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# Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley





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• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)):** Welcome to meeting number 46 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

We have several witnesses today, all doing opening statements.

We'll start with Ms. MacIntyre for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Christine MacIntyre (Deputy Secretary, Policy, Program and Protocol Branch, Office of the Secretary to the Governor General):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

[Translation]

As part of my duties as the Deputy Secretary for the Policy, Program and Protocol Branch at the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General, or the OSGG as we are known, I am responsible for the planning and execution of the Governor General's program. I was also the lead OSGG official accompanying the Governor General on the visit to the Middle East in March 2022.

I am pleased to appear again before this committee, joined by my colleagues from four other government departments, to assist with your continued and valued work regarding expenses related to official international travel of governors general.

[English]

Since our previous appearance, I am pleased to report that, together with our partner departments, some progress has been made in our commitments to the committee.

As per the committee's motion, documents were provided detailing expenses associated with the Middle East visit, in addition to a list of official international travel by Governors General since 2014. Our offices have been reviewing how processes can be strengthened and streamlined, and the OSGG has actively participated in the working group on in-flight catering. My colleagues leading this group will speak further to this.

[Translation]

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the Governor General's and the office's commitment to the responsible use of public funds in all that we do. We understand the serious financial challenges felt by many Canadians.

And so, while diplomatic travel is a vital component of a country's international engagement strategy, decisions must always reflect the highest possible standards of stewardship to ensure value for money in the use of public funds.

[English]

I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate that at no time did the Governor General make any decisions, request any service or otherwise voice any preferences about travel, accommodation, catering or any of the administrative and logistical arrangements discussed here. She understands and respects that accountabilities and responsibilities for these visits and the related budgets reside with public servants in the appropriate government departments involved.

I also reiterate that the costs related to in-flight catering on the Middle East visit were unacceptable. My colleagues from the Royal Canadian Air Force and Global Affairs Canada will speak to this in greater detail, but I want to assure the committee that the situation is being addressed. There have already been changes, and we are all confident that these improvements will continue.

Why is this important? It is because face-to-face representation abroad is a vital part of any country's foreign policy. A key component of the Governor General's responsibilities is to help the Government of Canada achieve its international objectives and further enhance its diplomatic relations. This includes facilitating global co-operation and dialogue; representing Canadian values; showcasing Canadian achievement; commemorating Canada's efforts and service, both civilian and military, to help people and regions in need; opening doors to trade; and delivering strong and important messages behind closed doors. However, this is only ever done at the request of the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada.

[Translation]

On the rare occasion when governors general are invited to participate in events in other countries by non-governmental organizations, they only do so with the consent and approval of the government.

We want to thank members of Parliament and the committee for raising these issues, as they have prompted a much-needed review of all related procedures and practices.

[*English*]

With respect to future official international visits on behalf of Canada, the OSGG commits to working with our partner departments to add further structure and rigour to planning and coordination. In this way, we will ensure that decision-making is clear, approaches are reviewed and adapted, efficiencies are found and flags are raised when required.

This is a process of continuous improvement, one that takes time to achieve and will not be perfect from the beginning, but we are determined to learn from the past and to move forward with official visits where foreign policy objectives and outcomes are advanced in a context of careful, responsible and robust stewardship of public funds.

[*Translation*]

I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I stand ready to answer any questions you may have.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. MacIntyre.

We'll now have Mr. Wheeler for five minutes, please.

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

My name is Stewart Wheeler. As chief of protocol of Canada, I am pleased to join the committee again today, alongside my colleagues, to help clarify the processes used by our offices to fulfill our mandates, and to reassure members of the committee of our shared commitment to the sound management of public funds.

● (1105)

[*Translation*]

As mentioned at our last meeting, and as I am Canada's Chief of Protocol, my office is responsible for managing the international functions of state protocol, which includes coordinating the logistics of high-level visits and related events.

In all its activities, the Office of Protocol is committed to transparency and accountability in the sound management of public funds. To that end, the expenses related to high-level visits managed by my team are systematically published in the Public Accounts of Canada.

[*English*]

The Governor General plays an important role in international relations by travelling on state and working visits at the request of the Prime Minister to achieve specific objectives and deliver key messages.

This is a practice that began before there were Canadian-born governors general, and it has grown over the decades since, as Canada has taken its place on the world stage. This is a practice that is a standard and vital part of international relations among all na-

tions, where visits are exchanged among countries at the highest levels to open doors and strengthen relations between international partners.

Engagement at the level of heads of state provides an entrée for conversations that are unique and that represent an indispensable tool in diplomacy, since in many countries, they cannot be replaced by communications at the ministerial or diplomatic level.

A visit by a governor general takes place when it is considered to be the most appropriate instrument to advance specific Canadian objectives in a particular region or country. Recommendations for visits are made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Prime Minister through Global Affairs Canada and the Privy Council Office.

[*Translation*]

Governor General visits strengthen relationships, advance key objectives, build bridges between peoples, reinforce Canada's image as a sovereign and unified country, and convey important messages for Canada to international audiences and interlocutors.

[*English*]

In coordinating these visits, the office of protocol works closely with the OSGG and, occasionally, with other departments, such as Veterans Affairs Canada when visits include military components and commemorations, for example, or Sport Canada when they include events like the Olympics or the Pan-Am Games. It always works in partnership with Canadian embassies and high commissions abroad.

Visit budgets mainly cover delegation travel, accommodation, transportation and programming expenses, as you will have noted in your review of the invoices for the visit to the gulf region. In this context, allow me to speak in a bit more detail about that specific visit.

The UAE, Qatar and Kuwait are important strategic partners for Canada in the gulf region. From a bilateral perspective, the Governor General's visit to these countries served three core objectives. The first was to express Canada's sincere appreciation for the extensive diplomatic and military support Canada receives from these countries, including for our evacuations from Afghanistan.

[*Translation*]

The second objective was to demonstrate the importance of these relationships through face-to-face discussions and engagement at the highest level, as well as a visit to Expo 2020 in Dubai. This included a speech at the Canada Day celebration at the Expo to the host country's leaders, representatives of Expo countries and the public on the importance of diversity and inclusion, human rights and gender equality.

[English]

The final objective was to reinforce other priority issues for Canada, including regional peace and security. We have asked all three of these countries for assistance with events and operations across the Middle East region and beyond in the past, and we will almost certainly need to rely on these partners again in the future.

In the context of the current crisis in Ukraine, this visit took on additional importance. Canada recognized the imperative of engaging key partners to build global consensus concerning Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. In all three countries, the Governor General's discussions broadened Canada's outreach beyond our traditional like-minded partners as the government worked to manage and mitigate the effects of the crisis across many sectors.

[Translation]

In conclusion, the Protocol Office is confident of its knowledge and application of the highest standards of public probity in managing its finances.

[English]

We look forward to continuing to work with our partners to refine our collaborative processes and continue to find efficiencies and savings as we deliver our important mandates.

Thank you very much. I'll be happy to answer any questions members may have.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Wheeler.

We'll have Ms. Kwong, please, for five minutes. Welcome to OGGO.

**Ms. Melanie Kwong (Director General, Major Events, Commemorations and Capital Experience, Department of Canadian Heritage):** Good morning.

Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, I am pleased to join you today to assist in your study and consideration of expenses related to the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General for the representation activities abroad.

My name is Melanie Kwong, and I am the director general of major events, commemorations and capital experience at the Department of Canadian Heritage. My department has a statutory responsibility for state ceremonial and Canadian symbols, as laid out in the Department of Canadian Heritage Act.

• (1110)

[Translation]

State ceremonial consists of Canadian practices for planning, organizing and conducting official or public ceremonies involving dignitaries.

The State Ceremonial and Protocol Directorate of the Department of Canadian Heritage performs this official function for the Government of Canada. Its mandate is to promote and protect our national symbols, provide expertise on national protocol matters and play a leading role in state events at the national level.

[English]

State events organized by Canadian Heritage take place in Canada. Examples include the installation ceremonies of governors general, state funerals, national commemorative ceremonies and other events of national significance.

Canadian Heritage's financial responsibilities in relation to governors general is limited to the period between when governors general designate are appointed and when they are sworn in. This responsibility includes the coordination and execution of the installation ceremony and can also include covering travel costs to the United Kingdom to meet with the sovereign prior to an installation ceremony.

[Translation]

In most cases, the Governor General designate will travel to London to be received by the sovereign shortly before taking office. Travel arrangements are made through an agreement between the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General and the Department of Canadian Heritage, which covers the costs of this official visit.

[English]

In closing, I would like to assure the members of the committee of our shared commitment to the sound management of public funds.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kwong.

Lieutenant-General Kenny, welcome back. I will hand things over to you for five minutes.

**Lieutenant-General Eric Kenny (Commander of the Royal Canadian Air Force, Department of National Defence):** Mr. Chair and members of the committee, good morning.

My name is Lieutenant-General Eric Kenny, and I am the commander of the Royal Canadian Air Force and the chief of air force staff. As a senior air force officer in the Canadian Armed Forces, I am an adviser to the chief of the defence staff on matters regarding air and space military capabilities to meet Canada's defence objectives.

I am happy to be here again today to answer questions you may have regarding the Royal Canadian Air Force's role in providing air transport for the travel that is the subject of the committee's study.

[Translation]

Upon request, the RCAF will provide safe, secure and reliable air transport, including for the Prime Minister and Governor General.

As a responsible steward of government finances, the RCAF continues to look for ways to find efficiencies in the services it provides.

Since I last appeared in September, my team has continued working with officials from Global Affairs Canada to identify efficiencies and to reduce catering costs associated with the transport of government officials.

I am pleased with the progress that has come from our ongoing collaboration, which I anticipate will result in a reduction in catering costs moving forward.

[English]

International travel will continue to be subjected to the high costs associated with aviation. This includes airport taxes and handling fees, as well as the services provided by airport catering companies globally. Nevertheless, the Royal Canadian Air Force will work in concert with our partner departments to implement changes where we can with a view to maintaining the safety and security of our passengers.

[Translation]

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today and remain available to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We will finish with Mr. Duheme, please.

**Deputy Commissioner Michael Duheme (Deputy Commissioner, Federal Policing, Royal Canadian Mounted Police):** Good morning, Mr. Chair and committee members.

My name is Mike Duheme. I am the deputy commissioner of the RCMP's federal policing program. I am joined here today by Inspector Taro Tan, the officer in charge of the Governor General's protection detail.

The protective policing program falls under my responsibility as the deputy commissioner of federal policing. This includes providing close protection services for designated officials, including the Governor General. Under the RCMP regulations, the RCMP is mandated to provide close protection services to the Governor General, both in Canada and abroad. The Governor General is provided with a level of close protection in line with the high-profile nature of the position.

It is important to note that the RCMP is responsible for the close protection of the Governor General, but it is not part of the decision-making regarding travel plans or agendas. As such, the protective plan developed by the RCMP is based on decisions that are made by the Governor General's office. Protective measures are intelligence-led and are proportional to any threats and risks assessed by the RCMP, in collaboration with external partners, to ensure that designated officials are provided with protection that is appropriate and required.

● (1115)

[Translation]

The RCMP's assessment process is founded on two central factors: the threat profile and the vulnerability assessment.

First, the RCMP intelligence groups work with external partners to develop a threat profile for the location the Governor General will be visiting. This general overview is made up of three components: the threat environment at the location, including threats to the event or the crime rate at the location; threats to the Governor

General; and threats to Canadian interests, due to international conflicts, for example. Once this profile is complete, the RCMP proceeds with the vulnerability assessment.

[English]

This assessment of vulnerabilities considers several factors that include, but are not limited to, the protective measures offered by the host country if it involves international travel, and the accessibility to the general public at venues such as the accommodations of the protectee and the event areas the protectee will frequent.

Taken together, the threat picture and the assessment of vulnerabilities permit the RCMP to assess the overall risk and plan accordingly to ensure the safety of the protectee. Given the range of locations designated protectees may decide to travel to, costs can vary greatly depending on the details of the trip and the protective posture required to ensure the integrity of the protectee's close protection.

[Translation]

It's important to note that RCMP members providing such protective services are considered to be in travel status. Their travel arrangements are in accordance with the provisions of the national joint council travel directive.

[English]

An internal review of the global costs incurred by the RCMP in the provision of protection services to the Governor General since January 2014, including incremental salary costs and travel expenditures such as meals, incidentals, travel and accommodations, was undertaken in advance of this meeting. This review shows a general consistency in the cost of close protective services provided to the past governor generals and did not identify any discrepancies that could not be accounted for.

The only notable change occurred, obviously, in 2021-22, but these variants are explained by the reduction of international travel, and I would combine national travel as well, due to COVID.

[Translation]

The security environment for public figures is constantly changing, both in Canada and abroad, and the RCMP will continue to provide quality, professional protective services to designated representatives.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about this important issue. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[English]

**The Chair:** Wonderful, witnesses. Thank you very much.

We'll start with Kelly Block for six minutes, please.

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC):** Good morning, Chair, and thank you very much for the opportunity to ask some questions. I also want to thank our witnesses for joining us today, and I'm sorry I'm not there in person with you.

I want to say, at the outset, I am a monarchist. I truly do appreciate the role His Majesty's representative plays not only here in our country but abroad as well. However, I do believe the expenses incurred by the Governor General and her office must be transparent and able to withstand the scrutiny of parliamentarians as well as Canadians, so my questions are going to reflect that belief.

The first question is the following. What was the total number of days for this trip?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Mr. Chair, it is Stewart Wheeler speaking, and I would be happy to answer that for the honourable member. The trip took place from March 16 to March 23, 2022, so a total of eight days inclusive. The members will have noted there were expenses incurred during an advance visit earlier in December 2021.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Thank you very much.

What was the total cost for these eight days?

• (1120)

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** In the production of papers we have supplied to the committee, there are amounts for each ministry. The total cost of the trip is in fact \$1.147 million. For my part in Global Affairs, the total that was charged against the budgets allocated to the office of protocol was \$518,741.24.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** It was \$1.147 million. Does that include the advance trip?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Yes, it does, ma'am.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Okay, thank you.

