



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Board of Internal Economy

BOIE • NUMBER 001 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

TRANSCRIPT

Thursday, October 19, 2017

—
Chair

The Honourable Geoff Regan

Board of Internal Economy

Thursday, October 19, 2017

• (1120)

[English]

Hon. Geoff Regan (Speaker of the House of Commons): I call the meeting to order.

Good morning, everyone.

Of course, this is a meeting of the Board of Internal Economy of the House of Commons. It will be televised, so the media will have access to the television feed from the House of Commons.

[Translation]

We have received the minutes of the previous meeting. Does anyone have any comments about them?

[English]

Are there any issues with the minutes of the previous meeting?

Unless I see any, we'll go on to business arising from the previous meetings.

Not seeing anything so far in that regard, we'll go on to number three, which is the parliamentary precinct long-term vision and plan. We have two people to present to us on this issue today.

[Translation]

Susan Kulba is the senior director of real property and senior architect for the House of Commons. She is responsible for managing the real property portfolio, as well as long-term vision and planning for Digital Services and Real Property.

[English]

Rob Wright is the ADM—or the assistant deputy minister, for those watching on television who might not know what ADM is—of Public Services and Procurement Canada's parliamentary precinct branch. Rob is responsible for implementing the long-term vision and plan to restore and modernize the buildings and grounds of Parliament Hill. His responsibilities also include providing accommodation for the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office, as well as managing all the buildings on the north side of Sparks Street, including retail and commercial space.

These are a couple of busy folks.

Thank you very much for being here.

We'll let you go ahead, please, Ms. Kulba.

[Translation]

Ms. Susan Kulba (Senior Director, Architecture & LTVP Program Management Directorate, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We are here today to provide an update on long-term vision and planning.

[English]

We'll be providing the board with an update on the progress and giving you a view of what's upcoming in direction.

We'll start with an overview of the program and talk about the progress and achievements to date. We'll give you a status of the major work, namely on the West Block, and we'll have a short video for you which will give you a status on the construction on site and we'll inform you of the next steps.

[Translation]

Mr. Rob Wright (Assistant Deputy Minister, Parliamentary Precinct Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you, Ms. Kulba.

Good morning, Mr. Chair and committee members.

The long-term vision and planning is intended to restore and modernize the Parliamentary Precinct in order to support parliamentary operations effectively and preserve the heritage of Canada for all Canadians.

Public Services and Procurement Canada is working with the House of Commons to update the vision, to ensure that investments in this program and its entire strategic direction continue to support Parliament.

All major projects continue to respect construction sites and the budget. The most complex and risky work has been completed on West Block and the Visitor Welcome Centre, which should be operational for the fall 2018 parliamentary session. Centre Block will then be vacated, and restoration on it can begin. Maintaining our speed is essential to avoid the risk of system failure and to limit costs.

[English]

The long-term plan in collaboration with parliamentary partners has been all about thinking big, starting small, being flexible, and sticking with it. With that, we've built momentum, expertise, and a foundation of success together.

Over the past several years, since the completion of the Library of Parliament in 2006, 21 major projects in a row have been completed on time and on budget. Several awards have been received for the results: notably for 180 Wellington, the Sir John A. Macdonald building, as well, of course, as the Library of Parliament. This work is creating significant jobs, both in the local economy...but also creating a national footprint. Today about 1,400 people are working on these projects, the West Block creating 5,000 jobs in addition.

Jobs, yes, but the way we're doing them is also to leverage innovation, to work with universities and colleges to ensure there are apprenticeship programs. For example, the masonry work on the West Block is the largest apprenticeship program carried out in North America with a good blend of both male and female apprentices. Both aspects are the largest in Canada.

We're on track to create a sustainable and accessible Parliament for parliamentarians, Canadians, and international visitors. Where are we now? You can see a chart that compares progress on the West Block, the Visitor Welcome Centre, and the Government Conference Centre, and the scale of the projects are all different. The take-away is we're all about at the same point in those projects coming to completion. We've been meeting all the milestones along the way and we continue to track to meet major milestones going forward.

There is growing confidence as we move forward. These projects are on time and on budget, and we will be ready to support the House of Commons and the other parliamentary partners in making the move from the Centre Block to the West Block. As I said, most of the high-risk work is completed. Of course, there is still lots of work to be done and we'll show you a virtual floor that will give a bit of an *aperçu* of where we are on the West Block today, but again what was considered much of the complex work, such as the chamber, is ahead of schedule. We're now down to electrical and IT and interior finishes and things are moving well. There is still lots of work to do. There are still risks; project management is all about risk management, but things are tracking well.

