



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 028

Thursday, September 22, 2022

Chair: Mr. Robert Kitchen



Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Thursday, September 22, 2022

• (1605)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome back to committee. I trust everyone had a good summer.

This is the 28th meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. The committee is meeting today to consider the study of expenditures related to the Office of the Governor General's Secretary.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of June 23. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely, using the Zoom application.

Regarding the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether participating virtually or in person. Unfortunately, we lost half an hour, but we will try to be as close to 5:30 p.m. as possible.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind all participants of this meeting that taking screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

I would like to welcome the witnesses. With that, we'll have opening statements. We will go in order, starting with Ms. MacIntyre, then Mr. Wheeler and then Lieutenant-General Kenny.

Welcome and thank you very much for coming. You have five minutes for an opening statement.

We'll start with Ms. MacIntyre.

Ms. Christine MacIntyre (Deputy Secretary, Policy, Program and Protocol Branch, Office of the Governor General's Secretary): Good afternoon.

Thank you, Chair and members of the committee, for this opportunity for me and my colleagues from Global Affairs and the Department of National Defence to assist the committee in its work today in its study of catering expenses related to official diplomatic travel on government aircraft.

[*Translation*]

My name is Christine MacIntyre and I am the deputy secretary to the Governor General, from the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General. In my role, I am responsible for the teams that sup-

port the Governor General's constitutional, State, diplomatic, official and public programs, in Canada and abroad.

The Governor General undertakes official international travel only at the request and upon the recommendation of the Government of Canada, in support of Canada's foreign policy objectives and to advance trade, investment and partnership opportunities on behalf of Canada.

[*English*]

In support of these objectives, governors general normally travel with delegations, including parliamentarians from all parties and leaders from the public and private sectors who volunteer their time to help advance Canada's policy objectives, as well as the required logistical, security and administrative staff and, sometimes, members of the media.

[*Translation*]

Once approved by the government, these visits are planned, coordinated and implemented by the Office of Protocol at Global Affairs Canada for which my colleague, the Chief of Protocol of Canada, is responsible in terms of planning, coordinating and executing.

When the use of government aircraft is required for such visits, like the one to the Middle East in March 2022, the Office of Protocol requests support from the Department of National Defence, which coordinates all details related to the aircraft including the provision of in-flight catering, as my colleague, the Commander of the Royal Canadian Air Force, will explain.

[*English*]

As is the case for all such flights, the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General was not involved in the selection, provision or contracting of in-flight catering, nor did it make any special requests in this regard.

In May 2022, when the costs related to the catering provided on the flights during the Middle East visit were released, our office, like many Canadians and members, was very concerned. Stewardship of public funds and accountability are of the utmost importance to the Governor General and her office.

When we learned about this following the response to an Order Paper question, we immediately reached out to our partners at Global Affairs and National Defence to confirm the costs involved, to review processes related to in-flight catering and to evaluate and implement measures to improve efficiencies in a collaborative effort to strengthen accountability and to ensure maximum value for public funds.

• (1610)

[Translation]

In further reviewing the process and costs, our office learned from our partners that there were many variables that come into play, many of which my colleagues will describe in more detail. However, it was apparent to everyone that there were opportunities for improvement. Our office was encouraged that our partners were able to begin introducing efficiencies as soon as June 2022, even while their review of the specifics of these flights and the overall process were still ongoing.

[English]

We continue to offer our full support for the work they are doing on this file, and will do so on an ongoing basis. We have asked our partner departments to convene all offices involved in these flights on an ongoing basis to further identify ways to reduce costs and to maximize efficiencies wherever possible.

My colleagues will be able to speak in more detail about the results of the review and the improved measures they have implemented to date, but I want to assure the chair and the committee members that the Governor General and her office are concerned about these costs. We remain committed to the sound stewardship of public funds, and we continue to work with partners to responsibly and efficiently facilitate the important work the Governor General and delegations do in support of Canada and its foreign policy objectives.

[Translation]

While we cannot change what happened in the past, we can help implement change going forward, and remain committed to doing so.

[English]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When the opportunity arises, I would be pleased to answer any related questions the committee might have.

[Translation]

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. MacIntyre.

We'll now go to Mr. Wheeler.

Mr. Stewart Wheeler (Chief of Protocol of Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Honourable members of the committee, *mesdames et messieurs*, my name is Stewart Wheeler, and as chief of protocol of Canada,

I'm pleased to join the committee alongside my colleagues to contribute to the important discussion taking place today to help clarify the processes that are used by our offices to fulfill our mandates, and to reassure the members of the committee of our shared commitment to sound management of public funds.

As the chair and committee members may be aware, I volunteered to join my colleagues today in order to be able to share relevant information on the work that we all do together in these processes.

[Translation]

The Office of the Chief of Protocol is responsible for managing and coordinating international protocol operations for the State, including high-level visits and associated events, as well as a series of services offered to foreign diplomatic officials here in Canada.

[English]

As part of that role, the office of protocol coordinates and delivers travel and logistics for high-level visits either to Canada by visiting dignitaries or abroad by Canadian dignitaries.

The international practice of exchanging high-level visits by heads of state and heads of government is a central element of diplomacy and international relations. The Governor General plays an important role in this context by travelling abroad at the request of the government to advance specific Canadian foreign policy objectives. A cabinet minister traditionally forms part of the official delegation, which often includes all-party groups of parliamentarians, as well as Canadians chosen based on their ability to contribute to advancing the themes and objectives of a visit.

As an example of delegations, the chair and committee members will have noted that a number of distinguished Canadians, including former governors general, prime ministers, national indigenous leaders and decorated representatives of national honours programs travelled on our flight this past week to London to attend the state funeral of her late Majesty the Queen. On our return, the Prime Minister of New Zealand joined us, engaging in important bilateral discussions as the leaders prepared for their engagements in New York at the United Nations this week.

[Translation]

One of the main objectives of international visits is promoting Canada, as well as strengthening ties between nations and international partners. We meet these objectives by opening doors at the highest level, in order to lay the groundwork in key areas such as trade expansion and investments and establishing dialogue on major international issues.

[English]

Once a high-level visit has been confirmed, the office of protocol leads on the coordination of the many stakeholders involved in the execution of these visits. We ensure that partner departments have the information they require to deliver on their individual mandates. Our office does not task other departments, but rather ensures that decision points are relayed and that knowledge and information is shared. The office of protocol arranges with the Royal Canadian Air Force for the use of government aircraft to facilitate transportation and, related to that, confirms the meals to be served based on the operational requirements of the visit program, i.e., whether the flights are taking place during mealtime, the dietary restrictions of passengers, etc.

