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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): Good morning everyone. Welcome to the 98th meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Our business today deals with the main estimates for 2018-19.

In the first hour, we will consider vote 1 under the House of Commons, and vote 1 under Parliamentary Protective Service, followed by vote 1 under the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer in the second hour.

We are pleased to have with us today the Honourable Geoff Regan, Speaker of the House of Commons. He's accompanied by Charles Robert, Clerk of the House of Commons; Michel Patrice, deputy clerk, administration; and Daniel Paquette, chief financial officer.

From the Parliamentary Protective Service, we have Chief Superintendent Jane MacLatchy, Director, and Robert Graham, Administration and Personnel Officer.

Thank you all for being here. Near the end, as in the past, if there are items related to Parliamentary Protective Service that have to be done in camera, please raise that at that point.

I'll now turn it over to you, Mr. Speaker. I know you're very busy, and thank you for being here.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Speaker of the House of Commons): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Colleagues, nice to see you this morning. Members of the committee and distinguished guests, thank you for welcoming us back.

[Translation]

As Speaker of the House of Commons, I am pleased to present the main estimates for fiscal year 2018-19 for the House of Commons and the Parliamentary Protective Service.

Since you have already introduced the people joining me, Mr. Chair, I will begin my presentation right away.

[English]

I'll begin by presenting the key elements of the 2018-19 main estimates for the House of Commons.

These estimates total \$507 million. This represents a net decrease of \$4 million compared to the total estimates for 2017-18, which include both the main estimates and the supplementary estimates. These have been reviewed, and approved by the Board of Internal Economy in a public meeting.

[Translation]

The main estimates will be presented along six major themes, corresponding to the handout that you received. The financial impact associated with these themes represents the year-over-year changes from the 2017-18 main estimates.

[English]

The six themes are: continued investment and support for the long-term vision and plan; major investments; conferences, associations and assemblies; committee activities, cost-of-living increases; and employee benefit plans.

I'll start with the funding of \$10.6 million that is required for the continued investments and support of the long-term vision and plan, or LTVP. We're nearing considerable milestones as you know: the move into a renovated West Block and the restoration of Centre Block. A restored West Block will be the first major construction project of this scale to be completed on Parliament Hill under the LTVP.

I'd like to stress that the House is working hand-in-hand with Public Services and Procurement Canada toward the goal of moving into the new West Block. In June, before the House rises, the Board of Internal Economy will be informed of the progress of this endeavour. At that time, a decision will be made on whether the move will take place this summer.

Our common objective is to ensure that the new facility is functioning as intended, and of course, avoid disruptions to House proceedings. That's fundamentally important.

As reviewed and approved by the board, the funding for our continued investment and support for the LTVP in these main estimates is required to sustain evolving campus-wide operations, and to support IT systems and facility assets.

•(1105)

[Translation]

The rehabilitation of the parliamentary precinct currently underway will have a significant impact on the human and financial resources of the House. Members must continue to receive the services they need during this period of incredible growth and change. While existing resources will be deployed to where they are needed most, additional resources are required to sustain critical operations for members, their staff, and the administration that supports them.

Additionally, the transfer to West Block and the opening of the visitor welcome centre will result in a direct increase in House of Commons operating expenses. These are expenses to record, safeguard, maintain, and life-cycle the related assets that will be transferred to the House of Commons from Public Services and Procurement Canada. By 2019, the House will have taken ownership of over \$200 million in new assets.

[English]

It is essential that all buildings in the parliamentary precinct be equipped with information technology and related infrastructures for access to information services, both for continued modernization and for the effective functioning of Parliament.

I'll now move to the funding of \$11.7 million approved by the board in support of major House of Commons investments.

[Translation]

We are at a critical juncture, one where the House of Commons must invest in the information technology solutions and systems that will enable it to meet the rapidly changing needs of members, their employees, and the House administration. This also means expanding access to parliamentary information through social media and a modernized online presence.

In light of the renewal of many parliamentary spaces, investments are also needed to deliver support services to members.

To this end, the modernization and optimization of food services focuses on the client experience while supporting the transition of production to the off-site food production facility for the relocation to West Block.

[English]

Pay and benefits is another key service offered to members and the administration. Funding is required for this group to ensure that adequate staffing levels are in place to satisfy current demands and mitigate system challenges.

Funding is also needed to ensure appropriate security enhancements for the West Block. While security reasons prevent me from going into the details, the House of Commons and its security partners continue to collaborate on an enhanced emergency management and security approach to ensure a safe and secure Parliament.

Another investment accounted for in the main estimates is for the disclosure of expenses incurred by House officers and national caucuses research offices. In keeping with the board's commitment

to transparency and accountability, the first annual House officers expenditures report will be published on ourcommons.ca this June. Quarterly reporting, aligned with the schedule set for the members' expenditures report, will follow.

[Translation]

Let us now turn to parliamentary diplomacy.

Funding of \$1.1 million is required for this important work that seeks to foster mutual understanding and trust, enhances cooperation, and builds goodwill among legislators.

As part of these commitments, Canada will host three important events in 2018-19.

•(1110)

[English]

The 56th Regional Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference will take place in Ottawa this July, as many members will know. This conference enables parliamentarians and their staff to identify benchmarks of good governance and implement the enduring values of the Commonwealth.

The 15th annual Plenary Assembly of ParlAmericas will be held in Victoria, British Columbia in September 2018.

Finally, the 64th Annual Session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, which provides a unique specialized forum for members from across the Atlantic alliance to discuss and influence decisions on alliance security, will take place in Halifax, Nova Scotia, so lucky them, right? The member for Halifax agrees. The member for St. Catharines is not so sure.

I will now proceed to the funding of \$1.7 million required in support of committee activities. Each year parliamentary committees undertake a number of studies on issues that matter to Canadians. These committees study and amend legislation, examine government spending, conduct inquiries, and receive input from subject matter experts and citizens.

Committees use their funding primarily for witness expenses, video conferences, travel, working meals, and preparing reports for the House of Commons on the issues they study. The Liaison Committee rigorously manages the global envelope allocated by the Board of Internal Economy for committee activities.

I'll now proceed to the funding of \$4.6 million that is required for cost-of-living increases. This covers requirements for the House administration as well as the budgets for members and House officers. For the House administration, this funding provides for the economic increases of approximately 1,600 House administration employees. The salary increases will help ensure staff retention, and provide competitive salaries to attract new hires.

[*Translation*]

I will now move on to funding required for members' and house officers' budgets, supplements, and salaries.

The board has determined that office budgets for members, house officers, and research offices will be adjusted annually according to the consumer price index.

[*English*]

Funding is also allocated in support of increases to members' office budget supplements. These, of course, recognize the challenges inherent in serving larger, more populated, or remote constituencies. The board also approved an increase to the travel status expenses account, which members may use to charge their accommodations and meal expenses when they are in travel status.

Additionally, in accordance with the Parliament of Canada Act, members' sessional allowances and additional salaries are adjusted every year on April 1 based on the index of the average percentage increase in base-rate wages for the calendar year in Canada resulting from major settlements negotiated in the private sector.

[*Translation*]

The final item included in the House of Commons' main estimates is a funding requirement of \$1.2 million for employee benefit plans.

In accordance with Treasury Board directives, this non-discretionary statutory expense covers costs to the employer for the Public Service Superannuation Plan, the Canada Pension Plan and the Quebec Pension Plan, death benefits, and the employment insurance account.

[*English*]

I would now like to present the 2018-19 main estimates for the Parliamentary Protective Service, PPS.

This June marks the third year of operations for PPS since the unification of the former House of Commons and Senate protective services under the operational command of Chief Superintendent Jane MacLatchy. This entity was created by an act of Parliament to unify and better coordinate the physical security of Parliament under one mandate.

As Speaker of the House of Commons, I am jointly responsible for the PPS with the Speaker of the Senate. They report to us on matters regularly. Let me begin by providing members with a brief synopsis of the evolution of this organization over the past three years, particularly as it relates to the main estimates.

In its first nine months, the PPS operated with a pro-rated budget of \$40 million. During this transition period, the House of Commons provided the newly created organization with corporate support through a charge-back model. This interim measure enabled PPS to focus on unifying security operations and completing interoperability. It also allowed it to plan requirements over two years to become self-sufficient in its corporate services.

● (1115)

[*Translation*]

In 2016-17, following its first submission of Main Estimates, PPS operated with \$62.1 million in funding, which significantly

improved unification efforts through the standardization of uniforms and equipment and the upgrading of facilities.

This past year, the organization was appropriated \$68.3 million, which helped implement numerous security initiatives on Parliament Hill, including the hiring of additional security personnel for the 180 Wellington Building and the establishment of an integrated mobile response team.

[*English*]

Today, the organization is beginning to stabilize and make important headway towards building an effective corporate administration that supports security operations. This fiscal year, PPS aims to deliver its mandate with a budget of \$83.5 million. The increase in funding earmarks \$7 million in permanent requirements, \$7.6 million in temporary security initiatives, and \$600,000 in statutory funds.

