourselves the idea of the Board of Internal Economy forming a subcommittee to facilitate these discussions between the administration and the Board. We think this would be an excellent way to proceed.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker, if the members of the Board of Internal Economy agree, there could be one member per caucus on the subcommittee, for example. That would make it possible to delve more deeply into certain services and concepts and to agree on a base, so that when we came to a Board meeting, we would not be starting from zero: we would already have started thinking about it; we would already have exchanged ideas and even consulted the members of our own caucuses.

If you agree, I will approve the procedure and include in the recommendations that a subcommittee of the Board be formed with the mandate of examining this interesting subject, strategic assessment.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you for the proposal, Ms. DeBellefeuille.

I see people nodding their heads and I note that the members agree with this proposal and there is no objection. It is therefore approved.

I also note that there are no further questions or comments concerning this strategic exercise. What now needs to be done is to adopt the recommendations that have been proposed. The first is the process that we have just approved. The second is to approve the one-year extension of the House of Commons strategic plan.

I note that everyone agrees.

[*English*]

Thank you, Madam DeBellefeuille, for your comments.

Before we move to the next item, it might be a good time share this with members. You might have noticed the new construction of the awning outside of West Block. I'd like to take an opportunity, while the folks are here from the administration, to thank them for bringing that entranceway to a reality in a short period of time and in an innovative way. I've heard comments from members who have all really appreciated having that new entranceway.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to thank the people who protect us. I am well aware that when there is as much snow as there is today and the weather is bad, it is nice to have a structure like that in place.

I want to recognize the contribution made by Public Services and Procurement Canada, which lost no time approving that work. It was done in a very innovative, very efficient and, I have to say, inexpensive way. On behalf of all members of the Board of Internal Economy, I say bravo to everyone for their contribution.

We will now move on to the sixth item on the agenda, presentation of Mr. LaPerrière-Marcoux's progress report.

• (1230)

[*English*]

This is not an item for decision. It's more of an information item and a report.

Monsieur LaPerrière-Marcoux.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux (Secretariat, House of Commons):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks also to the members of the Board of Internal Economy.

[*English*]

I'm here to present the 2024 progress report on the implementation of the House accessibility plan. The report is our second progress report, and was prepared in accordance with the accessibility act. It outlines the progress made since December of last year.

In keeping with the principle of "nothing without us", and as described in the report, the House continued to listen to feedback from people with disabilities and other key stakeholders to improve its plan and initiatives.

The House had major achievements and completed important steps this year.

[*Translation*]

There has been significant and ongoing improvement in the accessibility of the House's websites. We would also mention several speedy improvements made to the buildings on the Hill, including the installation of a new universally accessible washroom in Confederation Building. I would also point to the launch of a new training for members and for administration staff and managers to provide them with the tools they need for supporting members of their teams who have disabilities. We must also not forget the new directive developed for procuring more accessible goods and services, in particular.

The 2024 progress report marks the final update on the current accessibility plan. A new plan for the 2026-2028 period will be developed and submitted to the Board of Internal Economy for approval by the end of 2025, in accordance with the Accessible Canada Act.

[English]

This concludes my presentation. I welcome any questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Ms. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you very much for your presentation, Mr. LaPerrière-Marcoux.

I am a bit curious. I admit I have not done my homework. Does the plan talk about persons with temporary disabilities? Can a person have a temporary disability? How can the administration, members or their staff convey their support needs to the administration if they have a temporary disability?

**Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux:** We consider temporary disabilities to be full-fledged disabilities. The accommodation mechanisms and the attention given to these situations should therefore be the same.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Does this apply across the board? In other words, are all services concerned about listening to and responding to the needs of members or of the administration's staff who have a temporary disability?

**Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux:** It should be the case, and that is the intention of the accessibility program of the House. We have initiated the awareness process and the implementation of effective measures to respond to the needs of our clientele and of members.

Feedback is very important to us. The role of the secretariat is to receive feedback and make sure that it is clearly understood by all services, across the board. This is a job that gets done on a daily basis. We always keep an eye out for feedback and we are very grateful to our clients.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to ask one more question, if you will allow me.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Yes.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** As whip, I would like to know what the first contact is when we have specific requests to make, to support a member who has a temporary disability, for example.

Is it the human resources service? What services should someone approach to get support during a time when they need it?

• (1235)

**Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux:** The accessibility secretariat team is small, but we have allies in all of the services, so we would be happy to coordinate it for you. That is not a problem for us.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** So you are the first place to go.

**Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux:** Certainly.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Perfect.

Your contact info is clearly visible on Source.

**Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux:** Yes, we have a web page on accessibility that includes an email address at parl.gc.ca where we can receive requests. We also have a telephone number.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Perfect.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I give the floor to Ms. Fortier, followed by Mr. Julian.

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Deputy Government Whip):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for this progress report. Obviously, I always like to know how we can improve things. I saw that as part of your consultation exercise you consulted Stephanie Cadieux, whom I consider to be a truly exemplary resource when it comes to determining how we can improve things.

Did she have any specific recommendations? Are you able to tell us a bit about how she saw the exercise and whether she had recommendations or suggestions to make? I have worked with her a lot in other situations and I think she has a vision and knows how to find ways to improve things. Did she make any suggestions in this exercise?

**Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux:** Thank you for your question.

This year, we worked with her office and with her a lot. For example, she made a presentation to MPs and the entire parliamentary community. There were positive comments from Ms. Cadieux, which also appear in her report. She talks about how important she considers mandatory training to be. We have already organized several trainings.

With respect to comments, she proposed that we improve our communications on the subject of the various tools that we offer visitors relating to accessibility. We offer the tools, but their existence was not always clearly communicated. So that is something we did in response to the discussions we had with her office and with her. We clarified that. We created a web page on the subject, about the various accommodation tools. For example, we offer the T-Coil, a hearing aid device, in the galleries, with live transcription in certain seats and mobile devices for people who need an earpiece.

We had not really been able to make the public aware of these tools, so we worked with the international communication team to make sure MPs are familiar with these services. It has also been suggested that we create a page about this on our website.

We are continuing to work with Ms. Cadieux. She is a former MP, which is also an advantage, because she has a clear understanding of the context we are working in. We have an excellent working relationship.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Ms. Fortier.



I will now give Mr. Julian the floor.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you for the work you do.

I wanted to come back to the issue of consultations because there is a great deal of diversity in the disability community in Canada. I worked in the delivery of services to people who are deaf and hard of hearing, before being elected. We see Canadians who have vision, hearing or physical disabilities or are neurodivergent.

I note that the House has consulted Stephanie Cadieux, but I propose that a broader consultation be done involving the various groups across Canada. As part of the Centre Block project, we have a real opportunity to make Parliament as accessible as possible.

I think this involves quite a broad consultation of all these groups. Are more consultations scheduled? Are there consultations that have not been mentioned but have already been held?

**Mr. Guillaume LaPerrière-Marcoux:** Thank you for your question.

I entirely agree with you regarding Centre Block, Mr. Julian. It's very important. We and our partner, Public Services and Procurement Canada, have established an advisory committee that brings together all the major organizations that represent people with disabilities. There are many of them. I am thinking of Rick Hansen and the Canadian Association of the Deaf, for example. I could find the list for you. The advisory committee often gets us and our partner to present various options to it, and we get feedback from it. So it is an excellent consultation process.

At the House, we did a lot of consultations when we launched the plan, but we also don't want to put too many demands on the various organizations' time. They have been called on to an enormous extent since the plan was put in place. I am completely amenable to holding one-off consultations on specific subjects. So I am going to take your suggestion that a new plan be prepared and we will do a consultation blitz over the next year.

● (1240)

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Laperrière-Marcoux. I am tremendously grateful for the efforts being made to make Parliament even more accessible for all Canadians.

We are moving on to the seventh item on the agenda. I would remind my colleagues that this item was raised at the last meeting of the Board of Internal Economy, last week, and we had arranged to come back to it to have a more in-depth discussion.

Mr. Dicaire, you have the floor.

**Mr. Benoit Dicaire:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

As we were asked to do last May, we are here to inform the board of the state of the constituency telephony service pilot and to seek approval to maintain it until the next election to fully validate the finalized new solution and continue to develop the approaches to completing the nationwide service replacement post-election.

[Translation]

Since the pilot project was initiated, we have seen strong engagement and responsiveness from members. A total of 32 members

were invited and selected, 18 of them chose the HOC-managed solution, and 14 chose the MP-managed solution.

The consultation and deployment preparation phases have been moving forward since members returned for the fall session of Parliament. Total completed transformations stand at 13, with 11 involving HoC-managed implementations and two involving the MP-managed approach.

[English]

We've since gathered preliminary member and pilot feedback. Members consulted indicated a strong desire to have the House of Commons-managed telecommunications service and benefit from the functional and user experience improvements.

Specifically related to the HoC-managed telephony offering, voice mail-to-email management is reported as a significant benefit for inbound constituent case management. The main line call management approach, which allows staff to opt in and out of receiving main line calls based on their working hours and other commitments, is also deemed to be of high value. The portability of the solution, where calls aren't anchored to an office desk phone, has been identified as valuable.