I think I heard in your testimony that it is ultimately the responsibility of the Prime Minister to determine when and where the Governor General travels.

Can you, again, outline what the specific policy objectives of this visit to the Middle East were?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Mr. Chair and Madam member, I would be happy to review those.

There were three primary objectives. The first was to express Canada's sincere appreciation for the support that these three countries have all provided militarily and diplomatically to Canada in our operations in the region and beyond, particularly on complex operations such as the evacuations from Afghanistan. The second was to demonstrate the importance of those relationships at the highest level by engaging in in-person discussions and conversations with the leaders of those countries. Finally, it was to reinforce other priority issues for Canada such as regional peace and security.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** I'm aware of a report that was tabled in 2004. The OGGO committee tabled a report. There were six recommendations and, of course, this report did not receive a response from the government due to the dissolution of Parliament in May 2004, but they made some really important recommendations.

Are you familiar with that report from 2004?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** No. I'm not, but I would be happy to look at the recommendations and provide feedback to the committee on notice as to how those recommendations have been included in op-

erations and processes of the departments involved in this kind of travel.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** I will share with you one of the recommendations that I think—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mrs. Block, can I interrupt for a second? Can you raise your microphone up a tiny bit for our interpreters? Thank you.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** One of the recommendations that I think was fairly important that I will put on the table here today is the one that was to remove the constitutional exemption of the Governor General from reporting to Parliament.

Could you share with us your initial thoughts on implementing this change?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** I don't believe that is an area in which the office of protocol has a mandate or an official view, but I might turn to my colleague from Rideau Hall.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Thank you. I would appreciate that.

**Ms. Christine MacIntyre:** As Mr. Wheeler mentioned, I would be pleased to come back to the committee once I've had a chance to study more clearly the recommendations, but I can say that one thing our office has done since 2004 is produce and publish on our website an annual report that gives an overview of our activities and the costs involved in our department and our partner departments.

This is publicly available, and this is a practice that we undertook, I think, in response to that period in time. I believe that the 2004 appearance at the committee was in response to Governor General Clarkson's visits abroad, if I'm not mistaken, but I would come back to the committee with more information.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mrs. Block.

Ms. Thompson, go ahead for six minutes, please.

**Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. I really appreciate that you have come today. I think it's important. You have acknowledged transparency and accountability, and thank you for that. I do think this is an important conversation.

Ms. MacIntyre, I'll begin with you. Again, thank you for also recognizing that some of the costs we have seen are unacceptable.

To that end, could you please speak to the discrepancy between the information that you were able to provide in September when you came to the committee last and what we subsequently saw in media following that, where the food was more elaborate than what was indicated that day?

Could you speak to that discrepancy, please?

**Ms. Christine MacIntyre:** Absolutely.

Let me be clear. As I've said before, the costs of the catering were unacceptable. The comments made during the previous experience in September were based on my experience of being involved with official international visits over many years. I was giving an example of food that was served on the Middle East flight that was consistent with food that had been served on previous government flights that I had been on. I was not attempting to justify or normalize these costs in any way. I was trying to provide context to the committee about why, when learning about the costs of the visit, I was so surprised.

The OSGG has asked our partners from the air force and Global Affairs, who are responsible for this process and make decisions regarding menus and procurement, to do everything possible to find efficiencies in the costs that we can control. As the general mentioned at his previous appearance, there are a certain number of costs related to catering that cannot be controlled, and he can speak further to that. We've also asked them to raise flags when required. This is part of the improvements that have been made to the process since that time.

**Ms. Joanne Thompson:** Thank you.

I realize the work of the Governor General's office is incredibly important—and increasingly so, if that's even possible—in an increasingly polarized world, but in light of the challenges many Canadian families are facing today in terms of rising food costs and just general affordability....

Ms. MacIntyre and Mr. Wheeler, could you address that for Canadians in terms of the media release after that September committee meeting in terms of the cost, the role of the Governor General's office and the work that's happening in light of that perceived extravagance on a state visit?

**Ms. Christine MacIntyre:** Perhaps I can start by reiterating that the Governor General and her office are not involved in any way in the procurement or selection of the catering, but we have participated in a working group that has been set up by my colleague Mr. Wheeler and my colleague General Kenny. As the air force is responsible for the procurements, I would actually invite them to tell you about the work they have been doing, which we're very encouraged by and which I encourage them to continue as much as possible.

**Ms. Joanne Thompson:** Please go ahead. That was my next question. Thank you.

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Before passing it to the general to comment as well on the improved processes that we've put in place, I just want to reiterate that our office works with the offices that you see here to deliver and secure the logistics of Governor General travel abroad, because the Governor General plays an important role in international relations. When the government—the Prime Minister on behalf of the government—requests the Governor General to travel abroad, it is to achieve specific objectives and advance key messages that Canada is pursuing on the world stage and that Canadians can be sure are advancing Canada's objective of facing some of the global challenges that are having an impact here at home as well.

The office of protocol, for our part, is committed to transparency. As I mentioned, we routinely release, through the public accounts,

all of our spending and follow all Government of Canada financial procedures. While we work closely to deliver these visits, we are always able to improve our processes. We recognize that the system we had in place was not delivering the kind of oversight and control that Canadian taxpayers deserve, so we're here to assure hon. members that we are committed to improving it. In fact, we have put in place a number of improvements already.

What's really important for members is that we are empowering our teams now to work together to create a no-nonsense environment where they are routinely flagging any exorbitant costs put forward by caterers or other suppliers so that alternative choices can be made and so that we can make decisions to forgo standard elements that we may have taken in the past.

We are committed to identifying and implementing cost savings. We have been working together over the last couple of months—our teams—at identifying very specific outcomes that will change the variable parts that Ms. MacIntyre referred to, where we are able to control those costs.

I don't know, General, if you have some specifics you'd like to mention.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** I think that could be during the next round.

Thank you, Ms. Thompson.

Ms. Vignola, you have six minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Kenny, Mr. Wheeler and Ms. MacIntyre, when we saw each other in November, none of you were in a position to give us any specifics on the Governor General's expenses, other than the total cost, which was surprising. The next day or in the days that followed, the newspapers revealed exorbitant costs. They mentioned the equivalent of \$565 worth of ice, \$110 for 4 litres of apple juice and \$526 for lemons and limes.

Why weren't you able to tell us about this when the newspapers knew about it before we did? That's a little surprising.

**LGen Eric Kenny:** Thank you for your question.

[English]

In the intervening period since we met in September, we have looked at all the costs associated with catering specifically, to your question. There are five components that make up catering costs. I'll just go through them very quickly. The first one is the meal cost itself.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I'm sorry, but you are not answering my question.



How is it that the newspapers got the information before us, and even before you?

It seems to me that you should have known about it, but perhaps that's just my opinion. You should have been able to tell us before the newspapers knew. I don't understand how you didn't know, and the newspapers did. What's the process?

[English]

**LGen Eric Kenny:** Thank you for the question.

Some of the information was released as part of an access to information request, which was made available to those who requested the information. My role is to be as transparent as I can be to the committee about what I know at the time I am providing you with the information. Since we met, I have learned a lot more about the costs that go into catering. I'd be happy to share some of those details.