While PPS is an autonomous organization and a separate parliamentary employer, it has several service-level agreements with the House of Commons for assistance in finance, payroll, and IT. These arrangements will continue in the short term while the organization progressively builds capacity to lessen its dependence on the House for administrative support.

[*Translation*]

For this reason, the permanent funding request includes: \$4.5 million allocated for positions within finance, human resources, and facilities departments; \$1.9 million reserved to stabilize key functions within information services, assets, and major events, and physical infrastructure and emergency planning; and \$600,000 budgeted for the training of protection personnel.

[*English*]

Funding for temporary security initiatives include \$5.7 million to perform necessary maintenance and upgrades to security infrastructure, such as replacing and upgrading external cameras and crash barriers at the vehicle screening facility—because some of these upgrades are security-sensitive my officials and I would be pleased to address any questions or concerns in camera, if the committee wishes—\$1.1 million over three years to bring our protective personnel to the same minimum-level security clearance as all federal security agencies, another key measure to improve communications and allow for a seamless exchange of information with external partners; and \$775,000 for temporary corporate initiatives and support, such as the hiring of consultants, the development of an internal website, and the acquisition of a document management system.

The funding sought in these estimates provides for the steady growth of this organization and ensures that its workforce remains supported and adequately equipped to deliver on its security mandate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, this concludes my overview of the 2018-19 Main Estimates for the House of Commons and the Parliamentary Protective Service. My officials and I would be pleased to answer questions.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We will now move on to Mr. Graham.

[*English*]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a couple of quick comments before I get into any of your questions. First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the House administration for being very responsive when I have requests regarding ourcommons.ca. I've asked for changes to the XML format and so forth that have been responded to very quickly, so thank you for that. You guys have a great team.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I'd say I did all that, but that's not true.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: You weren't even copied on the chain.

In the Chamber, at the end of every question period, the public gallery, the gallery above you, Mr. Speaker, is emptied just before three o'clock, regardless of what's going on, regardless of the desire to leave. Although it's nominally voluntary, there's nothing really voluntary about it. Can you explain why this is done?

Hon. Geoff Regan: I'm glad you asked that because a few members have raised this with me. I believe it has to do with budgets and the cost of having folks doing some screening in the north corridor.

I wonder if that's one for Mr. Graham. Who can deal with this for us? Who can answer this question? Do you know what the issues are, why that's closed down, and people are asked to leave before the end of QP?

Maybe we haven't talked about this before, so it's time we did.

This is more for the corporate security officer. The Sergeant-at-Arms is going to come forward and take all the blame, right?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I thought this would be an easy question.

Mr. Patrick McDonnell (Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms and Corporate Security Officer, House of Commons): The reason for closing the gallery at three o'clock goes back many years before I arrived in my role inside the Chamber, and it was a cost-saving measure implemented by the Sergeant-at-Arms at the time. Shutting it at three reduces the requirement for guards in the north gallery, and also reduces the requirement for scanners.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Are those visitors immediately invited to sit in what they used to call the ladies' gallery at the other end? Have we changed the name of that yet?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Yes, we now call it the south gallery, the public gallery.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: People in the north gallery are then ushered to the south gallery or are told to leave?

Mr. Patrick McDonnell: Usually the group in the north gallery is part of a larger tour, as you witness every day. They leave the Chamber and the galleries once they exit the north gallery.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you, Mr. McDonnell. I appreciate it.

Let me get to the next question. I've heard recently that there is a new program starting, in which contractors will be escorted through buildings by outside security. I wonder if I can get more information on this, on whether these people will be trained by the House of Commons on privilege and on what accesses they will have or not have.

Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons): This program was put in place in partnership with the PPS, and also PSPC. It's in relation to the renovation of the buildings and the need to repair things in the facilities in the buildings. It is done under the responsibility of PSPC.

A third party firm was hired, essentially to provide an escort service for contractors. The third party firm is accredited through our CSO, through our normal accreditation process, and assigned for the contractor firms that are also doing the work on the buildings and the facilities. This program is made to alleviate pressure and to give a better response time, in terms of the things that need to be done to the facilities.

I should point out though, that in terms of MP offices, if there are repairs, renovations, or things that need to be done there, the escort will still be provided by PPS members.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: The outside security will not have access to any MPs' offices. Is that correct?

Mr. Michel Patrice: That's right.

The contractors will maintain the same program we had before. PPS members will escort the contractors into an MP's office and remain there while the repair is being done.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you.

Ms. MacLatchy, I have a question for you.

When you came to us in February, you said there were 46 operational vacancies. How are we doing on that?

• (1125)

Chief Superintendent Jane MacLatchy (Director, Parliamentary Protective Service): We just hired a group of new employees, but I'm going to allow my Administration and Personnel Officer, Mr. Graham, to answer on the specifics.

Mr. Robert Graham (Administration and Personnel Officer, Parliamentary Protective Service): Yes. We currently have zero operational vacancies. We're fully staffed on the operations side.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Can you give a sense of real operational cost savings, with the integration of PPS versus with the preceding system? Do we have any?

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: I do not have those statistics.

Mr. Robert Graham: Do you want me to look that up and get back to you?

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: Absolutely.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Sure.

Mr. Speaker, you mentioned the cameras. I did want to ask about that, but we can take it in camera if we have time, later.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker and our witnesses, for joining us here today.

I want to begin with a more general question about some of the vacancies we see in the House of Commons. As we know, our Sergeant-at-Arms has been in an acting position since January 2015.

Have you, as Speaker, been consulted in terms of the appointments process, or about candidates for some of these vacancies, including that of Sergeant-at-Arms?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Generally speaking, I am consulted. I'm trying to recall offhand whether I've been consulted in relation to that position. I don't recall it offhand. I have in the past been consulted in relation to similar positions.

Mr. John Nater: Do you have any concerns that some of these positions are, at this point, three-plus years in acting positions?

Hon. Geoff Regan: You're probably asking me to get into an area that the Speaker shouldn't get into to comment on.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Go ahead.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I want to thank Mr. Cullen for his kind offer that I should go ahead and wade into dangerous waters.

I think members like to see positions filled in a reasonably expeditious fashion.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this point in time, do you have any anticipation of coming back to Parliament with supplementary estimates, either for the House of Commons or for PPS?

Hon. Geoff Regan: I'm going to ask Michel to—

Mr. Michel Patrice: In relation to the House of Commons resource requirements, it is the intention, other than the carry-forward that comes as a matter of course, not to come for supplementary estimates. We feel that the budget that's been approved by the board will be sufficient for us to carry forward to the next month.

Hon. Geoff Regan: You saw me touching—

Mr. John Nater: I saw that, yes. I'll hold you to that word "touching".

And PPS?

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: We are reviewing the LTVP requirements. We've just completed a posture review using an outside expert to allow us to fully analyze the numbers we need going forward, particularly during the transition from Centre Block into West Block and GCC. We're still reviewing that. It is possible that we will be coming forward with further requirements, but I can't confirm that will be the case at this point.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, it was mentioned in your opening comments about the new disclosures for House officers and caucus services research offices.

Do you have an anticipation of what these disclosures will look like? Will they be similar to what is currently in place for members' offices? If not, what are the differences in those disclosures?

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): They will be similar in fashion...having that summary level. The look and feel may be evolving because we're evolving the technology we're using. I think we'll be able to have a little easier access on the ourcommons.ca website for the drill-down when we get into the details for the hospitality and travel.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, you recently ruled on a point of privilege raised by my colleague Luc Berthold about access to the gallery during the budget process. You mentioned in your ruling that there was going to be work done to improve communications and processes for these types of large events.

Would you be able to provide an update on whether any of those changes have been implemented, or what plans are in place to deal with those types of issues?

Hon. Geoff Regan: I've given that direction, but I'll ask the Sergeant-at-Arms if he has any news for us on that front.

We're looking forward to next year's budget, which is what we're talking about, so that's a ways off at this point.

Mr. McDonell.

Mr. Patrick McDonell: There was a miscommunication on that day to a guest of Mr. Berthold.

In reviewing and discussing it with Chief Superintendent MacLatchy, I think we can make improvements on the communication between the Sergeant-at-Arms' office and her on-ground personnel, the operational personnel, on days of major events such as a budget day.

•(1130)

Mr. John Nater: Thank you.

Now, as has been touched on, we will hopefully be moving to the West Block this fall—I think is the anticipation—and with that, the new visitor welcome centre.

I potentially have a few questions. I'm not sure how much time I have to get into this, so I may defer to colleagues in future rounds. At this point, looking at the new visitor welcome centre that will be operational with the West Block, will there be changes in procedures in terms of how members' offices and guests of members are processed and dealt with going through the visitor welcome centre, or will it be similar to what is currently the case here in Centre Block?