For the MP-managed telephony, some pilot members have encountered challenges in reaching their service provider. Largely, the issues raised are in the search for a provider and appropriate telephony service, selection and transformation actions required to move to the new approach. Offices have indicated that it is a very involved process on their part.

In both options, the feedback collected indicates a strong preference for wireless headsets to simplify mobility within the office, suggesting that wireless options should be considered as a possible purchasable MOB standard moving forward. Members have also expressed the need for a desk phone for front desk and constituent use on the grounds of hygienic reasons and practicality. The House administration has adjusted the offering to include a Microsoft Teams desk phone per constituency office to address this use case.

• (1245)

[Translation]

The transition from the existing telephony system to the new service requires significant change management. Porting the control, ownership and administrative management of the constituency office phone numbers from the incumbent to the new service provider is a big job. Administrative delays, scheduling delays and onboarding coordination have on occasion led to extended porting times and line downtime during resolution or rollback. Dealing with porting requests has taken from a few business days to months, depending on the complexity and issues encountered.

It should be noted that this is a one-time issue related to the transition and the problem will be resolved once the House administration has completed the mass deployment. Provisioning for newly elected members following the election and changes to member configurations will be quick.

[English]

To ensure an efficient rollout of the service post-election for all new members, it is recommended to lead with the standardized, House of Commons-managed telecommunications approach. This will provide members with comprehensive support, consistency in service quality and ease of implementation.

Post-election, new members will be the priority, addressing those who occupy the previous member's office or establish themselves in a new constituency office space. Returning members who need to move their constituency office due to electoral boundary readjustment will need to be addressed based on their new lease and occupancy dates. Finally, returning members who are maintaining their existing constituency office will see their transition happen in the last phase.

While the House of Commons-managed telecommunications approach deployment is the recommended option, members can opt out and seek an MP-managed telephony solution if they prefer to handle the deployment themselves. It should be noted that the member-managed model will be the responsibility of the member's office. This will require additional time and resources for coordination with service providers, equipment set-up and troubleshooting.

[Translation]

It is therefore desirable for the Board to approve the following recommendations: limit new member participation and focus on current deployments; maintain the pilot project for stability and information collecting purposes; prepare for mass deployment as part of the post-election constituency office technology lifecycle program; lead with the HoC-managed approach; and offer the MP-managed deployment as an opt-out alternative for members who choose to manage their deployment independently.

[English]

This concludes my presentation. I would be happy to answer questions.

[Translation]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. Dicaire.

Are there any questions or comments?

Mr. Julian, you have the floor.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you. Since several of my questions have already been answered, I am just going to make some recommendations.

The emphasis is on current deployments. I am wondering what the next steps are. If there are members who are satisfied, which is the case, from what I have understood, will the Board of Internal Economy be dealing with those issues after the next election and will it have to approve a plan for implementing these deployments for all members? If not, will the pilot project instead continue to be evaluated and then be submitted to the Board of Internal Economy again in a year? Does the administration have all the information it needs for carrying out these deployments?

I just want to know what comes next. In any event, we know there will be an election in a few months.

**Mr. Benoit Dicaire:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Julian, when we came here last spring, we asked for 12 months, and today is about six months from when it was launched. As you have seen, there have been some delays associated with summertime, but we are satisfied that if there is an election in the spring or next fall, we will be ready to proceed with wide deployment of the new service. As I said, new members who are affected by a move or choose to occupy the previous member's office will be the priority.

• (1250)

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Ms. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dicaire, I agree with all of your recommendations, but I would like to ask you two questions.

I have the privilege of being part of the pilot project, and I can tell you that we are delighted with the new and more ergonomic way of using telephony. My team finds that the work tool you have proposed is much better suited to their tasks. We are using the HoC-managed system; we use Microsoft Teams IP technology, if I am not mistaken.

I want to point out that when a pilot project is created, comments and feedback are appreciated. I have found your team to be very responsive, to respond well, and to be very attentive and find solutions to problems. When the project is actually implemented, it will be almost perfect.

If all offices opted for Microsoft Teams IP technology, what would happen if the hydro went out? Would people in our ridings still have access to telephony services? That is one of my concerns.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Mr. Dicaire, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Benoit Dicaire:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That is an excellent question, Ms. DeBellefeuille. There are two specific aspects to providing uninterrupted service to your constituents. The first relates to renewal of the technology in constituency offices, which I talked about last week; a degree of redundancy is built into the networking equipment so that—

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** What does that mean in French?