• (1125)

Ms. Susan Kulba: Given that the scheduled date for substantial completion of construction is May 10, it's imperative that we keep the momentum going over the next seven months. The House of Commons and PSPC are working together to maintain the momentum as my colleague Rob has indicated. We're advancing certain areas of work as we can and we're doing advanced testing where possible and we're leveraging some of the lessons learned from the former projects to make sure the momentum is being kept.

We've developed a robust governance process whereby we have senior management involvement to enable quick decisions and keep open communication and essentially address any issues that arise very quickly.

Some of the ways we look at advancing construction work are by creating mock-ups. The photograph on the left is a mock-up of an MP's office. Once that's carried out, the workers are able to view that and understand the expectation of the rest of the offices in the building, and by doing so that helps keep the progress going smoothly. On the right there is an example of the new gallery seating for the chamber, and the mock-up there enabled us to test the

functionality in advance and to look at how we integrate the technology in those seats.

Another thing we're working on... As you can imagine, the chamber is an imperative part of the new legislative space and so part of that is making sure it's very functional, and part of that is the acoustics. We've been working closely with PSPC through the design to make sure all the computer modelling has achieved the acoustic results we're looking for, and to date it's showing that it should exceed the standard. We're going to implement some physical tests, because acoustics are dependent on the built environment and the people within it. We'll be carrying out those tests starting in December and then doing them in the interim as the chamber construction progresses through February with the final test in March 2018.

• (1130)

Mr. Rob Wright: As I mentioned, project management is essentially risk management. As my colleague Susan indicated, the combination of mock-up rooms and a fairly robust quality assurance program, which has involved benchmarking with other parliaments facing similar challenges, visiting fabrication plants, and doing advance testing, puts us in a very solid position where we've reduced risk significantly. We are ready to support the House in making this move.

What we will do right now is present a bit of video that walks you through the West Block. This was taken approximately a month ago. Things change on a daily basis, given that there are around 700 people working there on a daily basis, but this gives you a good sense of where we are now.

[Video presentation]

Ms. Susan Kulba: We'll just inform you of the next steps.

As mentioned earlier, the acoustic testing will begin in December. Then we'll follow up with commissioning and testing to support the opening of the buildings. We are further developing the occupancy planning strategies, which include various scenarios and contingency plans. We'll be returning to the board later this fall with a business case for operational funding based on the impacts of operating a new building.

In the spring, we will be returning with an update on the construction progress again and looking for an approval on the occupancy strategy and move date. We will also return in the future with a further update to the LTVP with PSPC.

Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much.

Are there any questions or comments?

Murray, go ahead.

Mr. Murray Rankin (House Leader of the New Democratic Party): I just want to say, congratulations, and it was an excellent presentation.

I have two questions. I'll start with the one about greenhouse gases, which you referred to in your presentation. It said that you are on track to reduce them by 80% of the 2006 levels by 2030, and that you have already reduced them by 28%. I just want you to elaborate a bit on how you think you can achieve those and how you know you are on target at this early stage.

Second, does that include the construction implications for greenhouse gases, what you have included in that metric?

• (1135)

Mr. Rob Wright: I'll unpack that a little bit for you.

One of the major drivers of achieving that 80% reduction will be the modernization of the central heating and cooling plant, which is being completed. That's essentially the district heating and cooling for the entire parliamentary precinct, as well as a number of other buildings in the downtown core, which will shift us to clean energy. That's an important driver.

Within the individual buildings, I'll give you a sense of the things being done. You mentioned construction. We have an 80% target of diversion from landfills. We're exceeding 90%. When we do deconstruction, with the Wellington Building, for example, we achieved 97% diversion from landfills by recycling elements, either within the projects or to use them in road construction, etc.

We've also integrated a number of sustainable elements. Some of the most important, of course, would be more modern mechanical and electrical systems, smart building technology, green roofs, green walls. Solar panels on the Wellington Building would be another example. The windows are much more energy efficient. There's an array of elements we are putting in the individual building projects to make them more energy efficient, and then the supply of energy is also becoming much cleaner.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Pablo, and then Mark.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Chief Government Whip): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I had the opportunity to visit West Block three times, and I must say it's very impressive.