C/Supt Jane MacLachy: We're still developing our standard operating procedures based on the new facility. However, what I can tell you is that the level of screening will remain the same. The actual process, the flow patterns, are something we are working on, and we will be sure to advise this committee and all parliamentarians when we have that standard process developed.

Mr. John Nater: If it becomes the situation that the move into West Block is delayed, am I right to assume then that the use of the new visitor welcome centre will be delayed, that the welcome centre won't be used unless we are physically moved into West Block?

Hon. Geoff Regan: I'm told that's correct.

Mr. John Nater: I have a question more generally about the West Block. In doing a tour last year, we were told that the parliamentary press gallery would be moved, rather than above the Speaker, to facing the Speaker.

Is that the case?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Cullen said "FaceTime". Poor them.

It's the same place. It's not changing. So the good news is they don't have to look at my face.

Mr. John Nater: The bad news is that they'll see the rest of us more clearly.

That's great.

In terms of the go or no-go decision, will there be additional costs anticipated if the decision is made to delay past September 2018 to a further date? Will there be an anticipation of additional costs, either from a PPS perspective or a House administration cost perspective?

Hon. Geoff Regan: I think that the cost would be more associated with Centre Block. Of course, when you plan to start renovations at one date and it changes, that can have an impact.

My preoccupation, I want to make very clear—and I think the preoccupation of the members of the Board of Internal Economy—is that we want to be confident that the House can operate fully and normally in the West Block, and there's a myriad of details that have to be absolutely ready for that to happen. We're optimistic. We're looking forward to the June report, and then the board will have to make its decision of whether it's entirely satisfied that that's the case. If there are some other things that remain, we'd have to look at what the options are.

Sorry, the rest of your question was on—?

Mr. John Nater: The costs.

Hon. Geoff Regan: The costs, whether there are any PPS costs or other costs to administration for a delay in the move.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Not from a House of Commons perspective, as the Speaker has mentioned. It would be more deferred costs as

opposed to the expenditure. It would not occur related to the move, it would happen a bit later.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd now like to welcome to the committee the member from the second most beautiful riding in the country, Nathan Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): There you go, point of privilege again, Chair. You'll be hearing from me later this afternoon, don't worry.

Thank you for coming, and thank you to all your officials for being here.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to focus a bit on the PPS and the current state of affairs. I don't think there's much we often all agree on as parliamentarians, with perhaps a few exceptions, but one of them is the quality and professionalism of the security that keeps us and the public who visit the House of Commons safe every day.

I'm thinking of this in serious terms. We're all reminded of the importance of security just with the unbelievably tragic events yesterday in Toronto. The Prime Minister just spoke to the need for good security, as best as we can, in a complicated city. We have a complicated place here with media and public presence.

You and I were both here in October of 2014. I was actually in this room. There's a bullet hole in that door. I was trying to leave the room that morning to make a call during caucus. One of our security professionals came through the door the other way and physically shut the door, preventing me from going out. That's where the bullet lodged—one of our own, actually, as it turned out—in that door. It made it through one door and got lodged in the second, right by his head, as it turns out.

I saw Mr. Son this morning. He's working detail in front of the House of Commons. He got shot in the leg that day.

We welcomed the same security force into the House of Commons. I don't know if you were in the chair that day. I don't think you were; I think it was Mr. Scheer. We saluted them to thank them. I've seen a lot of people, great people, saluted in the House of Commons with applause. I'm not sure I've ever seen applause of such duration and such warmth as that day we had our security officials in front of us to thank them for what they do, for the risks they take for us and the public. I find it difficult that same feeling doesn't transpire over when we're sitting down with those same professionals to negotiate a fair contract.

We all, as MPs, pass by our security officials every day. They're wearing their caps, asking for respect. It's not a lot to ask for, yet it's been more than a year since the House of Commons security has had a contract, similarly on the Senate side, and it's more than three, almost four years, I think, since the people who work at the scanners have had a contract.

You and the Speaker of the Senate are, as you said, responsible for PPS. With all respect, why are we in this situation? Why have we not been able to break the impasse and negotiate in good faith with the people who keep us safe every day?

•(1135)

Hon. Geoff Regan: You'll recall that the PPS is by law an autonomous organization. By law, the director of the PPS is a member of the RCMP. Yes, she reports on aspects of her work to the Speaker. She reports to us. She doesn't take our... We don't direct her. That's a very important distinction. She also, obviously, works with the RCMP on operational matters.

I'm going to let her respond to the other matters.

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: Absolutely. Thanks for the question, Mr. Cullen.

First off, I would like to say that I fully agree with your description, your depiction, of the security force that makes up the Parliamentary Protective Service. I'm impressed every day with the professionalism and the competence of the folks who work within this service, and that goes across all categories of employees who are part of this organization.

That being said, when the Parliamentary Protective Service, the PPS, was created, under the legislation that created it, there was an allowance within that legislation for any of the parties to make an application to the PSLREB, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board, now the FPSLREB, to rule on how many bargaining units would make up the uniforms within PPS.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Is it the intention of PPS to have just one bargaining unit between the House of Commons, the Senate, and the folks working at the screening?

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: That's correct. We see one bargaining unit as completely in alignment with the unification of PPS integration, the interoperability. From my perspective going forward, when I look at this organization 10 to 20 years down the road, I think it would be very valuable to have one solid bargaining unit that covers all aspects of PPS.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: To get back to that admiration we all share for this security force that keeps us safe, they have filed a bad faith negotiation. If it's not toward the Speaker and the Board of Internal Economy, then it's toward you, not you personally, but the bargaining that's coming from the RCMP.

I understand you want to unify, but there's resistance to that unification, and in the absence of the unification, we have not had a substantive hour of good faith negotiations with the people who keep us safe. I don't understand why.

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: For starters, respectfully, I would have to disagree in terms of the allegations of bargaining in bad faith. We have been working extremely hard to try to find an avenue to move forward with our bargaining units as they exist right now. We're honouring the previous collective agreements. All of the legal advice I've been given is that until the labour board makes its ruling on how many bargaining units we will go forward with, I'm not in a position to enter collective bargaining with any of those units.

•(1140)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let's look at the status quo, then. We have officers working in this place 60, 70, sometimes 80 hours a week. Overtime is voluntary until the shifts aren't filled, then the overtime becomes mandatory.

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: It can be.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It can be, and this is one of the complaints. My concern is that, according to the status quo, until these issues are resolved we will have people working 80 hours on their feet, on shift, to keep us safe. That doesn't seem to be a healthy or good working space for people whose work we both require and greatly respect.

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: You are correct. We are working very hard to try to find a way to address the overtime issue. We are seeing folks working far more overtime than I would like to see them working. I'm very interested in ensuring that all of our employees have access to adequate leave, time off, and work-life balance. We've gone through a whole hiring process. Over the last year, we've hired 114 new protection officers and, I believe, 57 detection specialists to try to alleviate some of those—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but would you say the overtime being served, the extra stress on family, remains a concern?

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: Absolutely. One of the other pieces we're going forward on is an employee wellness program within PPS. We are hiring a wellness coordinator to start working towards finding avenues to address employee wellness across the PPS.

I don't know if you have anything to add to that, Mr. Graham?

Mr. Robert Graham: The other aspect is that, as Chief Superintendent MacLatchy mentioned, we have filled all of our operational vacancies. The other side of the equation is a review of our posture in every post throughout the precinct to examine whether that post is, in fact, needed. There may be areas where we can reduce the need for shifts and posts, but the priority needs to remain ensuring security.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we'll go to Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Ms. MacLatchy, let's continue with that for just a moment. With the hires you've just said you've done, you have a full complement now of full-time staff. Is that correct?

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: All of our operational positions are filled. However, we do have a certain vacancy rate based on long-term illness and various...I think it's about 8% right now based on "mat and pat", things like that.

Mr. Robert Graham: Yes, it's related to accommodated individuals. We're accommodating them for health reasons, people who are on long-term leave. It's about 8% of the operational working force.

Mr. Scott Simms: This includes high stress rates, is that correct? Stress is one of the major factors?

Mr. Robert Graham: Yes, it's based on a doctor's note. I don't have the details of the breakdown, but that may be one of them.

Mr. Scott Simms: In that environment now with the full complement you talked about earlier—except for the 8% you just discussed—this is going to continue to be a less stressful workplace. But are there other factors? You mentioned the wellness program.

Is that a part of this package, saying that you recognize that there's a high level of stress amongst the employees at PPS?

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: I think it's inherent in any type of protective function to have a stress level that can be exaggerated, depending on the threat being faced on a day-to-day basis. It's a job that is very routine the vast majority of the time, but we have to be vigilant at all times, and the nature of the work does increase the stress levels. That being said, I think what we've come to recognize across protective policing intelligence functions is that stress is a definite issue, and the organization needs to address it and find ways to help its employees.