It was never our intention at all to deceive or to provide you with false information. It's just that some additional information has come out since then.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you.

Mr. Wheeler, in the documents we received, we see that it was necessary to send a team of 12 people in December 2021 to prepare for the trip to the Middle East.

Because I'm not familiar with matters of protocol, I wonder if it's not the role of embassies to do some of that preparation. Also, why did it take 12 people?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Thank you for your question.

With respect to high-level tours, preparatory trips are essential when we travel to host countries where official meetings with representatives are scheduled.

Representatives of the Protocol Office and the Office of the Secretary of the Governor General are present on these trips. The team also includes representatives of the Royal Canadian Air Force, which is responsible for planning flights for the official group. Also on the team are members of the RCMP, who meet with their counterparts responsible for high-level security.

These individuals are supported by our teams in the region. Those responsible for the tour have discussions with their counterparts in the host country.

• (1135)

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I can understand that the RCMP has to be present to have a look around, find spots that could be problematic or pose a danger to the Governor General and those with her.

Nowadays, it's wonderful, we have the technology. From a purely diplomatic and protocol standpoint, would it be possible to have virtual meetings? Do meetings absolutely need to be face-to-face?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Increasingly, early in the planning process, we're using virtual modes of communication to do many things that previously would've been done by email or on the telephone. This certainly helps us get ahead when we're planning trips like this.

On the other hand, when we organize a trip where several options will be presented on site by the embassies, the group will travel with the organizers to see the various options and get a feel for the distance travelled. They can then negotiate with the companies that will provide the services. Due to the complexity of certain tasks, it is necessary that discussions take place in person.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you.

When you are—

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm afraid that's your time.

Mr. Johns, we'll go to you for six minutes.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Thank you very much for being here and testifying today.

With inflation at levels not seen in decades, many Canadians have been forced to cut back on food. In fact, 1.5 million Canadians are using food banks, right now. We're also seeing growing distrust of our public institutions.

Against that backdrop, it's concerning to see public funds spent on high-end meals, like \$2,660 on beef Wellington, or extremely inflated items, like \$270 for sliced lemons or \$565 for ice cubes. Can you speak about how these expenses might breed distrust in our public institutions?

I'll start with Mr. Wheeler.

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Thank you, Mr. Chair and the honourable member.

When we spoke with you on September 22, we'd already begun some work identifying exactly what drivers were responsible for some of those costs, which we, too, found exorbitant and unnecessary. Our teams have been working closely with the Royal Canadian Air Force, and we've implemented the following cost efficiencies, which I will point out.

There will no longer be any choice of meal for passengers in the main cabin, which will produce significant reductions in overage for us, in terms of the total number of meals ordered for a flight. Meal selections will be sourced as is from caterer menus, with no requested changes. As we determined through this process—and we thank you for bringing these things to our attention—those discussions with caterers were causing undue increases, often without our knowing what the caterer was going to charge us for final changes, because of the nature of some of the catering restrictions we face.

We decided, as a policy, that snacks will be minimal. Soft drinks and snacks will be sourced in Canada—likely in Trenton—so we can take advantage of bulk purchases here and store them on the aircraft. We're not using catering services for those purchases, for example. Things that would normally be part of standard international air travel, such as ice and drink garnishes.... We'll be looking at all those costs, as well. Certainly, drink garnishes will be eliminated from service. As well, disposable cups will be used in the main cabin to minimize cleaning costs that we cannot control.

Those are among a number of changes already made and producing savings.

• (1140)

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I appreciate that. Were you aware of what the government would be charged for ice cubes and lemons? Was any effort made to negotiate or renegotiate these costs either before or after the trip?

**LGen Eric Kenny:** Thank you for the question.

Mr. Chair, I'll take that one.

The reality is that, with global catering services right now, it's quite difficult, as I expressed last time on September 22, to get quotes in advance of these catering contracts. As one example, we flew the Prime Minister, many governor generals and former prime ministers for the Queen's funeral to London. As we reached out to get catering costs, we were told that, for operational reasons, the caterer could not provide us those costs because of the high volume of people coming in at that time. In this particular case, we received the receipts and the costs after the fact.

That is not the policy we wish to use. We are working with all the catering companies. We ask them for quotes in advance, but we do not always get that, unfortunately.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I do appreciate that, sir.

Is the working group that has been established focused solely on controlling costs for in-flight catering, or is it looking at ways to control other travel-related costs like vehicle rentals and communications? I mean, there are other costs related to travel.

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** I'm happy to take that question.

The protocol office puts in place systems and communications with missions on the ground at the start of the planning of any visit. We arrange for our missions on the ground in the regions to provide standard processes for government procurement that include multiple competitive bids from suppliers for all hotels, transportation and other hospitality and services supplied. That process will continue.

Of course, in an era of increasing need to recognize the constrained finances of everyone dealing with inflation and other pressures on our budgets, this will continue to be an important thing at the top of the minds of our officers.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Thank you, Mr. Wheeler.

We'll go over to you, Ms. Kusie, for five minutes, please.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here.

[*English*]

**Mr. Wheeler,** does Global Affairs still complete country strategies at missions, with every mission completing their own country strategy?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Each mission has it as part of our annual planning process. There is an online tool you might recall called "Stratega". I think it was being tested when the honourable member was a member of our diplomatic corps. Yes, I do believe it's still an annual process through which overall strategies for each country are established by the mission, in discussion with headquarters.

• (1145)

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you very much for that response.

Is there a section specific to events and hospitality within the country's strategy, in supervised versions?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** I'm sorry. For events and hospitality to—

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** That's correct. In determining country strategies, you would then roll out the activities that you would have in mind to meet the strategies and then perhaps another line for events. I was just wondering if events and hospitality were a part of the country's strategy.

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** I haven't been involved in the strategic process for a number of years.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Okay.

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** From my recollection at post, there is the possibility, when seeking specific funds for specific activities, whether that's a public affairs activity or a trade promotion activity, to include costs related to events and hospitality within that planning, but the planning of high-level visits is not part of that planning.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Okay, thank you.

That was my next question. Do missions themselves share the costs of governors general visits?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** The cost of visits by high-level dignitaries, whether the Prime Minister—

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** That's correct—high-level individuals.

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** —or the Governor General, are borne by my office, and we release all of those figures through the public accounts.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Okay.

When the previous administration implemented the deficit reduction action plan, do you recall specifically what the implications were for the protocol department? For example, in Dallas, you removed 10% of the budget. Do you recall if there was something similar at the time?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** I would be happy to take that question on note. I wasn't working in protocol at that time, so I would be unable to say.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you.

Prior to the end of the fiscal year, is protocol or are missions able to make purchases or invest costs for the following years, to be used for hospitality or events in particular?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Funds that are allocated for a given fiscal year are designed to be used for that fiscal year. Through the monthly process of reviewing budgets, all divisions and directorates at headquarters track their spending with respect to how they're tracking toward the expected expenditures of the plan for that year, and if there are additional funds, they are released earlier in the year so that we meet revised targets and don't have the excess funds that, perhaps, you were referring to.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you.