However, you talked about risk factors. It seems that some still exist, and there may still be surprises. What are the risks or surprises that could prevent it from being ready on time? And what would happen if it wasn't ready in time?

Mr. Rob Wright: These are really the important questions today.

Generally speaking, there are three main risks.

[*English*]

Susan indicated the acoustic testing. The chamber has to work for the House of Commons to function, and we are very aware of that. That is really why we're doing this staged testing of the chamber. It's important to note that the standard, the baseline that we'll be testing against, is significantly enhanced from the current performance of the Centre Block chamber.

The modelling that we've done with international experts and in partnership with the House of Commons is significantly above the standard. We feel quite confident we're going to be able to achieve those standards. Of course, the proof is always in the pudding. Doing that testing will be very important.

The second, of course, would be changes. Changes to a project especially at this time have an impact on cost and schedule. Evolving security can always be one of those elements that can cause a driven change at this point. We don't anticipate any there, but that, of course, is a risk.

Capacity is always a risk, especially in the private sector. We're working very closely with the suppliers to ensure the capacity is there. The number of electricians, plumbers, and all of those things are critical to continuing to hit all of these milestones.

Those would be the three baskets of risks I would see at this point.

• (1140)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I had asked two questions, Mr. Speaker. The second one was, what if it's not ready on time?

Ms. Susan Kulba: We're looking at various occupancy scenarios. We have a contingency plan should unknown risks arise that we cannot manage during that period of time. We're looking at various scenarios for move dates.

Hon. Geoff Regan: It seems to me the obvious one is that if we weren't ready to do this next summer, it would have to probably wait, I presume, until the following summer, because the period you have during December and January is brief, and obviously, in 2019, the period would be a bit longer. Hopefully, it'll be ready in time for next year.

Mr. Rob Wright: I would add that we have a great working relationship with the House and the other parliamentary partners, and that collaboration is really critical at this point.

My confidence and the confidence of my team is growing, so rather than seeing that risks are increasing, we're seeing risks diminishing over time. My confidence is growing the closer we get, which I think is a very important thing.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Before I go to Mark, if you don't mind, the other thing is that if we had a major problem in this building.... We have very old water pipes and wiring, for example, and the asbestos is not an urgent, right-now problem, but we do have to deal with it. The pipes could theoretically cause a major leak somewhere, which would mean we'd have to move out of the House of Commons structure. If the West Block wasn't ready, we would end up probably at the Sir John A. Macdonald building, which is a nice building, but it's not ideal for this purpose, so we'd have to adjust.

As I understand it, those are the options.

Mark.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chief Opposition Whip): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was glad to hear, Mr. Wright—and the Speaker will be happy to know—that there will be less noise in the new chamber.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I'll believe it when I see it.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Yes.

My question pertains to page 6 of the presentation. The chart shows that the West Block is about 90% complete. I know our primary concern is what's going to happen with the House of Commons on the West Block side, but if the Conference Centre is not done, we can't vacate, I assume.

Can you explain to me a little further how 65% is the same as 90% for the West Block?

Mr. Rob Wright: Absolutely.

This graph takes one particular slice of progress, and this is really the “spend” progress. The real thing there is that the scale of the Government Conference Centre is much smaller than the West Block. I have equal confidence, if not more confidence, with the Government Conference Centre. They're both tracking almost identically. They're both meeting their annual and monthly targets.

This is one slice, and that one slice distorts it just a bit because it's the scale. In fact, the Government Conference Centre really started in 2014, whereas the West Block started in 2011, so there are other considerations in there, but they're neck and neck.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Bardish.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Thank you for the information. My question is just to make sure I am understanding it correctly. Will the furniture currently in place be reused and sent over? I believe it is going to be.

Ms. Susan Kulba: The chamber furniture, the centre aisle and some of the desks, will be moved into the new chamber. We're supplementing with some additional desks. We have the 30 new members, so those desks are currently being manufactured by the House of Commons trade shops.

All the heritage collection that exists in Centre Block will also be moved. Some new furniture will supplement that.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Except for the Speaker's chair, right? We'll come back to that.

Ms. Susan Kulba: Of course. We are using an existing heritage chair, but not the current one from the chamber.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Am I supposed to rhyme off all my questions at one time?

Hon. Geoff Regan: No.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Okay.

How much time are we anticipating it will take for the move of that furniture and the full set-up?