We have resources in place right now for our employees to access from a wellness perspective. We do have 24-7 assistance available to them. When we did have a tragic event recently, we made sure we had counsellors available on site for our members. That's all part of the wellness piece that I'm speaking of, but we are engaging a full-time individual to work on exactly that aspect, the health and wellness piece.

•(1145)

Mr. Scott Simms: Certainly, the need has arisen in the past three, four years.

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: We see across multiple organizations that it really is a requirement. I see it no differently here. The Parliamentary Protective Service is made up of some really committed and professional people who are going to come to work regardless, so we have to make sure we take care of them.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you for that.

Just quickly, I don't mean to belabour the point, but why is one bargaining unit better than two?

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: There are a number of reasons for that. From my perspective, the most important, and it's one of the things that we're trying to build within PPS right now—and I grant you, it's a challenge at this point—is that unified spirit amongst all the uniforms that make up the organization—across the protective officers, the detection specialists, and the RCMP members who assist us in the exterior positions.

The RCMP would be—

Mr. Scott Simms: But do they not have different functionalities?

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: Yes, they do, absolutely, and the RCMP is a separate service supplier. We're looking at them as a separate entity, obviously. But in terms of PPS itself, that solid, unified service is incredibly important, both for esprit de corps and for the interoperability piece across the board. It crosses a bunch of different aspects in terms of training and scheduling and benefits. If we can get everybody within the same group, I think we would really enhance the organization as one service going forward, and there's no doubt the actual day-to-day logistic pieces, in terms of scheduling, etc., would be easier.

Mr. Scott Simms: Easier for you.

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: Well, for the organization, absolutely; it simplifies the entire logistics piece. But the idea of one bargaining unit going forward for a unified PPS goes far beyond the conveniences that would entail.

It's that esprit de corps piece that I think we're missing. We need to be a unified, solid, proud force, all for one. I don't want to be throwing adages out there, but I personally feel in my bones that one bargaining unit would be best for this organization going forward.

Mr. Scott Simms: So it's a team-building exercise. I'm sorry. I don't mean to put words in your mouth.

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: Yes, to build a team, absolutely.

Mr. Scott Simms: To me, that's what esprit de corps means.

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: It's to be able to embrace the pride as one organization. It doesn't matter what category of employee you are within the service, it's that you're all part of the same team—to use your expression. I think that's the most important piece involved in this, and that makes for a far more professional and capable service.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you.

I have a quick question to end with. We are moving into West Block shortly, within months or so. God forbid we should delay things, but shouldn't we have waited till after the next election?

Hon. Geoff Regan: That's a rhetorical question, right?

Mr. Scott Simms: You see? Geoff...oh, sorry, Mr. Speaker, you expected no less.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Well, look, the Board of Internal Economy, as I said, will receive a report in June on the state of things, and it will make decision at that time. There will be a number of options, obviously. One is to proceed this summer. One, of course, would be during the break in December-January. Of course, it will be a decision for the board to make.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): [*Inaudible—Editor*] You didn't know at the time and maybe there's been some research done. Do you know of any other police force across this country that has separate bargaining units, for example, between their front-line officers and special constables, as the case may be?

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: I do not. I did some research on that, and I was not able to identify any, although I do know some police forces that have separate bargaining units for the senior management ranks versus the front line.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Just for confirmation, is it five minutes at this point?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Mr. Simms asked a question that I was going to ask. In the event that the decision is not made in June to move so that we are in the West Block for September, is it then a delay of a full year? I think the answer we got back was that it could be a full year or it could be six months. Is that correct?

• (1150)

Hon. Geoff Regan: That's correct.

Mr. Scott Reid: I am going to speculate that the fact that we're talking at the end of April about a decision being made in June without any other comforting language that one normally gets—such as, “Formally we're making the decision in June, but we're pretty darn sure it's going to happen”—suggests to me that there is a high probability that we're not going forward this September. To the extent you're able to speculate, does that seem like a reasonable assumption for me to be making?

Hon. Geoff Regan: The House administration is working very closely with Public Services and Procurement Canada, as I said in my opening comments. You've perhaps been through the West Block. You know there's been a great deal of work done. It's coming along extremely well. Naturally, the board wants to be absolutely confident that the details are dealt with and that the myriad things we need in place are functioning properly. I think we're very close, but we'll have that assessment in June, and we'll have to make that decision then. No, I'm not going to speculate.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's fair enough.

We've been discussing this as a Board of Internal Economy decision. The Board of Internal Economy is a House of Commons body. Two legislative bodies occupy this building, the other being the Senate. I assume that there would not be a situation—although I can be corrected if I'm wrong—in which we would move to the West Block and the Senate would remain in Centre Block. I think that's correct.

Hon. Geoff Regan: That's a very good question. In fact, we're very clear that, if one is not ready, the other will not be moving. That's what I understand from the Senate side.

Mr. Scott Reid: That raises the obvious question. We have the West Block. Renovations have to be finished there and brought up to a standard. You were giving me a pitch as to why that's important, but I think we can all see the common sense that everything must be in place. There's the issue of the visitors centre being ready. I understand. It may not be obvious to an outsider, but the importance of ensuring that Parliament is a publicly accessible facility cannot be overstated. There is no point in our history when it has not been.

The other question is about the former train station, to which the Senate is moving. I realize you're not directly involved in that, but can you report back on whether that is going to be ready, for sure, in time for a summer move?

Hon. Geoff Regan: The first thing I want to do is to indicate my agreement with your statement about the importance of the public being able to have access to the House of Commons. That is an important part of our history and of the operations of Parliament in a democracy.

I wonder if one of the representatives here with me can answer the question. We don't work on the Senate side, but perhaps the clerk,

who has some experience with the Senate, might be able to address that.

Mr. Charles Robert (Clerk of the House of Commons): The work is progressing very nicely in the Government Conference Centre, but I think the same challenge that we have here in the House remains also with the Senate. It's not simply completing the renovation and restoration work; it has to do with its operability. Just as it is with the House of Commons, that has to be something that is resolved before a final decision can be made.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

The next question relates to the part of the presentation where you indicate that, by 2019, the House will have taken ownership of \$200 million in new assets. You didn't specify what those assets were. Could you elaborate a little bit?

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: It's basically all of the furniture, the technology, that we have to maintain and go forward. So when we look at the LTVP, it's been going on since about 2001, so it includes the assets for the Valour building, the committee rooms that were in there, it includes 131 and 181 Queen, and more recently the SJAM and 180 Wellington, and what will—

Mr. Scott Reid: Sorry, these haven't been transferred yet? Have these not already been transferred? We're using some of those buildings.

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: Yes, they have been transferred and we have control over them, but now part of the funding we're asking for is that, because it's been over 10 to 15 years for some of these assets, we have to start life cycling them. The technology in the committee rooms in the Valour needs to be updated.

It's just to give an order of magnitude of what all of this LTVP project is having on the House administration to be able to maintain and support that technology and keep it current and working for us.

• (1155)

Mr. Scott Reid: Is it primarily AV technology, or is there more to it than just that in the committee rooms?

Actually, I'm out of time so I'll just ask this question. Can you just submit some additional information on this? It's a large amount of money and it would be helpful if we had more information as to the amortization or depreciation that goes on with this equipment.

Mr. Daniel G. Paquette: Yes, we can.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you.

Going back to Mr. Cullen's and Mr. Simms' points earlier, if the integration of the bargaining units is integral to the team-building needed for a functional integrated protective service, what is needed to ensure the integration of PPS with the RCMP on the Hill?

C/Supt Jane MacLachy: The RCMP are not employees of PPS, as you know, Mr. Graham, and they are, for lack of a better term, a service provider to PPS. They are—

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: But they do have to operate as an integrated unit in order to provide security here.

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: Absolutely, and we do have interoperability now on our radios, which was one of our goals from the beginning. We do joint training. Our mobile response team is an integrated unit. It includes RCMP and PPS members.

One of the other pieces that we're looking at right now is that integrated training piece. How can we make that even more robust than it is right now in terms of the MRT, so an exercise planner, integrated exercises, all of that type of thing.

Our standard operating procedures include both the PPS and RCMP sides of the operation, and it's a work-in-progress there is no doubt. We are striving to improve the relationship and that ability for folks to work together, to share information, to work side by side, inside and outside. Particularly during major events and those sorts of things you're going to see far more integration between the RCMP and PPS.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I think that's my point.

If the RCMP and PPS are able to integrate without merging unions, because I don't believe the RCMP is even unionized—

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: Not yet.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: —why is it necessary for the PPS unions to all be one? I'm hearing both things here, and that's why I'm asking.

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: There are different points of view, absolutely, in terms of this particular situation.

In the current situation within PPS I see a separation, not between the RCMP and PPS necessarily, but between PPS—

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: —and PPS.

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: —and PPS, and that disturbs me.