Is there any aspect of head-of-mission performance that is tied to expenditure review?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Through the monitoring of the monthly budget allocations for a mission or for a bureau at headquarters, there is, at the seventh or ninth month—depending on the year—an attestation by the head of mission or the director general responsible for that budget, in which they commit to the proper planning and implementation of the budget figures that have been laid out for them. Coming within a certain percentage of that is part of what is included in the performance management agreements of all senior executives at Global Affairs.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kusie. You had three seconds to spare.

Mr. Housefather, we go to you for five minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I am going to come back to a question that was asked by Ms. Vignola, because I don't think I got an adequate answer to it. The last time this group of departments was here to talk about the expenses, you told us you didn't have the invoices, yet that very same day, later in the day, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation was able to deliver those invoices to newspapers.

Can somebody please explain how none of you were aware that your departments had already accumulated these invoices and responded to an ATIP request with the actual information?

• (1150)

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

On September 22, when I was here, what I stated was that I didn't know the detailed breakdown of the costs by meal. We did have the invoices at the time, and when you look at the invoices, you will see that some of them have breakdowns of the cost by meal and others just have an overall cost for catering with zero breakdown, so what I was trying to explain at the time was that it was difficult to provide an exact cost by meal and by location, so that information—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** If you had that information, sir, why did you not provide the invoices to the committee the day you appeared?

**LGen Eric Kenny:** It was that—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** If you had the invoices previous to your first committee testimony, why did you not provide those invoices to the committee, so the committee would have had the benefit of them? Why did you believe it was okay that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation received them before parliamentarians did?

**LGen Eric Kenny:** Thank you for the question.

At that committee, we were asked to provide that information on notice, which we did provide last month, for the committee to review. It had been previously subject to an ATIP as well, as you mentioned.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** I am asking if maybe somebody else can give a better answer to this. We have multiple departments here. I am sure all of you were equally embarrassed to see the information that you came to testify about in detail in the press with the information you couldn't provide to parliamentarians.

Has there been some accountability? Has there been some discussion between departments to go back to National Defence and ask them why this happened?

Mr. Wheeler, could you perhaps expand on that?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** We endeavour at all times when access to information material is being provided to requesters, whoever they may be, to fulfill the responsibilities under the Access to Information Act. When it's possible we do make efforts to consult among departments that are affected by, or have been involved in, events that are being referred to in an access to information request. As you will have seen, the invoices that were released under that access to information request were only part of the larger production of papers that the committee requested. As the committee was very generous with us in allowing us additional time for translation, because of the volume of detailed invoices, I think it's quite understandable that the details of all those invoices that later were released would not have been at any of our fingertips on the 22nd of September.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** I'll go to another question.

I believe it is unfortunate, when parliamentarians ask departments to come to answer very specific questions about a Governor General's trip, that there is information out there being provided to a third party before it's provided to the parliamentary committee that is asking for it. I don't think that's okay.

I'd like to come back to your comment, Mr. Wheeler, that now in the main cabin the menu is "as is".

Does the main cabin mean everybody on the plane, or is there a first-class cabin that would have a different meal plan?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** In fact, the main cabin referred to the majority of the people travelling on the plane. There is a cabin in the front of the plane where the Governor General or the dignitary being transported and their family members may be seated. With the procedures that we've set in place, we'll choose off the menu standard options. We will choose them based on cost and ensuring that we are meeting the dietary restrictions of principals and any passengers who we see having indicated. There will be a choice between two standard menu items for the principal passenger. Beyond that cabin, there will not be choice.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** I'm—

• (1155)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Housefather. We'll have to come back to you.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** No worries. I'm flabbergasted.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I think we share some of that, Mr. Housefather.

As we've done recently, I'm going to combine, if the committee is fine with it, the Bloc and NDP sessions into one five minute each.

You're up, Ms. Vignola, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to go back to preparations.

Did the 12 people who went to the Middle East fly with commercial airlines or did they have the same air service as the Governor General?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** People on preparatory trips travel with standard commercial airlines and follow all Treasury Board guidelines.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Do they fly business class or economy?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Based on the trip and travel, we follow Treasury Board guidelines.

In some cases, if the trip takes a certain number of hours and it's necessary for them to work upon arrival, people may travel in business class.

It's not always the case, however. It depends on ticket availability.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** With respect to this particular trip in December 2021, was it business class or economy?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** For the longer legs of the trip, such as Toronto-Qatar, people would normally have travelled in business class.

I can't speak for some of the people who are not from my office.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** When we met in November, we talked about a working group created to reduce travel costs for the Governor General. I mentioned to you that it wasn't the first time the

newspapers have reported surprising travel expenses for a Governor General. I told you I was disappointed a working group like this had not been set up long before that, so it would already be accustomed to watching expenses today.

How many times has the working group met since it was established?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Thank you for your question. That is now an important part of what we do.

The working group met several times during the summer before our appearance in September, to look at factors, among other things. After that, I couldn't tell you how many times it's met specifically, but I'd say there were dozens of meetings.

The general and I met with the group to have them present us with options, so that we could then approve the list of cost-saving measures I mentioned earlier.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** At the end of the day, which office is responsible for ensuring travel expenses are acceptable and reasonable? Is there a process for the flight attendant to say, maybe we don't need to serve Beef Wellington? Beef Wellington is far from ordinary. I've never had it myself, and I don't think it's the most popular evening meal for Canadians.

Is there anyone who can say, this makes no sense and we need to serve something else?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Thanks for that question, because it gets to the heart of what we were talking about today and before today.

We want all of our team members who work together to be prepared to ask questions, so that such exorbitant costs are systematically reported in every area.

At the end of the day, as chief of protocol, I'm responsible for sound management of the funds allocated to us to fulfill our mandate. In other departments, managers would have that responsibility.

• (1200)

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I'm going to ask you a very tough question: Quite frankly, if this hadn't come out in the media, would we be meeting today and would there be a review process?

As I said, this isn't the first time a Governor General's expenses have been called into question. If it hadn't made such big waves, would there really be a process under way?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** The important thing is that we all have a duty as public servants to ensure sound and transparent management of public funds. When we take on a new position and manage budgets, it's incumbent upon all of us to do that review. Yes, I would hope that we would have identified such exorbitant costs without them being brought to our attention, and that we would have taken appropriate steps.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you.

Ms. MacIntyre, when we saw each other—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

We will move on to Mr. Johns, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'm going to actually stay on that.

Mr. Wheeler, I think Ms. Vignola asked some pretty direct questions. My question is this: Do you believe that Canadians deserve more transparency about the activities and expenses of the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General? If so, how might that be achieved?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the honourable member for the question.

I can tell you that the office of protocol is committed to transparency and the sound management of funds, and everything that we spend for high-level visits is regularly released through public accounts, in addition to being requested through a variety of OPQs and access to information requests.

I'm very proud of the fact that our office is very transparent with the—

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Do you think you're going to do more now, after we've gone into this depth in this study, to ensure that the public has a better understanding of where those expenses are?

Getting back to Mrs. Block's question, she said that in 2004 the committee tabled a report with recommendations about the government's role in funding. However, there wasn't a government response because Parliament was dissolved.