As high-level travel has resumed after this difficult period, this is an opportune time for us to redouble our continued efforts to work across departments with our partners to constantly evaluate ways that we can improve efficiencies, eliminate unnecessary expenses and tailor our processes to deliver maximum return on the investment of public funds in these areas. Over the past months, our teams have already been engaged to look specifically at this particular area of our operations in order to improve our practices and identify efficiencies and potential savings.

• (1615)

[Translation]

In conclusion, I would like to underscore the importance of the Governor General's visits and the fact that they are the result of the close collaboration between the Office of the Secretary of the Governor General, the Canadian Armed Forces, Global Affairs Canada and other partners. We are always looking for ways to increase efficiencies and responsibly manage public funds in order to efficiently contribute to Canada's priorities and objectives internationally.

[English]

I'll be happy to answer any questions members may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wheeler.

Now, we'll go to the Department of National Defence and Lieutenant-General Kenny.

Lieutenant-General Eric Kenny (Commander of the Royal Canadian Air Force, Department of National Defence): Good afternoon.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, I am Lieutenant-General Eric Kenny and as of August, I have taken over as the new commander of the Royal Canadian Air Force. In this position, I am responsible for the RCAF's air and space force, in Canada and abroad.

In addition to air defence and search and rescue, one of the RCAF's missions is to provide safe and secure travel for what we call Very Very Important Persons or VVIPs including the Royal Family, the Governor General and the Prime Minister.

[English]

Upon a request to provide VVIP transport, the RCAF, as a service provider, coordinates all flight details to ensure the conduct of

a safe and effective flight, including the provision of meal services in coordination with the GAC protocol office.

To fulfill this goal, the RCAF is responsible for supplying pilots and crews, maintaining security and safety in flight, determining logistics with foreign countries and air traffic controllers, pre-positioning aircraft if required, conducting fuelling and maintenance, and finally working with Global Affairs to select menus and provide catering.

During these flights, VVIPs are provided in-flight catering services, which the Royal Canadian Air Force works with Global Affairs Canada to confirm but which the RCAF is responsible for procuring and supplying. To do so, RCAF flight stewards will liaise with airport catering services to identify meal options and procure the selected menu for the flight.

In compliance with air safety regulations and to ensure the safety of members and crew, RCAF flight stewards verify that all catering services meet Canadian food safety standards and that any food bought and brought onto the flight is safe for consumption.

RCAF flight stewards work with airport catering services to establish options for a meal, which are presented to Global Affairs Canada for review and approval. Once a menu is finalized and approved by Global Affairs Canada, the RCAF procures the selected menu from the caterers.

Catering costs are influenced by multiple factors, especially considering the episodic nature of VVIP travel, sometimes to airports where the RCAF aircraft do not frequently travel. For example, the RCAF may be restricted to using a sole catering service. This results when airports restrict catering services to a single catering provider or when the Royal Canadian Air Force must use certain catering services abroad to ensure that food meets Canadian health and safety standards.

Additionally, foreign catering services may have restricted menu options, resulting in additional expenses if the desired menu is not readily available.

Finally, catering costs also include additional back-end fees, which are common to all airline travel. These include costs related to waste disposal, food delivery and handling and international exchange rates.

• (1620)

[Translation]

These additional fees are included in the catering costs, and are charged regardless of the number of passengers on board. Whatever the flight, we seek to find efficiencies and reduce costs, all the while ensuring safe and secure transportation.

More recently, we have worked to reduce certain costs related to meal services. We have joined forces to further identify ways, where possible, to reduce costs, while also working within the reality of catering services offered at airports worldwide.

I look forward to answering your questions.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, General.

As I look at the time, I recognize that we should be able to get through three rounds.

We'll start our first round of six minutes with Mr. Paul-Hus.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank our witnesses that are here today to answer our questions.

In these inflationary times, when millions of Canadians are finding it difficult to afford food, you will understand that we were very surprised by these types of expenditures. My first question deals with the Governor General's trip.

We know that the Governor General was in London March 14 and 15. However, the answer we received states that the Governor General was on board a flight that departed from Trenton, went on to Ottawa and then to London on March 16. That is impossible. The Governor General could not have been in London at the same time.

Which flight manifest is the correct one? Was the Governor General already overseas? Did the delegation join her in London?

Ms. Christine MacIntyre: The Governor General was indeed in London for her official meeting with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. This had not been possible during her swearing-in ceremony due to pandemic restrictions. The flight you are referring to left Canada while the Governor General was overseas. The Governor General then boarded that same plane in London and carried on with the rest of her visit.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: All right.

In the answer to question No. 512, we learned that 60 passengers, including 30 guests and 30-odd crew members, incurred costs of \$57,000 over one week, which comes out to \$956 per head. For the flight in question, which included 17 guests as well as crew members, expenditures were on average \$3,000 per person. We have just learned that the menu had been set by Global Affairs Canada. At one point, we didn't know who was in charge of the decision-making process. We were pointing the finger at the Canadian Armed Forces, but as we have learned, they follow the orders they receive.

General, would it be possible to see the menu that was ordered by Global Affairs Canada, including the associated costs for the various meals and alcoholic drinks that were served on board the aircraft?

LGen Eric Kenny: I will be able to get the menu for you.

[English]

Something I want to add to that response is that one of the challenges we have with global catering right now, specifically for airlines, is that we have very limited choices as to who we can cater with. As you've heard, the locations we're flying to are provided to us. The air force does have a responsibility to determine where we might stop along the route, but once the location is selected, we work with the local catering companies. In many cases, only a single catering company is available to us. Because of that, they have a monopoly on costs from a catering perspective.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, General. I do understand, but we simply want an explanation.

If things are complicated in Qatar or in Kuwait and everything costs three times as much as it does elsewhere, simply tell us and you'll have answered the question. We can understand that prices are higher in certain countries and that things cost less in Riga or in Berlin, for example, as was the case with the other trip. We would be pleased to receive an intelligent answer to clear things up.

We would like to know if there were excesses during the trip. Were people served caviar and expensive champagne, for example? That is the fundamental question. We do understand that people have to eat during a trip, but there's a difference between the cost of the 60-strong delegation's trip to Europe and that of the 30-person delegation. That's why we need an explanation. If you tell us that in Qatar, things cost four times as much, we will understand. That is what we want to know, General. We would like detailed information in answer to our questions.