Ms. Susan Kulba: Currently, what's scheduled is that some of the furniture will start to move in June, stuff that's not being used, but then all the furniture that's currently being used until the end of the parliamentary session will start once the House recesses—at the end of June 2018, over the summer—so that you'll be operational in the West Block for September 2018. The moving of people is likely to be scheduled from mid-August to mid-September.

• (1145)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: In regard to the acoustic testing, and I know it's quite a strenuous activity, are we looking at diversity of abilities and accessibilities for people to make sure we'll all be considered, for example, people with hearing impairment, visual impairment, and so forth?

Mr. Rob Wright: Accessibility is a key component of these projects, including accessible spaces in the gallery seating, Braille signage, contrasting strips on stairs, accessible offices within the West Block. All the public spaces will be fully accessible.

Of course, there are constraints in heritage buildings such as the West Block, but we are pushing on these projects to meet, and we aspire to exceed, sustainability and accessibility codes and policies in all of these buildings.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: My last comment is that I love to hear the confidence that we have and that everything is on track, but we always have to be aware of the risk in case something else happens.

If we are considering other options, as I'm sure some of your time is spent, it's to consider those accessibilities always. At least I think it's important that we really do bring ourselves into the 21st century.

In regard to future projects, and I know this is way further down the line, what is the vision for the chamber moving to the West Block, and then after we come back to Centre Block, what will happen with that space?

Mr. Rob Wright: That will be decided in partnership with the House of Commons, of course, in terms of what are the functional requirements.

What I can say is that it was designed and is being constructed with flexibility in mind. If there's a need for additional committee space, that can be densified for committee space. If there is a desire to have that as a broader type of conference area, it could be that or other options that could be put on the table in collaboration with the House.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Even MPs' offices, I suppose.

Ms. Susan Kulba: The original plan, which is quite old at this point, from 2001 envisioned that this would be converted to two committee rooms. However, it's been many years since that decision was taken. During the planning of the next use of the West Block we would return to the board with options and requirements as generated at that time.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Pablo, and then Candice.

[Translation]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I have a practical question to ask since all our staff are here.

What will happen during this period? Will there be a period of uncertainty during which we will be left without an office? We are moving offices and furniture, and that involves a lot of people.

[English]

Ms. Susan Kulba: Typically, we'll organize the move such that it would be over a weekend. You shouldn't have that much disruption. It would be similar to an election move, only we are moving some of the furniture so that's a little bit more than we usually do. We would stage it so that we're doing it not to disrupt your operations whatsoever.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Okay.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Candice.

Hon. Candice Bergen (House Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is actually similar to Pablo's.

With the number of offices that we have now in Centre Block, will we have exactly the same number of offices or should our whips begin to prepare for some of the offices that are occupied in Centre Block needing to be occupied in a different location other than West Block?

Ms. Susan Kulba: For sure, there aren't as many offices in the West Block. Yes, the whips' assistants have been briefed. We'll be working with them to relocate some of the ministerial suites to the Confederation Building and the Justice Building prior to the moves to the West Block.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Okay.

My other question was regarding the completion.

When looking at the video, there were a lot of nice things to see, but it did look like there was a lot of unfinished work still to be done. At what point was that video made?

Mr. Rob Wright: That was made approximately one month ago.

Progress moves quickly, especially at this stage in the project when you get to interior finishes. Of course, there is work to be done. It's not ready to occupy tomorrow. But over the next 10-plus months, we feel that's sufficient time to bring this to a complete operational building.

• (1150)

Hon. Candice Bergen: All right.

That was my next question.

I know it's difficult, but I think we would prefer to know if there was a possibility that we would not be prepared for next summer because, as the Speaker said, if we don't do it in the summer of 2018, it is almost unrealistic to do it over the Christmas break in 2018. That would mean 2019, which is quite a ways away.

Should we be preparing for that, or would you say that the probability is greater that we will be able to finish on time and get moved in next summer?

Ms. Susan Kulba: We do have contingency plans in place. We will be returning to the board at the end of March after all the acoustic testing is done and we feel close enough to make a call on the construction completion because the substantial completion is mid-May. By the end of March we'll be here again to advise you on the progress and ask for your approval either to go or no go.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Do you mean you're not going to give us a guarantee?

Murray.

Mr. Murray Rankin: That was essentially where I was going.

At that next meeting of BOIE in March when you're back, we will probably have a go or no go choice to make?

Ms. Susan Kulba: Correct.