I know you didn't read the report, but do you think there's value for this committee in re-examining this issue to make recommendations that reflect Canadians' expectations two decades later? Has anyone else read the report who may want to respond?

**Ms. Christine MacIntyre:** Mr. Johns, as I mentioned to Mrs. Block, we will be going back to that report from 2004 to look at those recommendations.

What I wanted to talk about regarding this kind of ongoing review of all that we do, is that, what we're trying to do, going forward, is to ensure that we don't wait for a report, a committee or something else to take a look at these things, that we continually review our processes, that we do that on an ongoing basis, that it becomes part of everything we do, and that we look at options that will not necessarily be the same response in each situation.

Just having those discussions, looking at ways to try to find efficiencies and developing a system where people are encouraged to raise flags are all part of what we are committed to doing, going forward.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay. I appreciate that. That's the answer we were hoping for.

I'm going to give my remaining time, as agreed, to Ms. Vignola. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** You have two and a half minutes, Ms. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much, Mr. Johns.

Ms. MacIntyre, when you came and testified before the committee on September 22, you said you had eaten something ordinary, which was eggs. Earlier I mentioned the famous Beef Wellington, which I think is far from ordinary—I don't know if it is for you. It also looks like they paid \$565 for a few pounds of ice cubes. As for the lemons and limes, you said they weren't putting them out anymore or getting them directly in Canada.

I also noticed that the cost for portable freezers was about \$3,100. I don't know if that's Canadian dollars, UAE dirhams or Kuwaiti dinars. There's quite a phenomenal difference between those two. One is worth 37 cents on the dollar, while the other is worth \$4.44 per dollar. I saw work was done for 173,000 dinars; one dinar is worth about 4.44 Canadian dollars.

Nothing ordinary about that.

From now on, how are you going to make sure it's ethically responsible?

They are accountable for the whole process, because they were caught red-handed. It's been a long time.

I don't doubt your dedication or professionalism. I just want to ensure that parliamentarians, who did not get answers before the media, and Quebecers and Canadians, who are tightening their belts, will never get a slap in the face like this again. In Quebec, 15% of the people rely on food assistance. I have needed those services in the past. I can tell you, you have to swallow your pride, and I'm not the proud type, so that gives you an idea of how difficult it is.

How are you going to ensure that this never happens again?

• (1205)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm afraid that's our time. Perhaps you'll have to get back to the committee in written form on that last question.

Mr. Barrett, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC):** Thanks, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I filed an Order Paper question and the response to that inquiry to the ministry triggered all of this. If that wasn't in your briefing notes, you're welcome. It is great to have the opportunity to have you all at committee today.

That OPQ response, which was submitted in April and brought this matter to light, caused us to examine this particular trip. I appreciate that some changes are being proposed and that some have been implemented. My question is about proactive transparency.

I appreciate that there will be mechanisms put in place to limit expenses. We heard in testimony today that the office of the Governor General is not in any way involved in the catering, but on the invoices it says that there are special requests for a sandwich—singular—for \$53. I would say that's an impressive sandwich. There's also a special request for salad for \$271. Having to eat a salad is one thing. Paying \$271 for that punishment is something else. These must be quite remarkable dishes.

In terms of the Order Paper question and the access to information request that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation discussed and released, it's important that we were able to get information through those means. What is the office of the Governor General prepared to do, on a go-forward basis, to proactively and transparently publish their expenses for trips like this, respecting, of course, security concerns and the individual privacy of the people involved?

For example, for members of the House of Commons, there are itemized disclosures of their expenses, published quarterly. Would it not be easier to put in place a system in which this is the practice for Rideau Hall, rather than to have to examine invoices and publish those and translate those as they come up and then have all of you folks, who do important work, appear at committee to discuss them, because that disclosure wasn't done?

• (1210)

**Ms. Christine MacIntyre:** Thank you for the question.

The costs of these visits are actually already released, as Mr. Wheeler has described, through public accounts and through the office of protocol, which is responsible for the procurement and the accountability of the contracts. That includes travel and many of the elements you've talked about today, sir.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** With respect, ma'am, the detail is lacking. Otherwise, we wouldn't have submitted an Order Paper question and we would not have seen the responses from the access to information request as revealed by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. The level of detail is lacking. That's where we found the unacceptable costs.

**Ms. Christine MacIntyre:** Sir, I would refer this to my colleagues from Global Affairs and the Royal Canadian Air Force. They are the contracting authorities and are responsible for these costs.

I will share the floor with my colleagues, sir.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** The question is about transparency.

**Ms. Christine MacIntyre:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** The expenses are incurred for the Governor General to execute her responsibilities. Her responsibilities are important. The detail that is lacking in the information that is available through public accounts is, as we have seen, not acceptable to the public. What steps are you collectively prepared to take so that, on an ongoing basis, these improved measures that you're taking to reduce costs are reflected in a publicly available, proactively disclosed document?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Thank you to the honourable member.

As Ms. MacIntyre has indicated, our standard practice currently is to proactively release all of the spending per visit for every visit

undertaken abroad by, and paid for by, the office of protocol. It does have a breakdown so that you can see the amount spent for accommodation, for transportation, etc. We will, of course, continue to do that.

As we've mentioned, the general and I have a committee that has been set up to look at the specific questions that were raised and for which we were able to see that the system in place wasn't sufficient for the oversight of some of those exorbitant costs related to catering. We have addressed those and will address them going forward. We'll continue to make those savings on behalf of Canadian taxpayers.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Mr. Barrett.

We go over to Vancouver and to Mr. Bains for five minutes, please.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for joining us. There's a lot of disturbing testimony here on some of these costs. I'm just as surprised as Madame Vignola on the beef Wellington. I've never even seen it except for maybe on TV somewhere. I'm a bit encouraged by the fact that there are some changes taking place and some actions being taken on eliminating some of these things.

My first question is for Mr. Wheeler. Can you confirm if there are post-trip reviews to determine how the final costs compare with pre-trip budget submissions?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Thank you very much for the question.

Yes. When all of the final invoices come in from the various Canadian missions abroad, from the various suppliers and contractors, and are paid by our office or by other ministries that are involved in the delivery of a visit, those are then recovered by the appropriate ministry in the appropriate budget. There is a final accounting of an entire visit. For those that are covered by the office of protocol, as I mentioned, those are proactively released through the public accounts. It does take, sometimes, a matter of months before all of those invoices and those various journaling among ministries happen.

Yes, we do look at the overall costs, and I approve the public proactive release of that under the public accounts.

• (1215)

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Just to continue a bit on that, after that review of those costs is done, has a cap ever been considered, such as a price cap on what should be set based on an acceptable average?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** The important thing to remember is that the Governor General is being asked, on behalf of the government, to achieve important foreign policy objectives by international travel. The amounts for any given visit can range quite considerably depending on the locations visited, the complexity of the visit and the level of the visit. It would depend on whether it's a working visit or a state visit and whether there's a delegation travelling with the Governor General, which often includes parliamentarians, ministers and prominent Canadian experts who are chosen to come and support the Governor General and assist in advancing Canadian priorities in a given country or location.