Is there an office within Global Affairs Canada that tells you exactly what people would like to eat and then asks you to provide the menu, or do you have some leeway? Does the Royal Canadian Air Force have a say in these decisions, or do you simply follow instructions from Global Affairs Canada?

• (1625)

LGen Eric Kenny: I thank the member for his question.

[English]

The way we select the menu is that we go to the catering company. To answer a little bit your earlier question, what we look at is effectively chicken, beef and fish, so that is what the catering company will give to us. We then take that menu and share it with Global Affairs Canada protocol to ensure that it meets their requirements. Once they are satisfied with the requirements, we then go back to the catering company, establish a contract and go ahead and purchase the food. There is a difference in cost depending on where we go, as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: All right.

Did the crew enjoy the same menu as the passengers during the trip? Is there usually one set menu for the crew and another more lavish menu for passengers?

LGen Eric Kenny: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the member for his question.

[English]

Typically, the crew will receive the same menu selection as the rest of the passengers on board. It's much easier, logistically, to coordinate, because there's often only one service provider. To be clear, the crew will take whatever is remaining from the food selection. They'll receive the same food, but it will be whatever remains after the main passengers have been served.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

We'll now go to Mr. Housefather for six minutes.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

It's so nice to see everybody again.

Thank you to the three distinguished witnesses who are here with us today.

I loved what Ms. MacIntyre said how, essentially, of course we realize this doesn't make any sense.

The goal here, today, is to figure out what happened and how to fix it, going forward. As I calculated, there were 46 people on the flight. Not all of them ate every meal, and not all of them were on every leg of the flight. There were eight meals served and the total cost was \$80,367. If you divide that by 46 people, you get \$1,744 per person, or \$218 for a meal, which includes breakfast. That seems way out of line to most Canadians.

Somehow, 19 bottles of wine and 15 cans of beer cost only \$113. I think most Canadians would be pretty happy if 19 bottles of wine came to only \$113. If we could find a way to have the food match the wine, that would be fantastic. Obviously, that doesn't make sense, so there must be all kinds of costs embedded in that \$80,367 that have nothing to do with the cost of food.

Can someone walk us through the overall percentage that has nothing to do with food—what the different things are?

LGen Eric Kenny: When we contract with a catering company, the additional fees that come along, beyond the cost of the food, are for handling and delivery, storage, cleaning and food waste management. Those are additional costs. When we work with a catering company to determine the menu selections we want, we won't actually receive the cost estimate, in many cases, until we finalize the menu. That's just the way our industry works. We determine a menu, we submit it, and then they give us a cost estimate at that point, which includes these additional fees I've just described to you.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: At what point do you become aware of the costs, and who becomes aware of them? At what point in the process—before the flights, presumably—are you aware of what the total catering cost is estimated to be?

LGen Eric Kenny: I would say it depends on the flight. In some cases, we have very little notice for planning these events, and the cost estimates are coming in just prior to the actual execution—sometimes as we're issuing the contract. When we have longer lead times, as with this particular flight, we can have earlier estimates.

Each catering company does it differently. In many cases, the cost estimates are not fully understood until further into the con-

tracting process, because of the way they implement it. That information comes to the Royal Canadian Air Force for us to manage and then to go ahead and pay the bill.

• (1630)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I understand that.

Overall, what percentage of the \$80,000 was not associated with food? What were those four extra costs for those four extra line items you mentioned? Was it 50%, 75% or 10%? What balance of the costs relate to the food costs themselves?

LGen Eric Kenny: The reality is, the catering companies don't break that down for us. In fact, they don't necessarily break down the costs per menu, either. What we get is an overall cost. Some do provide more detail than others, but you don't get the actual cost breakdown of each of the things I've just described to you. It's very difficult to provide that. In some cases, you get it, and in some cases, you don't.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I understand.

In this case, presumably, because there were multiple flight segments, and different countries and different caterers that had to be engaged—because the airports had monopolies...without those caterers—did anybody look at the numbers and reject the initial proposal from the caterer and go back and negotiate? Were there negotiations involved, or did these flight segments always accept the first price provided by the caterer?

LGen Eric Kenny: There is very little—actually no—negotiation in these cases, unfortunately, unless there is more than one caterer available to us, in which case we can then look to see which one is the best value for money, but, as described, the vast majority of them are single providers who then tell us the price, and there's no negotiation.

I would say that it's a little bit different from what you might see with airlines that come into the same locations all the time. They have established contracts that get them the best value for money.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: That's understood.

Does anybody look at the price and say, “Oh my God, this is an astronomically high price for this small number of meals. Maybe we should look to the caterer and ask if, instead of ordering chicken, we should be ordering fish in this location because it's much cheaper”? Is there any negotiation on that part, maybe by Global Affairs or anyone else?

LGen Eric Kenny: This is something that we need to work on with GAC protocol, specifically, how we can further reduce costs as we move forward. There is opportunity to do that, but I'll defer to my colleague as to how the menu selection is determined. There are opportunities, I believe, to save money.

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: If the chair permits, I'll maybe jump in and just explain. It gives me an opportunity to outline the process, because people clearly have interest in understanding how those menus are arrived at.

In collaboration with the RCAF, we establish protocol once a visit has been approved and is being planned. We establish a meal plan for the entire visit. That determines how many meals or snacks will be offered during the various legs, based on the length of flights, the time of day and complementarity with the program. When we arrive, are we being fed at an event or are we keeping staff in a flight for eight and a half hours? We have an obligation as an employer to feed them. Are we living up to standard commercial airline practices for flights of similar durations?

The RCAF then works with their catering suppliers to provide available menus that would meet those types of meals. We don't send requests of what we must eat on this flight or what we must eat on that flight. We then review those. We look for things like redundancies, and we confirm whether the program has changed in the interim, whether those are still the meals that we require.

By then, we perhaps have a bit more information on our delegation passengers. We might know about dietary restrictions or some specific meals that we need to supply. Over the period of 32 hours of flights, six legs and eight meals, we try to provide some kind of variety for our passengers, but that's the extent of the—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wheeler.

I apologize for interrupting, but perhaps, as the questions come out, you might be able to add more as we go along here. I appreciate that.

We now go to Ms. Vignola for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses that are here with us today to answer our questions.

All three of you mentioned, at the start of your presentation and before the meeting started, how much the amounts spent on these meals and the number of meals had been an unsettling surprise.