**Mr. Benoit Dicaire:** I'm going to talk about two scenarios, one being if the hydro goes out. When the hydro goes out, the Teams IP telephony could be transferred directly to a cell phone, so nothing would be lost, even if there were no power in the constituency office. As long as an employee has a cell phone, the calls received on the member's main line can be transferred directly to the employee.

The second scenario is if the internet goes out. The internet is an essential element of the new IP technology. There are two components: first, the telephone still applies; second, in the new Internet communication technology in offices, there will be some offices that have a redundant Internet: that use cellular technology if the connection with the local Internet supplier is lost. We have not provided for the use of this type of technology in all constituency offices, because the costs are relatively high. That said, we are doing it in approximately 30% of them: for example, in rural regions where the risk of Internet problems is higher.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Right.

In your strategic review, we may decide that it would have to be done in 50% of constituency offices. Funds are allocated for this second technology, to avoid there being an interruption in the services we provide to our constituents as a result of a hydro outage or a network outage. I am going to adopt that if I am part of the committee. Essentially, the technology that is proposed works when there is electricity, the network and support. That is part of your plan.

One of the major irritants for newly elected members is that even if you have access to the physical office, it takes some time before you get access to the phone and fax machine. You are eager to get to work. What you are proposing means that the next group of members will not have to wait and the public will have access to a phone number in short order. Will this be the constituency office phone number of a cell phone number? How do you plan to organize that?

• (1255)

**Mr. Benoit Dicaire:** That is an excellent question.

For newly elected members, being unable to access the constituency office phone for the first 21 days was a major problem. The person has just been elected and some of their constituents want to speak to them on the phone, but it wasn't possible, because there is a period when the former member still has access to the office. Now, there will be a new phone number for the main line, so the newly elected member will be able to speak to their constituents by phone starting on day one. After the 21 days, the existing main number will be assigned to the new member. There will still be an adjustment period, but at least they will be able to print that phone number on their business cards and new members will not have to use their cell phone. Using cell phones poses security problems, in the long term.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** That is very good news. Thank you.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** It is our Christmas present, one for all of us.

Are there more questions or comments? It seems not.

Thank you, Mr. Dicaire.

Are the recommendations approved? I note that they are.

Bravo, Mr. Dicaire! Honestly, you are solving a problem that arose after an election and was with us for a long time. Congratulations.

We still have to address one point that I placed on the agenda. You have received the documents from Public Services and Procurement Canada.

I have to tell you that I am not entirely comfortable and I will explain why. First, we received the documents after our last meeting. Not all members of the LTVP working group, which is working on the renovations to Centre Block, have had an opportunity to examine the document and make recommendations to the Board. I feel a bit uncomfortable because the group was created to do evaluations and make recommendations to the Board, but it has not been able to do it this week. As well, the chair of the working group is not available, because he had to chair the meeting. However, the department's representatives are here and they can answer your questions, if you wish.

Personally, I would recommend that we address this item when the working group has had an opportunity to do its evaluation and make its recommendations. However, if you still want to ask questions about things that concern you and you have had time to read this document, the representatives of Public Services and Procurement Canada are here to answer your questions.

Ms. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

**Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker, I agree with your proposal. For one thing, we have agreed on a system of governance and we have to adhere to it. For another, I also didn't have the time to do my reading, because I received the documents a bit late.

As well, I have a lot of questions to ask. I have seen the recommendations, and some of them are definitely going to prompt some fine discussions among us. I find it hard to see us embarking on a discussion we can't finish. I am in broad agreement with you that we set it over to the next meeting of the Board of Internal Economy.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Does everyone agree? Yes. So that is what we will do.

I apologize to the people from the department who have appeared. I thank them, but we have to adhere to the system of governance that has been established for assessing these matters.

I believe my colleagues have nothing else to raise.

[*English*]

Let me take this opportunity to wish you all happy holidays. Thank you very much for your work over the last year in 2024.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to take the time to thank the House of Commons administration—all the women and men who have worked very hard to support us throughout the year. I am very grateful for the work they do to facilitate members' work and respect their privileges. They do marvellous work. I thank them all.

I wish everyone happy holidays. We will see one another again in the new year.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** We mustn't forget the interpreters.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** You are correct.

My thanks to Isabelle, Cécélia and Sharon.

• (1300)

Congratulations on your work to all of you. I also congratulate your colleagues who are not here, who also support us at the Board.

Thank you, everyone. Happy holidays and happy new year.

[*English*]

The meeting is adjourned.

---







Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :  
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>