There are so many factors that it would be very difficult to suggest that an international trip by the Governor General would need to fall into a certain package. I can say that the overall costs are recovered by my office in an amount that is established by the Treasury Board and the federal budget. We work very hard to make sure we are managing soundly those funds, so that there are funds available to support the required transportation and visits abroad by those dignitaries.

While we have uncovered some exorbitant costs, which we hope to bring down in the catering section of the invoices that were released, I can reassure the honourable member and the committee that the overall costs of this visit were in line with similar costs for high-level visits of this nature in the past.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Thank you. My next question—

**The Chair:** I'm afraid that's your time, Mr. Bains.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** We have Mrs. Block for five minutes, please.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wheeler, in response to Mr. Johns' questions, you acquiesced to the need for more frugality during a time when Canadians are having to make very real and very hard decisions about how they are going to make ends meet.

I would suggest, and even expect, that this should be a goal of the government, not just during an inflationary crisis but always, to ensure that taxpayers are getting good value for the money that is being spent. I would think that should be the culture of a government, to ensure that it is spending Canadians' money wisely.

My colleague highlighted the special requests that were brought forward through an Order Paper question. I would also note that one of the items that was reported on was \$250 for one litre of orange juice. That is 1,000 millilitres so that is \$62.50 for one glass of orange juice. It would appear that the price of orange juice has increased by four times since 2012.

My question to you would be whether all people—staff, including the Governor General's staff—are subject to ATIPs.

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** I am happy to take the question. The question is whether all members of the delegation or the staff travelling are subject to ATIPs.

All public servants in our ministry—and I would not speak for other ministries because there may be security implications or other reasons—all protocol officers and officials of Global Affairs Canada are subject to ATIPs, yes.

• (1220)

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** It would perhaps be reported who made the special request for the \$53 sandwich, the 200-and-something-dollar salad or the \$250 litre of orange juice. Would we get that level of detail?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Thank you very much for the question. I think it gives me the opportunity to clarify a little bit the reference to special requests.

In our past appearance before the committee, we discussed the process whereby menus were chosen by the general's team and my team for various legs of a flight to ensure that the menus were appropriate for the length of the flight and that they met dietary needs, among other things.

In the past, standard options from menus of caterers would be adjusted to meet some of those requirements, and through this process, we have learned that the mere fact of going back and forth with a caterer who is doing specialized catering has resulted in increased costs with every adjustment.

As part of the ongoing working group, we have identified that as a specific driver, which we are eliminating from our processes. Going forward, we will be choosing standard menu items off of budget. We will be ensuring, where possible and where caterers are able to procedure it, that those options come with price tags on them. We will choose them to be cost-effective and make sure that no changes to those standard menus are sought to ensure we do not have those things going forward.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** I echo many of my colleagues' comments here this morning that hindsight is 20/20, and I appreciate that you've made decisions to ensure that you understand the costs that are going to be incurred before a trip is taken, not after a trip is taken.

Again, I think many Canadians, when they are planning a trip, need to understand the costs they are going to incur before they take the trip so they can make wise decisions about the trip itself.

I appreciate that and will end my time there, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Block.

Go ahead, Mr. Kusmierczyk, please, for five minutes.

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

I have been listening with tremendous intent and interest to the discussions here, and I appreciate all of the excellent questions that all of my colleagues around the table are asking. Those are the questions that Canadians are asking and want answers to.

I want to go back to the different legs of the journey. The trip begins on March 16, if I'm not mistaken. On March 16, the group takes off from Ottawa. I noticed that the first expense there on March 16 is a Tim Hortons expense for coffee. There are two take-12 coffees that were purchased for a price of \$45.18. That seems infinitely reasonable to me.

I want to ask whether those coffees were used on the flight. I'm just curious. Is that something that could be procured and basically brought onto the flight? Could I just get an explanation for that expense?

**LGen Eric Kenny:** I don't have the answer for you as to who used or drank that coffee but, yes, we can bring the Tim Hortons onto the flight, specifically to your question. It was the flight crew who went and purchased that, the flight steward.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** That seems very reasonable here, two take-12 canisters of coffee from Tim Hortons to bring on the plane.

The next expense that I see is, again, the flight from Ottawa to London, as I understand it. It looks like it is an overnight flight across the Atlantic. I see a food expense of \$3,689. I believe you had 46 people on that flight, if I'm not mistaken, including the guests, the staff and the crew, which works out to about \$80 per person. Again, I imagine that this is an overnight flight.

Can you also explain this? There is a \$2,000 fee for wet and dry stores. Can you explain that for me?

• (1225)

**LGen Eric Kenny:** Did you say, "wet and dry storage"?

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** It says, "wet and dry stores", \$2,093. You had about \$3,600 for meals, and then you had the additional cost of wet and dry stores of \$2,000. I just want to understand what that means.

**LGen Eric Kenny:** That would be things such as ice and other aspects to bring the food within, which is my understanding at this stage. I don't have the other specific details. I apologize.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Okay, but for the meals, it looks like it's \$3,600 for that leg of the flight, from Ottawa to London, which works out to about \$80 per person. I imagine that includes dinner and potentially breakfast on the flight over, but then we go to the third leg of the trip, which is the London leg. All of a sudden, we go from \$3,600 for meals to what I see, which is \$29,000 Canadian. That is what the cost was from London, the catering from London, England. That is about 15,000 pounds, and that is \$29,000 Canadian.

Can we sort of explain a little how we went from, again, ordering two Tim Hortons take-12 canisters and paying \$3,600 for food from Ottawa to London, to then, in London, all of a sudden, paying four times more: \$29,000? Can you explain that increase in cost for that leg?

**LGen Eric Kenny:** As you are highlighting, there are different costs depending on where we go. In many cases there are costs that we can control. In some cases there are costs that we cannot control. We're often found with only one caterer that's available that meets the standards we require and the health and safety requirements for those who are on board.

As per any cost, what we find is that there are five factors. There's the cost of the food, which is a protein, which is typically between \$23 and \$90 total. There's a tray set-up fee that goes on top of that, which is sometimes the same cost as the food. The tray set-up fee includes the bun, the salad that you would get and the small dessert that goes with it. Beyond that, there are food and

snacks, which, as we've highlighted, we are only going to be purchasing now in Canada moving forward.

There's also a component of what we call "overages". As described by Mr. Wheeler earlier, we're only buying a 20% overage at this stage. We used to buy a 65% overage. That gives that option for the front crew, as was mentioned, for the passengers. Then there are back-end fees that could be sometimes up to 20%. In this particular case, it was 50% of that particular leg that were back-end fees. Back-end fees are handling and delivery, they're storage, they're cleaning and disposal of international waste and they're taxes.

When you add all that together, all of a sudden it becomes a much larger bill, as you've described, so we're always looking at value for money and making sure that we're going to caterers who will provide the best value for money. I would also say, as highlighted by Mr. Wheeler, going forward, we're not going to be working with Global Affairs Canada on any changes to the menus that are offered by the caterers. That's really going to drive down, we believe, the prices, but there are certain things that we will not be able to control. Some of those things are the back-end fees I described and the tray set-up fees.