Mr. Housefather spoke of \$267 per meal. I arrived at a total of \$349 per meal. It depends, as it always does, on the way you calculate the total amount divided by the number of persons. Nonetheless, you will agree that \$267 per head, whether it be lunch or dinner, is often the total amount that a family would spend for a week's worth of groceries.

This has raised questions and upset a lot of people, including me. I have used food banks over the course of my life, and to learn that five snacks cost \$80,000 is a morsel that is difficult to swallow. I've just gotten off a plane and I doubt that the two Oreo cookies that I received cost the same. We are not talking about the same kind of flight, of course. I am not a VIP, I'm an ordinary person.

You do understand that this is raising serious questions, not anger, in people's minds and has touched upon their values.

Lieutenant-General Kenny, a while ago, you stated that it would not be possible to know what parts of the meal costs were not linked to the food, because the caterer invoiced the total amount. That is what I understood. If we ask you to break down the \$80,000 to include management, meal delivery, storage, waste disposal and

airport fees, administrative fees, security costs and taxes, you would not be able to do so. Is that correct?

• (1635)

LGen Eric Kenny: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the member for her question.

There are invoices that indicate the amount billed for food or other items, such as taxes, and that provide more detail, but other invoices are not at all detailed.

I know that these flights cost a lot of money,

[*English*]

for the catering specifically.

That's why we're committed to making sure that we continue to look at how we can best achieve what we're doing, which is providing a safe standard of food to those who are on our flights while ensuring we're doing so at the best price possible, recognizing that we go to areas where the cost of living is quite high in comparison to Canada, and therefore the prices are much higher than we potentially would see here in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Would it be possible to get a copy of the invoices sent for these meals by the various caterers?

You indicated that some caterers were not able to provide itemized invoices, whereas others were. Would it be possible to send us the invoices?

What we really want is to understand. As my colleague has said previously, if in Qatar things cost an arm and a leg, at least we would know and we could plan accordingly. I know that it is not always possible to plan meals well in advance, because aircraft aren't usually equipped with refrigeration systems. I'm not asking VIPs to eat Spam and mustard or peanut butter and banana sandwiches for five days. That is not what I am calling for here.

If, for example, things cost two and a half as much in Qatar than in London or in Berlin, would it be possible to plan for cold meals that can be brought on board? Is that feasible? Would that be appropriate for the diplomatic sector? I ask the question because diplomacy does not figure in my political mandate.

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: Thank you for the question.

We all agree that there are certain problematic issues connected with the flights. This is what we have observed. That is why we set up a working group that will review the processes and find answers to the following questions: how is it that these high costs were approved in certain cases? What were the factors at play? What were the expectations on behalf of the client that could have been made clear to our colleagues?

• (1640)

Mrs. Julie Vignola: This isn't the first time that costs have made the news. Why didn't we seek to get answers about the process 10 or 15 years ago? We have been hearing about trip expenditures for the governors general for a long time.

Your words are reassuring, but why wasn't this done before?

LGen Eric Kenny: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for her question.

[*English*]

Over the years, we have changed the way we're ordering our catering services, specifically with the amount we order for the flights. Beyond working with Global Affairs Canada protocols to determine the type of menu selections—chicken, beef or vegetarian, as an example—and the numbers of each one, we also work to make sure we provide enough to cover the passengers who are on board and a bit of a contingency.

That contingency specifically has been reduced drastically over the years, most recently in 2022, but also in 2019. In 2019, we reduced the number of meals we were buying. We did a further reduction in June 2022, following this flight, on the number of meals we were buying, which does significantly reduce the cost overall for the catering provided on an aircraft.

The Chair: Thank you, General.

We'll now go to Mr. Johns for six minutes.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): It's great to be back and to see you all, colleagues. I hope you had a wonderful summer. It's nice to be back on the unceded lands of the Anishinabe and Algonquin people.

I want to thank our guests for being here today and for their service.

I also want to thank Ms. Vignola for putting forth this motion, which we strongly supported.

We've seen the rising cost of living where many Canadians are struggling to make ends meet. Food costs are going up. We have just seen a 41-year high in inflation and 10.8% rise in food costs. Against this backdrop, it's understandable why many Canadians were concerned. They are not concerned; they are actually outraged when they hear about the in-flight catering expenses on this trip for the Governor General's March 2022 visit and tour of the Middle East.

The shockingly high costs—the \$218 a meal—is unacceptable. A number of constituents have written to me today about this issue. I really hope we can get further transparency and some changes today.

Maybe I will start with you, Commander Kenny. Again, congratulations on your promotion. We're really grateful for your service.

Maybe you can talk about whether a budget for in-flight catering expenses is established in advance for trips on Airbus and Challenger flights. If so, can you talk about what the budget was for the Governor General's March 2022 tour of the Middle East?

LGen Eric Kenny: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We do not have a set budget for a specific flight. We are provided operations and maintenance funding throughout the year to cover VVIP travel, but we don't have funds specifically allocated for each flight.

Mr. Gord Johns: Can you talk about what checks and balances are in place for when in-flight catering expenses are beyond the norm or what has been budgeted?

I'm concerned that if information regarding the catering costs for this trip hadn't been made public by an Order Paper question by Mr. Barrett, we wouldn't even be having this conversation about the appropriateness of these expenses or how to improve practices moving forward.

LGen Eric Kenny: Right now, this is coordinated between the flight steward lead on the particular flight and Global Affairs Canada protocol to determine the menus and to actually do the catering.

We are absolutely committed to changing this to make sure it reflects the expectations of Canadians and those who were serving on flights. I strongly believe we will be able to further reduce costs as we move forward.

Mr. Gord Johns: That's really good to hear.

My next question is whether there has been a thorough review of the catering expenses from this trip. What areas have you identified where expenses could have been reduced? If so, where were those possible savings?

LGen Eric Kenny: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One of the savings that was identified was in terms of the contingency meals that are purchased for the flight, which are above and beyond the total number of people on a flight. Reducing that specifically is one of the savings that has been implemented.

There are also certain locations that we know are much more expensive than others. Having said that, working with Global Affairs Canada, we were told exactly what locations we're going to.

I will allow my colleague to speak to why they would pick certain locations.

• (1645)

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: If the chair would allow, I'm happy to jump in and add a little bit of detail there on the question of the selection of locations.