I think to have one unified service, one integrated service, it means we all need to feel like we are equally important. We have three pillars in terms of our security in this place. They're detection, protection, response, and all three pillars are crucial. If one piece of that structure feels like they are less than, or not being treated equally, I think that's a problem.

Personally I believe that going forward with one bargaining unit for all uniforms in PPS would enhance that level of integration to avoid that separation.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I have a quick question for you. You probably don't know what this means, but CYR537 is the designation for the airspace above Parliament Hill. That's managed by RCMP, and not by PPS.

Is that always going to be the case?

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: It's something that's worth discussing. At this point that's the way it has been for a number of years, as the RCMP were responsible originally for the exterior. They do the air security management piece from a national perspective.

That's not something that's been on my radar recently, and no pun intended, sorry, but it's something that definitely, as we look at the RCMP footprint—and I have spoken with this committee before about a potential reduction in that footprint and an increase in PPS—we will be looking at that piece as well.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I have one final, very quick question, which I think is an important one that we're all very curious about. How will the parades work between the old train station Senate chamber and the new chamber in West Block? I'm imagining this flurry of taxis and things when the Usher of the Black Rod is going to knock on the door.

Hon. Geoff Regan: He might get cold.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: It could be quite interesting.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I'll ask the Clerk to tell us about what the plans are at present.

Mr. Charles Robert: Actually, it's a very good question, and it's something we're still considering. The challenge really is to some extent that this delves into a realm that is the prerogative of the government. The government controls when Parliament will meet. It controls when the sessions will last.

In terms of trying to come up with an answer, we have to work with the government. To borrow a phrase, it's a work-in-progress.

• (1200)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I believe it's two stops on the Confederation Line, so they could use the LRT.

Voices: Oh! Oh!

Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

The Chair: We're out of time.

Mr. Cullen, if you can ask a question in one minute I'll give you one minute.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Ms. MacLatchy, are there any security concerns with the status quo in terms of the different security services operating under three different unions?

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: No. I can tell you right now that from my point of view, our security on the Hill is intact. It's secure. I am not concerned with the safety and security of this place.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I want to be clear with our chair that the interest of PPS in amalgamating these three, even if the various security forces don't want to be amalgamated, is not out of a security desire. I don't want to say it's bureaucratic in a negative sense. You used the term esprit de corps earlier. The point is, it's not a security issue. The current system we have in place is not posing any type of security risk to the House of Commons and the people who visit here.

C/Supt Jane MacLatchy: I want to be clear on how I answer this. Right now we work very hard to ensure the security and safety of this place, and that includes juggling multiple schedules and different collective agreements to make sure we have the appropriate posture at all times. That's my number one. Posture is my number one priority.

That being said, if we were to go to one union, a lot of the aspects that we mitigate on a day-to-day basis would be alleviated.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chairman, on that I'll make it very clear that like all members I have the greatest respect and appreciation for the work of the members of the Parliamentary Protective Service. We are all grateful for the work they do and appreciate them very much.

I also want to express again, as I have previously to this committee, my full confidence in Chief Superintendent MacLatchy.

The Chair: Thank you to the witnesses for coming.

I'd like to remind the committee—because we talked about the two buildings—that the Clerk has agreed we will have a discussion on the plans for the Centre Block at some time with this committee.

I'll do the routine motions.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$347,004,325

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

PARLIAMENTARY PROTECTIVE SERVICE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$76,663,760

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll suspend for a minute to change witnesses.

- _____ (Pause) _____
-
- (1205)

The Chair: Welcome back to the 98th meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Joining us today from Elections Canada, we have Stéphane Perrault, Acting Chief Electoral Officer; Michel Roussel, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events and Innovation; and Hughes St-Pierre, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Internal Services.

Mr. Perrault, you may proceed with your opening statement. And thank you for all the time you've spent with our committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Perrault (Acting Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is a pleasure to be back before the committee today to present Elections Canada's Main Estimates for 2018-19. This appearance also provides the opportunity to highlight the calendar of key activities that remain to prepare for the next general election, particularly in light of potential important legislative changes.

Today, the committee is voting on Election Canada's annual appropriation, which is \$30.8 million and represents the salaries of some 360 indeterminate positions. Combined with our statutory authority, which funds all other expenditures under the Canada Elections Act, our Main Estimates total \$135.2 million.

There are now at most 16 months left before the start of the next general election. Of course, we do not know exactly when it will begin, but there are at most 16 months before the start of the next election, and less time than that for Elections Canada to achieve a full state of readiness, for which our target date is April 2019. We are giving ourselves some flexibility between April and the start of the election in case any last-minute adjustments are needed.

A strict calendar of activities serves to ensure that changes to the electoral process and its administration are well tested before they

are deployed and used by some 300,000 elections workers during the election.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to explain key aspects of our readiness calendar. This is particularly important should legislative changes be introduced late in the electoral cycle.

- (1210)

[*English*]

There are some 40 IT systems that are critical to the services we provide to electors, candidates, and political parties in the context of the delivery of an election. A majority of these systems will be new or will have gone through significant changes for the next general election. The importance of these changes is a reflection of the need to improve services for Canadians as well as renew aging technology and enhance cybersecurity.

I'm glad to say that work on these systems is progressing well. Over this summer, we will be migrating 27 of these systems and associated databases to our new data centre, which is currently being built. The new data centre is essential to provide the flexibility and the security required to deliver the election in the current environment.

Starting September 1, we will subject all systems to a full round of integrated testing that replicates the activities and transactions of a general election.

Through the fall and winter, we will perform necessary adjustments to our systems and rerun testing cycles until we are satisfied that they are capable of sustaining the requirements, volumes, and pressures of an actual general election.

In March 2019 we plan to hold a simulation of the election process in several electoral districts. This is an exercise we did prior to the last general election as well. The purpose of this exercise is to see how the new business processes and technology that will be used at the next general election perform in a simulated setting, including interactions between local offices and headquarters.

By April 2019 we will also have designed, produced, and largely assembled electoral supplies and materials so that they can be progressively deployed to the 338 electoral districts.

Finally, in the spring of 2019 we will then have also trained all returning officers and have completed and tested the training modules for the poll workers who will be hired for the general election. The training program for returning officers is largely delivered online, and must undergo stringent quality assurance and testing processes before it is rolled out to field administrators, more than a third of whom will be new at the next election.

This is our readiness plan under the current legal framework.

Now, as you know, following the last general election, we made some 130 recommendations for legislative improvements. Many have been endorsed—endorsed unanimously, I should say—by this committee. In its response, the government has indicated that it broadly supports the recommendations for change, and has put forward additional proposals for improvements. These are over and above the proposals already contained in Bill C-33 and Bill C-50, which are currently before Parliament, not to mention private members' bills.

Considering the above, it is pressing for legislative changes to be made without delay if they are to be implemented for the next general election.

When I appeared last February, I indicated that the window of opportunity to implement major changes in time for the next election was rapidly closing. That was not a new message. Both Monsieur Mayrand and I had previously indicated that legislative changes should be enacted by April 2018. This means that we are now at a point where the implementation of new legislation will likely involve some compromises. Let me explain.

Should legislative changes be enacted over the coming year, the agency will need to minimize, as much as possible, changes to existing systems and applications. There are considerable risks in introducing last-minute changes to complex IT systems if there is not enough time to test them thoroughly. As indicated earlier, our window for integrated testing is September 2018, therefore there may not be sufficient time to automate new processes. Less optimal paper or manual solutions may have to be used instead.

Moreover, to the extent that legislative changes impact rules for political entities—and I'm referring here in particular to political financing rules—there will be only a short window of time to complete the necessary steps for renewing all of the manuals and consulting with all the parties, as well as the Commissioner of Canada Elections, on the changes being made, as required by law now. The same is also true for instructions required of field personnel. Last-minute updates to poll worker training and manuals reduce the time for quality control and testing in advance of the election.

Of course, Mr. Chair, our mandate is to implement the changes that Parliament decides to enact, and we will find ways to do that if and when legislation is introduced and passed. However, it is also my responsibility to inform you that time is quickly running out. Canadians trust Elections Canada to deliver robust and reliable elections, and we do not want to find ourselves in a situation where the quality of the electoral process is impacted. Should legislation be introduced, we will, of course, support the work of this committee, including informing members of operational impacts and implementation strategies.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my opening remarks. As usual, my colleagues and I will be happy to answer questions that members may have.

• (1215)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Thank you for all the great service Elections Canada has provided us over the last year. We've done some great work together.

Now we'll go to Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you, Mr. Perrault.

Thank you very much to all the members here.

Very quickly, obviously deadlines are approaching, but I want to bear down on some of the things you talked about here that you're currently going through. You'll be migrating 27 of the systems and associated databases to the new data centre. The data centre has not been built yet. Is that correct? Is that what you said?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: The data centre is in the process of being built. The timeline for that is June 12, to be precise. Following the completion of the data centre, it will be tested. Then we will migrate the systems, which are currently being worked on. The work is being finalized. We will migrate that for integrated testing in September. On September 1, we will start the full round of integrated testing.