Mr. Murray Rankin: And you'll be giving us the information, and we hope that Mr. Wright is correct and the risks have been attenuated.

I was so pleased that you won an award for your heritage work that you did at 180 Wellington. It's a spectacular building. But it has been a year now. I want to know if there are any lessons or things that would help you on the West Block project that you learned from that experience.

Mr. Rob Wright: Actually, between the Library, 180 Wellington, and the Sir John A. MacDonald building, we've together received about 25 international, national, and local awards, so the quality of the results are being recognized, which is great. It's a team affair.

There are lots of lessons learned, and a critical element of success is actually kind of paying forward those lessons learned. What we're focused on right now are lessons learned from the end stages of projects and how we can collaborate and work internally with our operational people, have other contracts in place that can pull up some of the slack so that deficiencies and adjustments to the building can be made. It's essentially like a SWAT team type of approach. With all of that coming forward, my message, to kind of reiterate it again, is a message of confidence that we'll be ready.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Great.

One of the things that was mentioned in the video was technology in the seats and the gallery. It seems to me that if I were sitting at home in my living room in Nova Scotia watching that, I might wonder why you need technology in seats. We know why, but why don't you explain that a bit?

Ms. Susan Kulba: The technology in the gallery seating is really about the language interpretation, so all visitors, either English or French, will have access to what's spoken in the chamber in the language of their choice.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

On the acoustics, I think in the video, when we saw the pillars in the chamber that hold up the roof and are kind of like trees with diagonal branches coming off them, I saw a fabric there. Obviously, that must be one of the key elements. Are there other kind of elements of the acoustic solutions?

Ms. Susan Kulba: Yes, many things contribute to acoustics. Sometimes it's the shape of the room. It could be the fabric. The panels are a very key element in that case. Carpeting, people—people absorb sound—all these things together are calculated and generate the actual acoustical values that we design to.

Mr. Rob Wright: To add, Mr. Speaker, on the acoustics, the acoustic testing that will begin in December will be done in a number of stages. That will be done with the room at its most bare state, so we would anticipate that as furniture, soft seating, gets added in, the acoustic performance will improve as we move forward as well.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thanks very much.

I guess we'll go now to the next item, number 4. First will be the 2016-17 audited financial statements, and after that, the supplementary estimates (B) for fiscal year 2017-18.

We have with us for that purpose.... We'll give him a chance to get to his seat here, and thanks very much to the previous folks.

[*Translation*]

Daniel Paquette is the chief financial officer for the House of Commons.

Thank you for being here. The floor is yours. Go ahead when you're ready.

• (1155)

[*English*]

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

I'm pleased to be here today to present the audited financial statements for the fiscal year ending March 2017. These financial statements present only one of the forms of financial reporting that we disclose to the public. We also have the report to Canadians, the public accounts, and the members' expenditure reports. We did retain the services of an external accounting firm, KPMG, that completed the audit and issued an unqualified opinion. This confirms that the financial statements properly reflect the activities of the House and that management maintains the systems of financial management and financial internal controls throughout the year. I also want to mention that the auditors had no other findings that could have required us to make any corrections or adjustments to our financial statements or changes to our financial process. To me, this is a clear validation of the great work of our staffs since this was also the first full year with our new financial statements.

These financial statements are prepared in accordance with the Canadian public sector accounting standards, which is different from the public accounts or even from our quarterly management reports. Let me point out some of these differences from the audit financing. In these statements we look at costs that are recognized when they are incurred. Tangible capital assets are amortized over their useful lives. Service benefits are recognized as earned during the year as opposed to charged against the authorities upon disbursements, and service provided without charge to the House by other government departments are also included.

I'd like to take a few minutes to present some of the highlights of these financial statements.

I will start with the statement of financial position, which provides the balance of our assets and liabilities as at March 31. These assets include our accounts receivable, our inventories, and our tangible capital assets. The liabilities include our estimates, like the future cost of employee benefits such as our severance and our sick leave benefits and the amounts payable at March 31 for salaries and to our suppliers.

As for the statement of operations and net financial position, it shows the net cost of operations, which we have seen fluctuate from year to year depending on various activities that can occur. Some of these events can be significant if projects are approved, if it's an election year, or when there is a change in the number of members sitting in the House.

The main reasons we look at the trends of costs of operations going up between 2015-16 and 2016-17 is that 2015-16 is lower than normal due to the fact it was an election year. In 2016-17 we see the full impact of the 30 new MPs and their constituency offices as a result of electoral boundary redistribution.