Often when we are travelling as guests to a host nation, it will be dictated what airport we need to land at. In consultation with Public Safety, other partners here in Ottawa and the air force, of course, we identify a flight routing. There may be some limitations on countries or places in which we can land to refuel, for example. That explains a little bit about the limitations we have sometimes on which airports....

I think what's really important is that the members of our teams have been working together since this episode. We recognize there are problematic elements of this process. What we're trying to do now is instill a no-nonsense environment where exorbitant costs need to be flagged. They need to be flagged at the appropriate moment, so we can make alternate choices or forgo things that might have been part of the standard operating elements that have always been included in packages.

We're happy to make those choices and we look forward to being able to deliver cost savings.

Mr. Gord Johns: What I'm looking for is what changes in practices have actually been implemented since March 2022 to ensure that there's responsible stewardship of public funds and ways to improve accountability, so that it doesn't require an Order Paper question and so that Canadians know what expenses...what changes are being done.

What is going to be moving forward the transparency to Canadians to help them see that this isn't going to happen again?

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: I would just mention again that we are identifying cost savings. One of the examples the general gave was on this idea of contingencies.

To help people understand, the standard operating procedure when you're on an international commercial flight is that you would be given a choice between two meals, chicken or fish. Ordering enough meals to make sure you have a balance of those and you allow that choice is an art. It's an art the caterers and the steward work through in order to have a balance between service and overage or waste.

As the general mentioned, the number of contingency meals that have been ordered in the past has been strictly reduced over the last few years. We've now decided, as one of the outcomes of the discussions we've undertaken since this became clear to us, to forgo choice altogether. So on the recent trip to London, there were no choices. That reduces the number we have to order, because everybody's eating the same thing. That's one. Obviously that doesn't apply if there are dietary restrictions, but we are able to identify those things in advance and make sure we have a robust system of checks and flags so that we're able to work together and avoid these exorbitant costs.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wheeler.

Thank you, Mr. Johns.

We'll now go to the second round, starting with Mr. McCauley for five minutes.

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

Just very quickly, some of the committee members have asked for copies of the menus and so on. There would have been a banquet event order or catering event order for that.

Can you please confirm that you will provide that to this committee as soon as possible for this issue?

LGen Eric Kenny: I'll get you what we have.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thank you.

What was the reason for the difference between the \$93,000 on the Order Paper question and the revision?

LGen Eric Kenny: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair. It's a great question.

Initially, when we responded to the Order Paper question, the cost that came out was \$93,117.89. What we didn't specify, which we should have, was that it was based on an estimate, based on what we understood at the time from the catering companies to be the cost. When we received the invoices—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: When we get these banquet event orders, are they going to reflect \$93,000? That's quite a significant thing.

LGen Eric Kenny: Each caterer we worked with had a cost. We had estimates. And then—

• (1650)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay. Would you provide the committee with the estimates, then, and with the final bill and the menus, please?

LGen Eric Kenny: I will if I can.

Once we looked through it—and we have the final invoices—the total cost turned out to be \$80,000.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Will you provide us, please, with those estimates, the contracts and the menus for all the flights in question?

LGen Eric Kenny: We'll take it on, in order to look into those and provide what we have to you.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm not asking you to look into it. Will you provide it for us, please?

LGen Eric Kenny: We'll take a look at it, yes, or to provide it.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I think I have the will of the committee to ask that you provide it for us.

Were there any other, perhaps, hidden costs that were not part of that \$80,000 that you discovered later or that haven't been included in that \$80,000, or is that the drop-dead final cost and there's nothing else?

LGen Eric Kenny: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair. It's a great question.

There are additional costs beyond catering for our flights. Specifically, there are costs for airport taxes, administrative fees, security charges and local taxes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Were there any specifically regarding the fuel or the catering for that flight?

LGen Eric Kenny: When we go to certain airports, there are charges for landing fees and airport taxes that are not—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Are those related to the catering or the fuel?

LGen Eric Kenny: No, they're separate from the catering charges.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay, so there are no other charges that are going to pop up.

LGen Eric Kenny: The charges of \$80,367 for the catering costs hold, which were included in a further update we gave in June and were not part of the original Order Paper question. But we do have additional costs beyond catering, just to be clear.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay.

What was the cost per person for the recent trip the Prime Minister and the GG took to London and then to New York?

LGen Eric Kenny: I do not know what the cost was per person.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Could you provide that for us, and the contracts and the menus?

When you talk about a selection of chicken and beef—I know on Air Canada you have a choice of stringy chicken or stringy tasteless chicken—often it's the same item. Is it beef or are you offering a filet, a choice cut of beef? What is exactly being chosen?

I ask because I'm kind of gobsmacked—and I'm trying to be polite here—that it's 2022, and I'm sure there are dozens of people working on this, and that \$218 just seems to be: Yeah, that's okay. I have to ask: How did this happen? We hear Lieutenant-General Kenny talking about changing things in 2019, addressing the contingency in 2019, unless I heard it wrong, but now it's 2022 and we're hearing, “Well, we're going to address the contingency.”

We keep hearing, “Well, we're reviewing and reviewing.” We've been reviewing for years. I don't have a lot of faith—and Mr. Johns was getting at this—that it's actually going to get done. We hear a lot about reviewing. Would you be able to maybe put in writing to this committee actual firm steps you're taking to address the costs?

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: Absolutely. To answer your question around the style of meals, standard commercial airline-practice meals is what we're ordering, in line with health and safety and travel regulations as the General mentioned. We are looking at concrete savings, and we'd be happy to make that available to the committee.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: With regard to the Governor General's trip to the Middle East, the previous week, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and 58 other people went on a trip to London, Poland and various other stops. There were eight stops. There were 60 people, and the cost was about two-thirds, so we had about 50% more travelling and yet two-thirds less cost for that trip for catering.

How do we end up with such a massive discrepancy between caring for the Prime Minister—so it's not like it's 60 members of OGGO, you know; we're talking top-echelon people.... How do we end up with such a massive difference?

LGen Eric Kenny: I don't have the specifics of those costs with me.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: It's on the same Order Paper. Maybe you can let us know.

LGen Eric Kenny: What I can say is that where we go to really dictates the price. So, for example, in Qatar and the UAE, the catering costs are quite high, and there are certain locations—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes, I think my time is up, but I'll come back the next time.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much. If there's further documentation that you'd like to provide, if you provide that to the clerk, the clerk will distribute that amongst the committee members. That would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Bains for five minutes.

● (1655)

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our guests for joining us today.