Mr. Scott Simms: How long will the testing take at that point?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: It depends on how well it goes. That's why you need to give yourselves a bit of runway.

We will do the testing. To the extent that we need to make adjustments, we are giving ourselves until March. So far things are going very well, but we are giving ourselves enough time to do the adjustments so that in March when we do the simulation, everything will be ready to be deployed and used.

Mr. Scott Simms: Technically there seems to be a lot that will be happening within the next year or so, obviously. I want to touch on one of the issues.

I was here at the last Parliament. I was a critic for the party. I remember the big issue at the time was about the proactive stance of Elections Canada, which I'm fully in favour of doing. In the last Parliament, the past government believed in just the facts that were out there, which was about where and when you should vote. This government, obviously, had different views on that.

I always felt that Elections Canada, being a separate body, and internationally renowned, by the way... I've been in other countries in my capacity, and they compliment the nature of Elections Canada, and its separation, being arm's length from the government, but also for being very proactive in what you do.

What have you done to promote yourselves to Canada, to promote the idea of voting, exercising your democratic rights? How does all this activity regarding the migration of data, and so on and so forth...? It seems to me that with all this happening, and pending legislation, you might be a bit too busy to get to the other stuff. I'm sorry if that's a leading question.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: It is fair to say that we have been and continue to be quite busy. We have a very tight but clear schedule of the work that needs to be done for the next election. We are working on schedule.

Of course, if changes are coming up, as you've indicated there may be, then we'll have to introduce them into our schedule, so after September, once we've done our testing, we may have to introduce other changes to the system, which is why I'm here today saying time is of the essence. We need to bring forward any legislation if we are going to implement them.

You talked about promoting democracy. As you know, our mandate is limited in that regard. We certainly have been working with youth. We have an inspire democracy program that has been focusing on youth, and we are working toward renewing our civic education program in the lead-up to the election. We will see whether Bill C-33, if I'm not mistaken, has a provision in it to restore the fuller civic education mandate, the public education mandate, to Elections Canada, and we'll see where that goes.

• (1220)

Mr. Scott Simms: Where are you with the civic education part and the youth? Can you give us an update on where it stands right now, and what you plan to do in the lead-up to the next federal election?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Some of it will depend on the legislative changes. As always, we like to do simulated elections with youth, and that's still very much in the cards, so we're working on that.

We've been engaging teachers across the country to develop new civic education materials and programs to support teachers in the classrooms. That has been a focus, and we're going to be piloting some works at the next election. Returning officers have started reaching out locally this month to find polling locations, and in some areas in that context, we're going to be having some hired staff reach out to schools and start speaking with the schools about civic education ahead of the election.

A bit of work is going on right now.

Mr. Scott Simms: That's a valid point because the teachers I speak to talk about the fact that they lack the material to help outline democratic rights to their students and how to vote and so on. The support material is very good.

Does that support material go to the returning officer, or do teachers have to go directly to Elections Canada to find material?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We provide it directly to the teachers. We are also working with provinces. This is an area of collaboration moving forward. Provinces also have direct contacts with the schools, and the materials should be coordinated. To a certain degree we can leverage each other's resources to improve the overall quality of the materials we have.

We've had some tools for many years. We're currently refreshing those tools, and we're doing that in consultation not only with the schools, but with the provinces.

Mr. Scott Simms: Would they primarily be online materials?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: It's a mix of online and simple artifacts that support teachers.

Mr. Scott Simms: I think that's a fascinating exercise for several reasons. I worry. Obviously you're here to talk about the impending legislation, and where you need to be, and certainly between now and the fall of this year, technically you're going to be in a place that's either going really well, or not going well at all, meaning migration of data.

I'm no expert, but when it comes to migration of data, so many things could go wrong in a very short period of time. Obviously, I see the message you bring here today is certainly one that is salient to all of us because it is very close. I'll get back to that in just a moment.

I just noticed the by-election stuff and some of the complaints that came in. I don't know if this is a great number of complaints, dealing with polling place accessibility, services at the polls, these sorts of things. The highest one seems to be the services at the polls and the accessibility issue.

Can you update us on where you are? Is it a big number, given all the by-elections from 2017?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I don't think there are any unusual numbers of complaints in those reports. Accessibility is a fairly broad topic; it includes accessibility for people with disabilities, as well as accessibility for ordinary Canadians who find the distance may be too long to get to the polls. That's one key area of work for the next election: to reduce the travel distance for Canadians going to the polls, in particular in rural areas.

Mr. Scott Simms: Oh, thank you. Yes, reduce travel in rural areas. That's—

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We've been making efforts to improve the voting process at the polls through the introduction of some technology at advance polls to speed up and reduce wait times in urban and semi-urban areas. But in rural areas we see long distances to the polls, and we're working to address that at the next election.

• (1225)

Mr. Scott Simms: I'm glad you're addressing that.

I'll just leave it at that, Mr. Chair, because you're telling me I should.

The Chair: That's right.

We'll go now to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I see your opening remarks had indicated, in terms of changes to elections law, that the window of time was rapidly closing in which to implement anything prior to the next election and even mentioned that your predecessor, Mr. Mayrand, had said they should be enacted prior to April of 2018. I note that it is now April 24 of 2018.

However, in a news article—I think it was on March 8—the Office of the Minister of Democratic Institutions had indicated that there were some new rules coming to strengthen and clarify rules governing third party spending by foreign actors financing Canadian political advocacy:

We are concerned about the lack of transparency seen around many third parties on all sides of the political spectrum. Canada has robust finance rules governing political fundraising from foreign actors, but we will further strengthen and clarify these rules to ensure greater transparency in our political fundraising system and a stronger defence against foreign interference in our democratic process.

I'll beg to differ somewhat with the assertion there that there are robust rules currently that ensure that, but I certainly do agree there is a need to strengthen those, and there is a need to ensure that foreign influence is not influencing our elections as I think it currently can under the rules that exist now.

Because of the fact that it has been indicated that there is something coming to deal with this, can you give us any indication whether the minister or her office has been in contact with Elections Canada, with yourselves, to consult you on any proposed legislation that they're thinking about bringing forward?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Certainly, I can say that officials at the Privy Council Office and officials at Elections Canada have been engaging over the last several months, and we've been providing some technical advice on the legislation, not policy advice, which we provide to this committee, but technical advice on the options for legislation that they're looking into.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, so have you been able to give them some suggestions on what should be included or more on how it should be administered or set up?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We've made recommendations through this committee on their roles and two aspects that we'd like to see improved on the third party regime. One is the scope of activities that are being regulated. Currently, it's only election advertising activities. There's a broader range of campaigning activities that should be captured.

The second issue is the funding issue, which you alluded to, and in particular the fact that, third parties being able to use their general revenue, there's a fair amount of foreign funding that can come through that.

These are two core areas that we've been looking into and making suggestions through this committee, but in terms of working with the Privy Council Office, as I said, the advice is more of a technical matter in terms of how you draft legislation to meet the governance policy objectives.

Mr. Blake Richards: Obviously, given that there's been some discussion and given the news article I quoted from, there is some indication that something might still be coming prior to the next election.

Is it your position that you would feel comfortable that there is still time to be able to put those things in place and have them be effective? I know you've indicated in this that we were talking about major changes specifically. Do you think the window of time is less to implement some of these things that you're talking about here? You mentioned the two different aspects. What would that window of time look like? When would it close?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I can't say when it closes until we see the full package of legislation, and when we do, as I said, we'll work with this committee and look at the implementation options. Obviously, our preference would have been for the legislation to have been introduced much earlier and passed at this point, so that we could make implementations in a manner that is optimal. That is no longer the case, which doesn't mean there is no more time left, but we'll have to see how we implement this in certain cases.

It may mean that some reporting, for example, of political financing is through a simple PDF online as opposed to a complex system. That allows for some transparency, but not the same ease of auditing, for example, that our systems allow. That's just an example. There is still time, but time is ticking and we're at a point where I'm urging for legislation to be introduced, if it's going to be significant, so we can deliver the election in an orderly fashion.

• (1230)

Mr. Blake Richards: That's much appreciated.

I also noticed that Treasury Board vote 40 set aside \$990,000 as new funding for the Public Prosecution Service related to election integrity. Was that part of a recommendation from your office? Is that something you were a part of recommending?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: No. Anything that has to do with the investigation of election offences is the role of the Commissioner of Canada Elections. He is now part of the public prosecution branch. That's money that they've been asking for.

Mr. Blake Richards: I guess you wouldn't be able to answer how they came up with that number of \$990,000.

Given that, I'm going to give notice of motion, Mr. Chair. It reads:

That the Committee undertake a study of the subject-matter of Treasury Board Vote 40 in the Main Estimates, 2018-19, in respect of the funding proposed for leaders' debates and election integrity, and invite witnesses from the Privy Council Office and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to appear, respectively, on those initiatives.