**The Chair:** I'm afraid that's your time, Mr. Kusmierczyk. We actually went over about a minute.

Ms. Kusie you have five minutes, please.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We've mostly been talking about food, so I'm just going to go back to some of the Library of Parliament questions, which I think were very worthwhile, which are related to food. I should also add that my colleagues have made reference to them, but no one has asked them specifically.

It says here that the Global Affairs invoice summary notes charges of over \$40,000 in vehicle rentals for a trip to Abu Dhabi that was cancelled, as compared to \$25,000 for rentals in Doha and \$17,000 for rentals in Kuwait City. Can you explain why the car rentals for a cancelled trip are higher than those in cities the delegation visited?

This one is particularly interesting to me because I actually thought that this was from section 3 of the public accounts, but now that I reflect upon it, I think that was actually an expense tied to National Defence as opposed to Global Affairs. I thought it was a good question anyway.

Please go ahead, Mr. Wheeler.



• (1230)

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** You make reference to costs attributed to the stop in Abu Dhabi. At the time the visit was first being planned and accounts were being set up within our SAP accounting system, a stop in Abu Dhabi had been envisaged in order to meet the president of the UAE. When the final program was finalized, the meetings with Emirati leadership were held in Dubai, not in Abu Dhabi. Therefore, we dropped the leg to Abu Dhabi, and all of the costs that had been for services retained there were transferred and used in Dubai. There were no sunk costs lost on a “cancelled trip” to Abu Dhabi. Simply, those transportation costs that were contracted with a service provider in Abu Dhabi provided those in Dubai as well.

The visit to the United Arab Emirates was longer than the visit to Qatar that you are referring to and that would also account for a difference in price between those two legs of the visit.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you for that.

I was trying to recall how sunk costs are budgeted or recorded. I'll have to go back to my books, I guess. It's the same thing I was trying to recall from the last round, the process for applying products with the accrual method.

I'll go on then to question nine from the Library of Parliament. It says that the National Defence invoices list roughly \$26,000 in satellite communications charges and Global Affairs' invoice list notes over \$10,000 in mobile charges for the advance visit. How do these costs compare to communication costs for other advance and official visits?

I will ask the second question at the same time, which is this: If there is a significant difference, what accounts for the discrepancy?

I know certainly in the House of Commons, when we're going overseas, we have the opportunity to go onto other more cost-effective packages, so what would be the reasoning behind these costs, then, please?

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Thank you very much for the question, honourable member. It allows me to clarify that precisely.

In an effort to reduce costs for communication and to keep our team and our principals connected to Canada and each other during a visit, one of the tools we use is called mobile pucks. They are a mobile Wi-Fi or a Mi-Fi, which we have in the office of protocol. We can reuse them in every visit in the future, and they allow us to avoid roaming charges, which many of us have noted can be very high, particularly when travelling internationally. They also allow us to make bulk purchases of cheaper SIM cards, which are then added to these Mi-Fi pucks.

On a number of invoices, you'll see Wi-Fi or mobile charges. That's what that refers to.

With respect to the question of comparability to previous visits, I don't have the level of detail for previous visits before me. However, I can reassure the honourable member that we look at the situation in each country and the destination based on what the roaming charges would be versus the cost of using the pucks that we have and taking them with us from Canada. That's always part of our effort to keep those costs under control.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Ms. Kusie.

Mr. Jowhari, go ahead, please.

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

Welcome to the witnesses. I'll probably start with Mr. Wheeler.

We talk about the costs of the trips for dignitaries and the Governor General. Are the costs when the Governor General is performing domestic visits comparable to the international visits?

• (1235)

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** Thank you very much, honourable member, for the question.

I'd have to defer that question to Rideau Hall, as the office of protocol is not involved in the Governor General's domestic travel.

**Ms. Christine MacIntyre:** Thank you for the question.

If I understand the question correctly, it's whether the costs for domestic travel within Canada are comparable to international costs. I would say that costs are dictated by the nature of the specific type of visit.

Within Canada, the Governor General visits communities across the country upon invitation to visit bases and to recognize Canadians for their efforts—both civilian and military—across the country, and would not typically take an Airbus or a large group of people. It's a small group that accompanies her, and it's all done within the budget of the Governor General's office for these particular visits, so I wouldn't say there's necessarily a comparison there.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** We cannot compare the domestic costs of the Governor General doing business with the international, because there are different players involved.

**Ms. Christine MacIntyre:** There are different players. There are different levels of security. My colleagues could speak to that.

There are partners we work with when we're participating in these different activities. There are not as many ceremonial elements. When the Governor General's conducting a state visit, there are certain protocols that need to be followed. When the Governor General is visiting communities, she is greeted there in a very different way.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** By their nature, the overhead costs associated with planning the Governor General's domestic travel are much lower than the overhead costs of the Governor General.... I'm looking at the number of witnesses we have. We have five departments coming to present their testimony today for an international trip that happened. I'm looking at it and I'm saying, yes, we're looking at the food costs and we're looking at the transportation costs.

What kinds of overhead costs has the group of five...? I'll call you that now. Has the group of five looked at the overhead costs and the complexity of planning these trips, and whether the ratio of the overhead costs to actual costs is justified?

**Ms. Christine MacIntyre:** Perhaps I can start by saying that diplomatic travel is a vital component of a country's international engagement strategy. The Governor General travels only at the request of the government, but the decisions with regard to these visits must always reflect the high standards of stewardship. We're all in agreement with you there.

These visits have specific objectives in place to try to advance Canada's international strategy. Mr. Wheeler has spoken to you about that.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Ms. MacIntyre, I appreciate that. I'm trying to make the point here that, when it comes to the total cost, there's an aspect of the cost that has to do with the overhead cost, setting aside the execution cost of this. I don't think that we as a government have any idea of how much that overhead cost is.

I don't know how many hours each member of your department spends planning this. If you multiply it by the average hourly rate of a public servant, does it come to \$30,000? Does it come to \$50,000? I don't know. It probably wouldn't be a bad idea for your department to also look at that.

I only have about 30 seconds. Are we setting up standards for international travel based on the category of the expense? Do we say that from now on, going forward, this is the category of spending, for example, for fuelling or for food, and that if it's for a VIP person, it's this much, and for individuals, it's that much?

Are any of those being set, or are the budgets developed when we ask them how much it's going to cost, so that we take it without challenging it and developing a budget?

• (1240)

**The Chair:** Give just a brief answer, please.

**Mr. Stewart Wheeler:** What we're putting in place is an ongoing system where we're constantly looking for those savings.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir.

Witnesses, thanks very much. I do have one question for you, and I want to quote Ms. Block. She talked about hindsight being 20/20. I think this is probably the third or fourth time in OGGO or with other departments that we've faced this moment of hindsight being 20/20 and nothing seems to change. I think that's been reflected in a lot of the comments here today.

I wonder if each of the departments represented today would put in writing and submit to the committee, step by step, what your plan of action is in plain, basic language, please, not bureaucratese. What are departments going to do to ensure that in one year, five years or 10 years, there's not going to be another OGGO committee saying 20/20 again, and that we're actually going to stop this issue from recurring. I would appreciate that.

Colleagues, unless there's anything else, we will adjourn.

Thank you, everyone. The meeting is adjourned.

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