My question is for Mr. Wheeler. Earlier, Lieutenant-General Kenny mentioned things like monopolies in certain countries that drive up the costs. Were there other unique or unusual restrictions or limitations that contributed to the costs of catering services in this situation?

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: I think that on this visit there were a number of complexities, given the number of countries and the number of stops. We would have to go back and look at the specific airports. However, I can say that the discussions with host countries.... In this case, the host countries that we visited did have an impact on which airports were chosen for our landings in the host countries. That related to, for example in the UAE, landing with a government aircraft at a time when the UAE was hosting the final month of the world Expo. The UAE government requested that we land at a specific government airport versus the main commercial one, which is often the case when we're flying government aircraft into host countries for events hosted by foreign countries.

Mr. Parm Bains: Are the costs different with a government airport versus a commercial airport? Are the landing fees higher at a government airport than at a commercial one?

LGen Eric Kenny: It's different in each situation, but often these are locations where there are very limited catering services. In other words, there might only be one caterer available to us, and they're not used to working with airlines as we would see in a more normal civilian airport where the costs could be lower because they are providing greater quantities.

The location is selected by GAC in coordination with the host country, of course, for those reasons, which include security. Ultimately, there's often less choice when it comes to the actual caterers that are available to us.

Mr. Parm Bains: Moving on, how does the GAC protocol determine the appropriate standards that in-flight catering should meet? For instance, if we have royal VVIP who are flying on RCAF aircraft, how would GAC determine the appropriate standards?

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: We work with the air force to request a meal plan that is in line with the health and safety travel regulations, taking into consideration how long the flight is and how many meals would be offered. As I mentioned, meals are arranged to align with standard commercial airline practices for flights of the same duration. Global Affairs protocol is not involved in visits of the royal family to Canada. We are involved only with foreign dignitaries, and of course the royal family is the Canadian royal family, so that's not one where we would be involved. The Department of Canadian Heritage coordinates the royal tours.

I think the important thing is that we work very closely with the Royal Canadian Air Force to determine the appropriate number of meals, what kinds of meals are needed, how they complement the program that we have, or if they are in line with that program. Then, we review those and confirm the final menus based on the selections we've had from catering companies.

Mr. Parm Bains: What is the GAC protocol office's role in this process, then? How do they interact between the RCAF and the VVIP office to determine catering choices? Where does that directive come from?

• (1700)

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: As I mentioned earlier, our job is to work with our partners, whether it be the Governor General's office or the Royal Canadian Air Force, to ensure that there are appropriate meals provided during the visit. As I mentioned before, our job is not to task, but to share information. We evaluate the menu plan, we look at the options being put forward, and we make sure that it still fits with the needs of the people who are flying, in terms of special meals, etc.

In this case, for example, I would say it's useful to know, perhaps, that the office of protocol makes the choices. At no time in the process does the Governor General herself personally review menus. The only review by the office of the secretary to the Governor General for menus for her flights is actually done as a point of information and in order to avail ourselves of the in-house translation expertise that Rideau Hall has when it comes to food so that we can meet our obligations under the Official Languages Act to present a bilingual menu to our passengers. That consultation with the office of the Governor General is for information purposes. It's the office of protocol that makes the choices for menu selections in conjunction with the air force and the options that are provided by the catering companies.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bains.

Now we will go to Ms. Vignola for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I would like not only the menus to be provided to committee members, but also the breakdown of expenditures, as I asked for previously, as soon as possible, of course. I do understand that certain catering agencies do not provide an itemized breakdown, but I would be surprised to learn that every caterer refused to provide a such an invoice.

Lieutenant-General Kenny, some of our troops went to Kuwait and to the Middle East. They ate during their flights. How much

does it cost to provide a meal to a soldier who's on mission on board a flight to Kuwait or to the Middle East?

LGen Eric Kenny: I thank the member for her question.

I do not know the cost of the meals provided to our members during these flights.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Do our soldiers receive meals that cost less than those provided to the Governor General, her guests and her staff?

LGen Eric Kenny: I thank the member for her question.

We do not always provide the same types of meals on board our flights as compared to the flights of VVIPs, as I stated previously.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: And yet in our minds, these soldiers should be considered VVIPs.

That said, we all have the same basic needs. Our meals should be fair. I am not saying that our soldiers should receive meals that cost \$350. Rather, I am saying that the meals provided to the Governor General and the 28 or 29 persons who accompanied her should be more like those provided to our soldiers. If our soldiers are given certain meals, then those meals should be good enough for everyone, in my humble opinion.

You stated that snacks were provided. How many snacks, what kind of snacks and how much did these snacks cost in general?

LGen Eric Kenny: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for her question.

[*English*]

There were snacks that were served on the flights. I do not have the specific breakdown of the cost for the snacks with me at this time.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: All right.

Would it be possible to send them to us, please?

[*English*]

LGen Eric Kenny: You've asked as a committee to see the cost of the catering. Whether it breaks down the cost of the snacks, I do not know, though.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Okay.

Ms. Christine MacIntyre: I would like to clear things up about the meal costs by stating that I was on board one of those flights. I can guarantee that the meals that we received were the same ones that are served on board commercial flights. Nothing in the menus gave cause for alarm. That is why we think it is important that we look at all the processes and see, for example, if we need to provide food during a flight that lasts an hour and a half.

With the information that we have gathered during past and current reviews, we will be able to make decisions and provide alternatives. Your question is relevant. We are looking at all the options in order to save money. Our office is supportive of all the efforts of our colleagues.

• (1705)

Mrs. Julie Vignola: It would be fantastic if your reviews and all the others led to lasting results.

Ms. Christine MacIntyre: Absolutely. I'm in agreement with you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Johns for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I guess just following that, \$218 average for a meal.... Were there any meals that stood out that were unexpected and that were in the hundreds of dollars?

Moving forward, are you going to learn and decide that this is clearly outrageous? I'm not saying that you should eat KD, but I think it would be good for us to know the costs of the meals for our soldiers who are going overseas. As Ms. Vignola spelled out, these are the people putting their lives on the line, and we're spending this much money on a delegation.

Ms. MacIntyre, can you tell me about the objectives of the Governor General's trip and what outcomes were achieved? I think that would be important for us to understand as well, given the cost of this trip.

Ms. Christine MacIntyre: I will give an overview, and then I'll ask my colleague Mr. Wheeler to add to this, as these are the objectives of the government.