Do I have some time?

The Chair: You have thirty seconds.

Mr. Blake Richards: Maybe what I'll do then is wait for a further round because I don't think I'll have much opportunity to....

The Chair: We'll go on to Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for appearing today.

You said you were in conversation with the Privy Council Office. Are you also in conversation with the Minister of Democratic Institutions?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: The discussion is of a technical nature, taking place between my officials and those in the Privy Council who support Minister Gould.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: They're in Privy Council, but they're not in the Minister of Democratic Institutions' office.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Correct. They're public servants who work in the Privy Council Office.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's curious.

You talked about the deadline, which you've let us know about. You've let the government know of this deadline. The homework was due in order to have the changes in place. Some of these are very substantive changes. The ones that are contemplated in Bill C-33 include expat voting, Canadians living abroad; your ability, or who does the investigations of potential election fraud; your mandate for public education, which is important; and vouching and ID requirements. Those are all contained in a bill that you said you needed passed by now. Is that right?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We said it was all major changes to—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Those sound like major changes.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That also includes the recommendations this committee has been supporting that are not part of Bill C-33.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So it was both the changes that were promised in Bill C-33, which was meant to undo some of the changes made in Bill C-23, the so-called Fair Elections Act—some said “unfair elections act”—plus any changes that this committee proposed after having studied the last election with Elections Canada about how to make the next election secure. Your recommendation to the Government of Canada, to Parliament, was to pass all of those changes through Parliament and the Senate by the end of this month.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Correct.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Seven days from now. That's not going to happen.

My concern is that you also talk about compromises. Essentially, are you saying that some of the changes that the government promised in the last election and some of the changes that this committee has recommended either have to not be done or to be watered down in order for you to enact them properly and keep our elections whole?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I would distinguish between changes to the law that provide discretion to the Chief Electoral Officer, which we may leverage at any point down the road to improve services to Canadians, to voters, to parties, and to candidates. That discretion may or may not be leveraged for the next election, depending on where we are in timing. That's one category.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let's take one of those; expat voting. Changing the rules around expat voting, changing the rules around vouching and identification, and changing the rules around how investigations are handled are not inconsequential changes. Those are significant changes. If you're going left or right into the next election, you said you needed to know that, in law, by the end of this month.

• (1235)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That's particularly true of changes that have an impact on IT systems.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: On what system?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Complex IT systems. When you want to make changes to that, you need to test them thoroughly before the election.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Can you give me an example of one of the proposed changes that would affect the IT system? As Mr. Simms pointed out, any mess-up on an IT system can....

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: There are a number of them, including some in Bill C-33, but in our recommendations to Parliament, for example, we've recommended different categories of expenses to be a bit more fair. When you start playing with categories of expenses, then you need to design the systems to analyze the returns accordingly.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Right, so that's even for things about people spending inappropriately or appropriately, any changes with the way you're meant to govern that, changes the way your computers work, the way that reporting is done.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: There are different ways of implementing that. In an ideal world, we would leverage the opportunity of IT systems, and we would have them tested thoroughly.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Here's what confuses me. The bill to make some of these changes, to fix the problems that the government and that we and many Canadians agreed with, to fix the problems in Harper's elections act, Bill C-23, was introduced November 24, 2016, in Bill C-33, and hasn't been seen since. We don't have it at committee. It hasn't passed through the House for debate, yet the government was in court three weeks ago, fighting against a charter challenge of the unfair elections act.

Are you aware of this case?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I am aware.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Is Elections Canada participating in any way?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: No, we're not.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So the government is participating, and just dropped 2,000 pages on the claimants, arguing for Bill C-23, Harper's bill. It's more than confusing to Canadians, who said they want truly fair elections. A government that promised to do that is fighting in court to maintain the status quo that was brought in by the former prime minister.

I have a question about Russian diplomats. The Foreign Affairs minister, also a couple of weeks ago, said they have expelled six Russian diplomats who are:

intelligence officers or individuals who have used their diplomatic status to undermine Canada's security or interfere in our democracy.

Are you aware of any Russian interference in the 2015 election?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: No, I am not.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You're not?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I am not.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Does a citation like that, from our Foreign Affairs Minister concern Elections Canada at all?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: It's certainly a matter of interest to us. We are working with our security partners. I met recently with the head of CSIS, as well as the Communications Security Establishment, and security people in PCO, so we are working with security partners. This is not something that belongs uniquely to Elections Canada—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: No, it's not.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: —and we rely on their support as we approach the election.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You're working with our spy agency, and you're working with other intelligence agencies to determine if there was any interference in the 2015 election. Is that right?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: No, we are working with them to prepare for the next election.

We've been getting a lot of support from the Communications Security Establishment to make sure that our new systems are secure.

A lot of the investments I'm talking about are based on the need to improve our cybersecurity in this new context.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's about hacking into your system. There's also the threat of the fake news cycle, what we saw in the recent U.S. presidential election.

Is it of concern to Elections Canada that repetition and amplification of outright mistruths, particularly by foreign aggressors, as our Foreign Affairs Minister seems to have implied, is the reason that Canada expelled Russian diplomats?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: The issue of fake news is a very broad topic, well beyond the help of the electoral process. Certainly it's of great concern to us to make sure that Canadians have the right information about the voting process, about where, when, and how to register and to vote. That's our core area. We will be focusing on that at the next election.

We are, for example, going to have a repository of all our public communications, so if somebody receives a communication that

they're not sure comes from Elections Canada, they can check against our source.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: This has happened in the past, hasn't it? There have been false robocalls sending people to the wrong polling stations.

• (1240)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: It has, but sometimes it's been by mistake and sometimes not by mistake.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I had some similar questions top of mind as well.

Maybe you can elaborate a little bit. You specified on page 6 of the Elections Canada departmental plan, where it states that you are:

remaining well positioned to anticipate, detect and respond to emerging security concerns related to the administration of elections by strengthening the agency's cybersecurity posture and maintaining collaboration with Canada's lead security agencies, including the Communications Security Establishment.

Minister Gould is also very concerned about this subject matter, and therefore she released a report on cybersecurity last year.

Can you elaborate on what you meant when it comes to detecting and responding to these security concerns, and on how you're working with these agencies in order to make sure that our coming election is not in any way compromised?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Absolutely.

There are many aspects to this, of course. One aspect is having a good understanding of the threat environment. We are working with security partners so that we stay abreast of the threat environment. Another important aspect, of course, as I mentioned, is our cybersecurity. We've made a lot of investments to restructure our systems. I spoke about the new data centre. We are migrating our systems to a new data centre, which is much more protected than the current one, in the lead-up to the next election, in part in order to enhance our security.

All of our IT improvements have been made in collaboration and with the support of the Communications Security Establishment. They will test for us, for example, the supply chain integrity of the products that we purchase, or they will look at our systems or provide advice on how we should protect.

As I believe I mentioned when I appeared last February, I'm in the process of commissioning a third party audit. We've made some improvements. We just want a third party to look at the improvements we've made and see whether anything is missing. That will be happening this spring so that we have some time to make adjustments as we go forward.

That's the main area. As I mentioned, we are also planning a campaign to make sure that Canadians have the right information about the electoral process and to react quickly if there is misinformation. We will be monitoring, for example, social media, making sure that the information that circulates is correct, and if it's not, we'll be ready to react quickly.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you monitor media in other languages as well?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I'd have to get back to you on the number of languages. We do some monitoring, but I'd have to get back to you on it.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I think that might be a good idea as well, because we may be missing certain threats, or certain communities may be spreading misinformation that's not hitting our radar.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Absolutely. It's certainly my understanding that security partners are doing that. Beyond that, in terms of information on the voting process going beyond French and English, it's something I'll be looking into.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: You mentioned that you're doing an audit with a third party. What about reaching out to partners similar to Elections Canada in other countries to share best practices, meeting maybe once a year or connecting somehow to determine whether there have been these types of threats or different concerns in other countries, and determine how you can learn from best practices?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Yes, some international engagements do take place. Meetings have happened in Europe. Every jurisdiction is dealing with that issue. We have contacts, and we do some exchanges. I've met personally with colleagues and counterparts in the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand. That is always one of the topics we talk about.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you stick within just the parliamentary system, or do you discuss with the U.S. and others as well?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We have some contact with the U.S., but our environment is quite different from theirs. They have a very unique decentralized structure, whereby, if I'm not mistaken, 60% of the districts or jurisdictions that serve electors in the U.S. are less than 5,000. It's a constellation of micro-jurisdictions with, in some cases, very varying means to deal with threats. They also need to rely on technology a lot more than we do in terms of voting because of the nature of their system. They often have referendums and so forth. They typically don't vote on paper the way we do. Their challenges are quite unique in that regard.