To get to some of the specifics of our expenditures, salaries and benefits did decrease by \$2.5 million compared to 2015-16, but that is mainly due to the decrease of \$20.9 million in severance benefit payments made in 2015-16, more specifically the amounts pertaining to members and their staff after the election. This was offset by the increase of \$17.5 million for salaries and benefits for the additional staff in the 30 members' offices as a result of electoral boundary redistribution. Economic increases were also approved for a total of \$1.1 million for several House administration employee groups.

The variance in accommodation is all due to the new facilities, Sir John A. Macdonald and 180 Wellington, which were opened. These costs are valued at about \$8.3 million. Transportation and communication increased by \$8.7 million, mainly due to the increased committee-related travel, in addition to the trends we see as a result of the election year and the new members in 2016-17.

The \$1.7 million increase in rental is mainly due to the increasing cost of licence and maintenance agreements and our office equipment rental.

Professional services has increased by \$6.5 million. This is mainly due to the consulting expenses for various initiatives that are presented in our House administration strategic plan 2016-17. Some of these initiatives are the strengthening of our IT security posture for the organization, the implementation of the mobile work environment for members and House administration, the renewed physical space as part of the long-term vision plan for the parliamentary precinct, the enhanced emergency management and security approaches, and the replacement of our human resource management system. In this category there was also the increased hospitality expense resulting from the increased activity of committees. Utility materials and supplies increased by \$4.9 million. The increase here is mainly due to the printing activities compared to the election year and the increase in food-related costs due to the increase in sales.

• (1200)

Our information increased by \$2.9 million, and as expected with more members, we saw an increase in advertising and printing and communication services costs.

Other categories did not vary significantly. We will be posting on our website these financial statements at the end of this meeting.

I am open to any questions you may have relating to the financial statements.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mark.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The increase of nearly \$5 million in consulting expenses in professional and special services, is that one time? Would you expect to see that decrease, or is that going to be an ongoing increase we should expect to see year after year?

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: I think we have many new initiatives in our strategic plan. Some of this is not permanent funding, but other projects will contribute to probably maintaining a significant portion of these specialty services.

Mr. Mark Strahl: That will be the new normal, would be your expectation?

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: I think it will fluctuate with projects, a little up and down, but it will be higher than what it's been in the past.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Okay.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Pablo.

[Translation]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: The increases for 2015-16 and 2016-17 are largely due to the addition of 30 MPs.

We truly saw the real impact of adding these MPs for 2016-17. It can be assumed that subsequent budgets will be similar. We won't be in the \$400,000s anymore, but still around \$525,000 or a little more, given the addition of these members.

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: The addition of 30 new MPs, their new constituency offices and their employees caused a significant increase, which set a new standard. In addition, our strategic plan, which was put in place to try to modernize the administration and ensure the advancement of our parliamentary institution, will also

help to keep costs slightly higher for the duration of this strategic plan, provided through 2019.

[English]

Hon. Geoff Regan: Murray.

Mr. Murray Rankin: I have a couple of questions drilling down into two categories that you presented.

The first is accommodation and the second is information. I'd like you to spend a bit more time teasing out what the \$8.3 million in accommodation increase represents. What's in there?

On the second, I noticed in information there's a \$2.9-million increase, quite a significant year-over-year increase in information. I understand what you suggested in terms of advertising, but I don't know why it's that high and whether this is a continuing increase or just one time only.

Those are the two questions I have.

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: If I look at the accommodation, the \$8.3 million is all due to the costs relating to the Sir John A. Macdonald and 180 Wellington buildings. Also to note is the accommodation costs for all the buildings we occupy are managed by Public Services and Procurement Canada. This service is actually provided to us without charge. They need to calculate the actual value of that service provided to us. Since our financial statements are prepared in accordance with the Canadian public sector accounting standards, we must include the cost of those accommodations in these financial statements. They don't show up in our public accounts because it's not a charge against our authority. The whole \$90 million you see, that is the charge for all of the accommodations, the buildings, that are operated by Public Works in the precinct.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Just on that point, then, could I suggest that it's a one-time expenditure? You talked about Sir John A. and 180 Wellington. Does that mean this will be recurring? Will the number be that high going forward?

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: The increase this year is all due to those two buildings, and we didn't have those buildings fully operational for the full fiscal year, so I expect that for the next fiscal year, we'll see it go up, and then it will remain stable.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Then it will be more or less steady-state after that.