The Governor General is the commander-in-chief. One of the reasons we were going to this region and one of the things she did while she was there was go and visit our troops in Kuwait and in Qatar to accompany them, to see what they were doing, to offer them support and to recognize them.

We were also going to these countries as a gesture of thanks to these countries who helped Canada evacuate Canadians from Afghanistan during the crisis. We were there to build relationships with people who support this very important part in our foreign policy.

These questions.... The costs were really shocking to all of us. We had eggs. We had omelettes.

Mr. Gord Johns: I do appreciate that. In terms of the menu options that were presented by the Royal Canadian Air Force, were any of them rejected by Global Affairs? If so, what was the basis of rejecting the menus as presented? Did the selection of alternative options result in increased costs?

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: I think I could lead on that question to say that there's always a back-and-forth between the flight steward and my team in looking at the options that have been put forward. There may have been changes to some elements, but again, looking at redundancies, looking at variety during the trip.... Are we going

to have the same thing for breakfast twice in a row? Are we going to have different things? Are we having chicken, fish or pork?

On the question of the importance of the trip, if you'll allow me, I would just add that not only was the visit to the troops and the high-level engagement with the senior leadership of those countries important to express Canada's thanks and appreciation for everything they have done for our military platform in that region, but also, I would remind the committee, we were at the time reinforcing the importance of regional peace and security in the context of the crisis in Ukraine—

Mr. Gord Johns: That's very important. I appreciate that—

The Chair: Thank you—

Mr. Gord Johns: Just to wrap up, Mr. Chair, if you don't mind, just one comment: Two hundred and eighteen dollars a meal is about the average cost of the Port Alberni food truck that goes out and feeds over 100 homeless people a night where I live. I just want to make sure that's on the record, because that's what we have to be thinking about.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

We'll now go to Mr. McCauley for five minutes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to share a bit of my time with my colleague Mr. Redekopp.

Just quickly, Lieutenant-General Kenny, would you be able to provide us with the flight length of each of the trips involved that we're discussing?

LGen Eric Kenny: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm sorry—just to the committee, not right now. Just when you have time.

LGen Eric Kenny: All right.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Who in Global Affairs would have signed off on the menu? I think we heard in the opening statements that Global Affairs signs off. Who specifically would have done that and would they have seen the price?

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: The final discussion on menus is a conversation back and forth. As we mentioned, it would be a member of my team, and no, they would not see the price at that time—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay. Are they going to see the price in the future?

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: As I mentioned, we.... That is—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: How are we fixing this going forward so that someone says, "Oh my Lord, this is going to get us dragged in front of committee, a rather unpleasant OGGO"?

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: We would always be happy to see the committee, but I think you're absolutely right, sir. What we need is to have an environment between the teams where those things are being flagged to us.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: My question back to General Kenny is, then, is someone on your side saying to Global Affairs, “Heads-up, this is all you're getting”? Is it like, “Good Lord, it's \$400 for stringy Air Canada chicken, beware”? Or does it just go over and everyone just shrugs because it's the taxpayer?

LGen Eric Kenny: We're very aware of the use of public funds and we want to make sure we're fiscal stewards of that.

The coordination that goes on with Global Affairs Canada protocols specifically is to the contents of the menu. Once that's passed to us, we will then go ahead and work with the caterer. In many cases, we will not know the cost until after that menu is selected, and then we go back to the caterer, which is when we get the cost.

Many of these catering companies don't actually provide the breakdown of costs until you select the menu. That's one of the challenges we're having right now about trying to get ahead and making sure we're getting the best value.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: What airports tell you, “We're not telling you the price until after you've chosen something”? Having been in that business that actually catered to airlines for decades, I've never seen a process where it's, “We'll let you know the price after you've chosen.”

LGen Eric Kenny: I will give a bit more clarity on the process, Mr. Chair.

We'll work with Global Affairs Canada protocol, who will tell us, okay, on this flight leg, we are looking for a breakfast and a lunch. Once we get that information, we go to whatever catering company that we can go to. If we have multiple options, we'll do that. We'll say that we need menus for a breakfast and a lunch. We'll then get that information, pass it to Global Affairs Canada protocol, who will look at it to make sure that it meets the purpose—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Who is the gate...I don't want to say “gatekeeper”. Who, somewhere, looks at it and says, “We're not paying \$218 for eggs, unless they're perhaps dodo eggs.” Who is saying that? Who has that opportunity to say, “Stop—we're not doing that”?

LGen Eric Kenny: This is one of the things that we're looking at. Obviously, based on what's come to light and why we're here today, there are changes that absolutely need to be made in terms of the oversight and how we determine the best value for what we're trying to do for the mission. This is something that we're working on closely to ensure....

We have already made a change, which is a change to the contingency percentage that we're purchasing.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm going to let Mr. Redekopp have the time. Thanks.

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to pick up on that point of contingencies. You mentioned that there were contingencies. You eliminated part of them in 2019 and now, again.

Can you tell us a bit more about that? When you had the beef, chicken and pork options, how much contingency did you have if

you had, say, 30 people on board? Did you have 35 meals? What were the typical contingencies?

What would happen to those excess meals once the flights were completed?

LGen Eric Kenny: I don't have the exact number of meals that were purchased for each flight and the contingency amount.

What I can tell you is that when you go on an airline right now, they'll often go in order. The first person has two choices and they get what they want, and as they go down, they run out of a specific meal set. That's the contingency. That's offered to more people than not, and that's what we've reduced specifically.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Could you provide the committee with that information? What was the reduction? What was the contingency in 2019, and what did you reduce it to? What have you reduced it to now?

• (1715)

LGen Eric Kenny: We can look into that.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: If you could provide that, that would be great.

If we were to go on a military flight—you're flying officers or military people on those types of planes—would we find the same sort of situation if we were to do an Order Paper question on those types of things?

LGen Eric Kenny: Is that on flights with just military, specifically? Often, with the military flights, we fly through military airports and get our food from military facilities, which have a very different cost.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Okay. Thank you.

I have one last question for Mr. Wheeler. You mentioned that the protocol office was doing a review, and you were maybe going to have some new procedures and policies.

Could you give us a bit of a timeline on that? Could you then provide that review to the committee, so we could see the results of that?

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: Yes, absolutely, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to take that on board.