• (1245)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: In terms of your preparation for the 2015 election and the preparation now for the 2019 election, what differences are there, if any? How have the priorities changed from that election to this election?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That's a good question. There are a number of changes. One that we've spoken about quite a bit is the cyber-threat. Before the last election, our concern on security included cyber but was nowhere near the level that we have right now. On that front there's been a lot of work done to improve our cybersecurity. We have made great improvements. That's an important change.

We've also made a number of efforts to modernize the voting services. We saw in the last election a dramatic increase of 70% of the vote at advance polls. There was a migration of the voters from polling day to advance polls. That had, as you will remember, an impact on the lineups and the services. We've been working hard to improve that. We're doing different things. Some of them do not require legislative changes. We talked about the electronic poll books to accelerate and streamline the process at the polls. We also streamlined the procedures, even the paper procedures. In polls where there will be no technology, the paper processes will be streamlined. We've also made some recommendations, which we hope we'll see at some point—for example, to increase the number of hours at advance polls.

You always have to adjust your electoral services to the changing reality of Canadians. If you only plan for the last election, then you will run into some difficulties. We're looking at making a number of improvements this time around.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we'll go back to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I guess I'll start with this: in Treasury Board Vote 40, there was a \$570,000 reduction for Elections Canada, which was entitled "Rebalancing Elections Canada's Expenditures". I'm wondering if you were consulted on that rebalancing or cut in funding and what impact it is going to have on your abilities in the next election. Obviously, there will have to be some changes to deal with that cut in funding.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That is a good question. The numbers can be misleading. It's a change that was made at my request. What we are doing is trying to transfer some of the spending we do right now on the statutory draw, by which we buy services from contractors, for example, IT, terms and casuals, and reduce that amount while increasing the amount on our voted appropriation, the annual appropriation, for which we have the vote today. This is money that is exclusively for indeterminate positions. When we do that, we do two things. We stabilize our workforce. That's particularly important in IT where we do want to have the flexibility of some consultants, but you need a core capacity. Similarly, in other areas as well, you want to reduce the number of terms up to a certain degree and make those positions permanent.

When we do that, we see that full-time public servants are cheaper to hire than consultants, much cheaper. Over five years, you'll see an increase of some \$51 million in our annual appropriations and a reduction of \$61 million in our statutory spending. This gives us a \$10-million saving while at the same time stabilizing our workforce. That's a request that I made, and I was very happy to see it in the budget.

Mr. Blake Richards: Great, thank you for that clarification.

You mentioned in your opening remarks the migration of a number of your systems and databases—that's maybe tied together, even—over to the new data centre you are currently building.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Correct.

Mr. Blake Richards: You said this was necessary in order to have the flexibility and security to deliver the election, and you specifically said “in the current environment”. I wonder if you can give us some clarification or specificity as to what that means. What's the current environment? What's the difference? What's changed that you see as a difference with the current environment?

• (1250)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: There are two things, but mostly one. First of all, we currently have a data centre. The contract for that data centre has expired, so it had to be renewed to begin with. As we move forward to a new data centre, we wanted the greater flexibility of expanding the service, so that especially on voting day when there's a peak demand, we'll have much greater flexibility to deal with that and not risk having the system freeze during the key period of the election. That is one thing.

The most important point about the changing environment is the cybersecure environment. This new data centre is much more secure than the one we currently have, and the security components will take into account the information received from the Communications Security Establishment. That's why it is critical—

Mr. Blake Richards: Sorry to interrupt, but when you talk about security, are you talking about concerns with the kinds of reports we've heard or the threats we think might be out there in terms of foreign—

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: —in terms of penetration of our systems, exactly.

Mr. Blake Richards: You mentioned that starting in September you're going to be conducting integrated testing, the full testing, in a way that replicates the activities and transactions of a general election.

Can you give me some sense as to what we're talking about there? What are those activities? What are those transactions that you're going to be testing starting on September 1?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: For example, during the course of the election we're using a system called REVISE to record the new additions of voters to the list of electors who registered on advance polls. That's one. That information is loaded locally at the returning office and has to work with the central database. It's the same for the election night results.

Mr. Blake Richards: When you talk about that simulation where you're including a process with several electoral districts, and including the interaction between the local offices and the headquarters, which is what you were just referencing there, how is that done? To do that testing, do you have to physically rent space that would look like a returning office in several electoral districts for a different period of time than what's required for the election?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Absolutely. We do rent space, as we would do during an election, for a limited number of offices, of course. We bring in staff and we go through all the standard procedures that they would go through during an election, and test those systems to make sure they perform properly.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, great. Thank you. I appreciate the information.

The Chair: We'll go on to Ms. Tassi.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Thank you for being here today and for the testimony that you're providing.

Continuing with Mr. Richards' last question, how do you choose the places where you're going to set up that testing?

Mr. Michel Roussel (Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events and Innovation, Elections Canada): It would depend on various factors, but we try to find places, electoral districts, that are representative of the country, so the west, the east, urban, and rural. That's how we select those places.

Usually we take about four or five electoral districts that are selected, so representativity is important.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: I see. Okay.

I am interested in the tools that you're preparing for teachers. Part of my background is 20 years in a high school, and I found the biggest stumbling block is that there are so many resources out there, but we're often not aware of the resources available.

What action are you taking to let teachers know that these resources are available—the awareness piece?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We've put together an advisory group of teachers from across Canada. They are actually working with us in the design of the new tools. We want to make sure that the tools reflect their needs. We're currently working to refresh them. Some of the tools we've had were good tools, but they're now outdated. We need to get them up to date and to use more online materials and so forth. Across the country, we're working with the teachers themselves to get some advice on that.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: I think that's fantastic. I think that's the best. You're going to develop the best tool by working with the teachers who are in the classrooms. It's brilliant that you're doing that.

The next step is the awareness piece. Is that same group going to advise as to how to get the information to the schools that these tools are available? Or is that independent of that advisory group?

• (1255)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: No. It's fully integrated. It's about the tools and how we roll them out and make them available.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: That's perfect.

I believe I asked this question the last time you were here. In terms of having students engaged, one of the most effective things in the democratic process and one of the most effective things that I saw happening was having the advance polls at the university located in my riding. Has there been a determination yet with respect to advance polling and having those polls at universities and colleges across the country?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Absolutely. The last election was the first time for that. We had some 38 campuses where we had a polling station using special ballots to serve students. Wherever they resided, they could vote at the campus. As well, people who work on campus could too. It was a significant success. We've decided to expand that. We've done a number of things to improve that. One is that we're going from 38 to 110 campuses.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: That's fantastic.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: The criteria include the size of the campus, but also the regional diversity. We want to make sure that we cut across different areas of the country and also go to campuses where there is a concentration of indigenous voters, for example. We have a range of criteria. That's one thing.

We've also expanded the number of days. We went from four to five days. What we saw at the last election was that the number of students who voted kept on growing and had not peaked, so there's an untapped potential there. We're hoping that by expanding it we can better service young voters.

Finally, we've made some improvements to the process. It should be considerably faster. It was not a very quick process, and they were very patient. I was impressed by their patience, I must say, but the process is a complex one because it involves a special ballot. It's a more complex procedure. We're streamlining that procedure so as to make sure it does not unduly delay the vote.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: I really commend you on that. I think that initiative is critical and important. I voted with my son on campus, and I did not have a timing problem. It was run very well.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: It's great to hear that.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: I think the awareness of your presence there makes great strides in terms of getting young people to vote.

You touched on this in terms of indigenous electors in your last answer, so that was good to hear as well. Page 5 of Elections Canada's departmental plan talks about making "voting more accessible to Indigenous electors" by working with local organizations. I wonder if you can give me an update as to what you've done there.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: There are two aspects to this. One is general across the country. Right now what we're doing, well ahead of the election, is that we've begun as of this month to work locally with returning officers to ask them to identify potential polling locations. That's something that we used to do right at the beginning of the election. We're now doing that 18 months in advance. As they

do that, they get to engage with the local community. Where there are indigenous communities, that's an opportunity to engage there.

Over and above that, we've identified 92 communities and 28 electoral districts, I believe, which were remote indigenous communities that were less properly serviced in the last election. There, we're going to ask returning officers to engage them not only this April but on a more sustained basis as we move towards the election, to try to make sure that we design the election in a way that meets the needs of their community and that we can hire more community members to work at the polls. There's going to be a more sustained effort in those areas.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and thank you for being here again. We really appreciate it. It's always very wise counsel.

I'll ask for the votes.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....30,768,921

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the votes on the main estimates of the House of Commons, Parliamentary Protective Service, and Chief Electoral Officer to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just for committee members, on Thursday it's indigenous languages. As we agreed upon, in the next few meetings if there was a time slot where witnesses couldn't appear, we would do the petitions. Indeed, we have that slot now and it's on May 8, so if the parties could be ready on May 8 to discuss the recommendations that you receive from the clerk on the electronic petitions, it would be great.

Is there anything else, anyone?

We're adjourned.

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