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: That's right.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Okay, talk about the information item, please.

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: When we look at the information, it is the advertising that seems to attract... With the 30 new members, they are allowed to spend up to 10% of their budget in advertising, so we will see the increase in their operating budgets having an impact on that. The majority of that fluctuation is all due to the 30 new members and the activities that they are contributing to promoting their parliamentary functions.

• (1205)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

The next thing we'll talk about is supplementary estimates (B).

Mr. Paquette.

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: We're seeking your approval for the House of Commons supplementary estimates (B) for the current year, the 2017-18 fiscal year. We've provided in your package a detailed list of all the items that make up the \$30.9-million ask. All the amounts have either been previously approved by the board at various meetings or have been subject to discussion at the board meetings themselves.

The total amount consists of permanent funding of \$10.7 million to help manage the increase in various activities and services that include such things as the additional funding for the committee and association activities, the modernization of the House of Commons web presence, the expenditure disclosure for House officers and presiding officers, and the funding for the economic increase of the House administration staff.

The other portion consists of the temporary funding in the amount of \$24.2 million. Of this, \$15.3 million is the operating budget carry-forward. These are all funds to be used for short-term or in-year activities such as the initial start-up phase of the initiatives I just mentioned and other projects that are in support of our strategic program, like building our strategy for social media, our security enhancements, and our new human resource system.

If you have any questions, we can cover them.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

Murray.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have a question about the carry-forward. The operating budget carry-forward is \$15.36 million out of a total of \$35 million in the supplementary estimates. That's a very high number as a percentage of what's normally a carry-forward in situations like this. I would like you to elaborate a little bit on that number.

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: The proportion of the carry-forward should be looked at in relation to our complete main estimates, not against the supplementary estimates (B). We're allowed to carry forward up to 5% of our voted appropriation. That's what that amount represents.

Mr. Murray Rankin: So \$15.36 million represents about 5%, and that's within the normal range—

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: That's right.

Mr. Murray Rankin: —when you look at it against the main estimates. That's why it seems so skewed.

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: Yes.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Okay, thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: A large portion of the supplementary estimates has been allocated to economic increases. It's a rate that is planned in advance and that provides these figures. Is that it?

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: Yes.

We have collective agreements and agreements with different groups of employees. They cover approximately 1,600 employees of the House of Commons Administration. To give you an idea, part of

this amount is retroactive because the agreements were made during the current year. We are talking about approved rates of 1.5% for 2014–15, 1.25% for 2015–16 and 1.5% for 2016–17. What's in between the increase in the current year and retroactive pay is the \$1 million we need for the current year.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: If we stop at 2016–17, what is expected for the future?

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: A smaller group of employees already had an agreement for 2017–18, and the rate was set at 1.25%. As far as the others are concerned, there haven't been any negotiations.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you.

[*English*]

Hon. Geoff Regan: Ms. Chagger.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Thank you for the information.

In regard to the security enhancements for West Block, was that subset not intended in the original?

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: Do you want to cover the security matters?

Hon. Geoff Regan: We would have to do that in camera, if we're talking about security matters.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Okay.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Do you want us to go in camera or do you want to hold that for another time?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: We can have that conversation after. I'll just take his time while he's here.

You talked about the modernization of web presence. Is there any way we are measuring the use of it? Even with the committees given more money, are we seeing committees being able to get to where they're trying to get to? Is it adequate? Even online, do we know the number of hits we're getting? Are more people engaging with Parliament because of these modernizations?

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: That's getting into specific activities. I'll ask one of my peers to cover that for you.

● (1210)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: We have André Gagnon, Deputy Clerk, Procedure, along with Stéphan Aubé, our Chief Information Officer.

Mr. André Gagnon (Deputy Clerk, Procedure, House of Commons): Thank you for the question.

The objective that we have set regarding the request that has been put forward clearly wants to establish the House of Commons as a leader in terms of sharing parliamentary information. To do so, we had to go through a couple of items. One of them was social media, to establish the House of Commons as a leader in terms of using, developing, and stabilizing a structured and impartial social media presence through Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. The other items—and I'll go to the other questions that you've raised—wanted us to modernize our web presence. To do so, you need to invest a lot. Clearly, the House of Commons was falling behind on that front.