We are constantly working together, and these people work together all the time. What we are asking our teams to do is to work in between the operational working on a specific visit to sit down and say, “What isn't working here? Let's look at the numbers, now that we see those line numbers, and ask why this is part of the standard operating procedure. Nobody asks for this, so why is it part of it? Can we eliminate it in the future? Can we decide that we're going to set up some flags, so that flags go up, a question comes over and we make an alternate choice?”

That's what we're hoping, to instill that kind of rigour. We're hoping it will be an ongoing process and it isn't a one-stop review and then it's over. We want this to be the new practice.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Can you provide that review to us, though—

The Chair: I'm sorry. It's not a bad question.

Could you provide that? Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Jowhari for five minutes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for coming today. Thank you for acknowledging right off the bat that this is something that's not acceptable and for working toward....

Mr. Chair, I'll be splitting my time with my colleague, MP Kusmierczyk.

Madam MacIntyre, in your opening remarks, you said, "we immediately reached out to our partners at Global Affairs and National Defence to confirm the costs involved, to review processes related to in-flight catering and to evaluate and implement measures to improve efficiencies". I would be interested in hearing about evaluating and implementing measures to improve efficiencies.

Can you talk about the measures and what you were trying to improve?

Ms. Christine MacIntyre: The measures I was referring to are the measures that my colleagues are developing. Our office is supportive of anything we can do to bring more efficiencies to these processes—for example, bringing down the contingency, removing choice to the passengers on the flight and looking at questions. Really, we're open to anything we can do, because we were extremely concerned when we saw these costs come out.

For example, as Mr. Wheeler spoke about earlier, the office of protocol often looks at what the program is and how it connects with the flight. Do we need to eat on the flight? Is there an option where people can eat before they leave or after they arrive, so that catering doesn't need to be there? Are there additional elements that are part of the standard practice that we really don't need and that we can eliminate to have better efficiencies when it comes to these visits?

Further, what are other ideas? Let's think outside the box. We know that these costs are increasing in the airline industry. Every Canadian is seeing that when they're booking flights. How can we follow suit? How can we also encourage creativity and these kinds of flags from our department colleagues? That's something we want them to do. We want to encourage that kind of rigour.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you.

I might suggest that we establish a target or threshold by meal per flight, depending on the length. It would be a good idea. We as MPs have per diems, and we follow those to a T. Anything above that comes out of our own pocket.

I'll just leave it at that, because I want to give my colleague Mr. Kusmierczyk time to be able to ask his question.

• (1720)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Jowhari, and thank you very much, Chair.

Actually, my colleague just asked the very question I wanted to ask: Do officials at Global Affairs know if a cost is reasonable? Is there a schedule of rates that can be compared? Is there a guide, for example, that guides the folks who are signing off on these decisions?

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: From the Global Affairs protocol perspective, I would refer to what the general mentioned, which is the complexity of factors that are in play when the final catering cost comes out. Those change for countries and for airports. It's not like the Treasury Board travel guidelines for a specific location, but I think that's exactly the kind of thinking that we're thinking about. When we get experience with travelling to different airports, we'll recognize, for example, that this is an airport that clearly gouges the state and private aircraft, because they force you to use certain caterers. Can we take that into consideration as well in the selection of which airports we choose to go to along the way?

I think we're open to looking at all possible economies affecting the various elements of our planning process.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: But I guess my question is about whether we can just set up a band, for example, where we can say that this is a reasonable cost, and anything above that requires extra thought or extra reconsideration. I think that would be helpful.

Mr. Stewart Wheeler: That's precisely the kind of flag I'd like our teams to be developing.

Ms. Christine MacIntyre: Again, to add a personal experience, I actually contracted COVID on this visit. I had to remain behind and quarantine in Qatar. So in terms of the Treasury Board.... This came to me as a public servant. You talk about per diems for members of Parliament. This to me gives an overall sense of the difference in the scale of price in these countries. For example, in Canada the Treasury Board per diem for breakfast is \$22.80. In Qatar it's \$42.77. In UAE it's \$43.

It gives you a sense that where you go, as the general has said, really plays an important role in determining some of these costs. This is why asking these kinds of questions and having this kind of process is so important to go forward.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you very much, Ms. MacIntyre. I'm happy to see that you've recovered from COVID and that experience.

Ms. Christine MacIntyre: It was a very unique experience.

A voice: It was hard to leave her behind.

Ms. Christine MacIntyre: Yes. The entire motorcade left and I stayed behind for 11 days. It did help me appreciate what some of the challenges are.

The Chair: Thank you.

That ends our second round, but it is my understanding that there is agreement amongst members for one more set of questions.

Mr. Paul-Hus, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: General, when the Governor General went to London, what aircraft did she use? She does not fly commercially, so there must have been another aircraft. It was not the CC-150 Polaris, because in the answer provided to the written question No. 512, we can see the list of all the flights taken as of the month of December, and that aircraft is not on the list.

How did the Governor General get to London?

LGen Eric Kenny: I can't say for certain, but usually, she flies on the CC-144 Challenger or the Airbus. Those are the two aircraft used by the Governor General.

Ms. Christine MacIntyre: In this instance, I can confirm that she took the Challenger to fly to London.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: The Challenger came back empty, and the Polaris flew to London with the delegation on board and was used afterwards. Is that correct?

Ms. Christine MacIntyre: You should know that ferrying the entire delegation to London would have cost much more if we had taken into account hotel rooms, meals, etc. These are the types of discussions that we are always having.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: My last question pertains to planning supplementary meals. What is the percentage of supplementary meals that are provided for? Is it 50%?

LGen Eric Kenny: It is now set at 20%.

• (1725)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: We learned that the figure has been changed. What was the percentage beforehand?

LGen Eric Kenny: The percentage was changed in June.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: What was it before?

LGen Eric Kenny: It was set at 65%.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: So it went from 65 to 20%.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

Before I say anything more, is everyone comfortable with the questioning?

Okay, that's great. Thank you.

It is my understanding that we will end the questioning at this point in time out of respect for your offices and the time commitments that you made.

We do appreciate you coming on such short notice and being able to be here for us. It's nice to see you working together. That's what we like to see.

We had Team Canada from 50 years ago in the House of Commons today. It makes me reflect back to 50 years ago when I was a son of a colonel who was the military attaché at the High Commission in Pakistan. I saw the work that was being done between Global Affairs—it was foreign affairs at that time—and the military, as well as Her Majesty's Governor General, who is now His Majesty's Governor General. It's just a great pleasure for me to be able to say that.

I like to see that work. I really do appreciate your time here and your efforts to do that.

With that said, I will declare the meeting 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>