What we've decided to do is to come up with some real-time descriptions of what is going on in the House. For instance, I can now say to you that Mr. Champagne is speaking to the opposition motion as we speak, while we are in this room. This is a novel tool, which we wanted to use to make sure that Canadians would be more interested in the work that parliamentarians do, and to have a great idea of what goes on daily, in real time, in the House of Commons. Also, the decisions that are made at the House of Commons are now available in real time.

Think about making the work of parliamentarians accessible for Canadians. This is a main objective of what we're doing in terms of the improvements we're making. We also wanted to make it more open, open for Canadians to have access to documents that will be tabled in the House more widely and rapidly than they were able to in the past. Can you imagine that we have 3,000 documents that are being tabled every year in the House? Most of them are not easily accessible, or not accessible for a long time afterwards. We are working with our other parliamentary partners on that. We will be making substantive progress to make those documents available rapidly and widely.

I need to add the fact that we will be modernizing our web presence for international affairs, while also improving the tools that members of Parliament will be using to do more of their parliamentary activities. For instance, the e-notices portal module is based on outdated technology. We want to improve that technology so that members can be in a position to submit notices of motions, for instance, to be put on the Order Paper.

That being said, we also need to make sure that they respond to the needs of members and Canadians. For instance, when we established and prepared all of those initiatives, we worked clearly and very closely with focus groups. We also did a lot of surveys. We worked with the Parliamentary Press Gallery journalists to see what their needs were. We will continue to do that in order to make sure that we hit all of the targets that we established at the beginning of this initiative.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons): I can add, Mr. Speaker, that we do have statistics. We monitor the use of the websites. We monitor the use of the content.

With the new approach that Mr. Gagnon just talked about, we try to promote the content that's used most at the top of the website. Content that people look for more often gets promoted to the side, so that people get the content that they want directly. We do monitor that.

This monitoring also allows us to create the focus group that Mr. Gagnon just talked about. We basically use the users who come to the site to then consult them on a continuous basis, to continuously improve the content. We do that with all of our web services, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: So we are monitoring within sites and looking at the statistics to determine whether the numbers are increasing, whether there are more Canadians interested, and so forth.

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: Yes. I'll give you an example. Since we introduced the mobile version of ParlVu, the application that we use

for streaming, the ability of people to take clips and reuse them on the web has increased by 200%.

This is an example of our being able to identify the key functions that we want to ensure that we promote, so that people can have access to them quicker. That's an example, but we do monitor the—

• (1215)

Hon. Geoff Regan: They can do videos making fun of us.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: This is the last point I will make. I hope we're also looking at the regional diversity of the country. Obviously, there are hubs of innovation where technology use is greater, but then there are also rural and remote areas which have their challenges because of access and so forth. This would provide another reason why we need to make sure that we continue to voice their concerns, so that they have the ability as well.

Thank you. That is good work.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

Candice.

Hon. Candice Bergen: I have a quick question in regard to the increases.

I do seem to recall over the last year, or a little over a year, different increases that we approved, and I see that they're reflected. Could you summarize for me in which areas we approved increases previously?

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: When we look at the full list of projects, we have additional funding for committee activities that came forward to the board, economic increases, strategies for social media and modernization of the House of Commons web presence, food service modernization, authorization services, security enhancements, some additional capacity for HR, and additional money for the disclosure of House officers and presiding officers.

What had not been officially approved was the carry forward that was only part of a discussion about our quarterly report last year. Everything else had come forward and been approved.

The reason we have to come here is that when the Clerk and I sign off on the documents, we need to submit to central agencies for the supplementary estimates. We certify that the board has approved the full submission. This is a summary of the full submission going into the process, and the request for that approval today.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Anybody else?

Seeing none, is there agreement to approve supplementary estimates B?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much.

We're on to the last item, the appointment of the board spokesperson.

Would I be right to guess there might be agreement that Mark Strahl be the new additional spokesperson for the board? I don't think we need a motion for that. My understanding is that's been discussed.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It's up to them to decide who they want. I'm sure Mark would not be the spokesperson for the Liberal Party.

Hon. Geoff Regan: No, it's a spokesperson for the Board of Internal Economy that we're talking about here. One is Dominic

LeBlanc. Gord Brown was another. Gord's doing other things now. He's no longer a member of the Board of Internal Economy.

Is there agreement that Mark Strahl be the new spokesperson?

Mr. Murray Rankin: I certainly agree.

Hon. Geoff Regan: It's agreed. Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

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

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

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

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

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <http://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.

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 : <http://www.noscommunes.ca>