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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

[*English*]

Good morning and welcome to the 155th meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

This morning we are hearing witnesses for our study on the mandate of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and oversight of the Centre Block rehabilitation project and the long-term vision and plan, as discussed at the meeting of Tuesday, May 7.

From the House of Commons, we have Michel Patrice, deputy clerk, administration; and Stéphan Aubé, chief information officer.

From the Department of Public Services and Procurement Canada, we have Rob Wright, assistant deputy minister, parliamentary precinct branch; and Jennifer Garrett, director general, Centre Block rehabilitation program.

We also have Larry Malcic, architect from Centrus Architects.

Thank you all for being here. I've been told that you're all available to stay for the two hours of the meeting. From what I understand, there will be an opening statement to be followed by a presentation on the long-term vision and plan. After that we'll move to questions by committee members for the remainder of the meeting.

As you know, we all have a great interest in increasing communications on this topic, so this is very good. Everyone's very pleased this meeting is occurring.

Mr. Wright, please begin your presentation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rob Wright (Assistant Deputy Minister, Parliamentary Precinct Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Good morning, Mr. Chair and committee members.

I am pleased to be here today to update you on the Centre Block rehabilitation program.

I am accompanied by Jennifer Garrett, director general for the Centre Block rehabilitation program, and Larry Malcic from Centrus, who is the program's design consultant.

We are pleased to be working on this exciting program with our parliamentary partners and to have the opportunity to discuss the restoration of the Centre Block with you this morning.

[*English*]

Since the historic move of parliamentarians out of Centre Block last Christmas, PSPC has been working in collaboration with the administration of the House of Commons on preparing the Centre Block for its major rehabilitation. This involves working hand in hand with Parliament on decommissioning the building so that it is fully separated from the rest of the Hill. This includes such things as rerouting underground IT networks and removing the building from the central heating and cooling plant.

Another key part of the decommissioning process is ensuring that the remaining art and artifacts in the building are safely moved and stored. During this work, the Centre Block remains under the control of Parliament, and we expect that it will be officially transferred to Public Services and Procurement Canada by the end of the summer.

While we continue to collaborate on the important decommissioning process, we are also advancing the assessment program, which had begun while you were still using the Centre Block. We have now progressed to opening up the floors, walls and ceilings to deepen our understanding of the building's condition, which is an important component of de-risking the project.

In addition to working to better understand the building's condition, we have also been working closely with parliamentary officials to define the functionality desired for the Centre Block of the future. In modernizing the Centre Block so that it supports a modern parliamentary democracy, we are also taking care to restore the beautiful building. We have heard loud and clear from you and other parliamentarians the desire to immediately recognize the Centre Block when it reopens and to feel immediately at home again.

An important element of the conversation on the Centre Block's future is phase two of the visitor welcome centre. Much like phase one is done for the West Block, the expanded visitor welcome centre will provide security screening for visitors to Parliament Hill outside of the footprint of the Centre Block and East Block. As well, it will provide additional services to Canadians and international tourists visiting the Parliament Buildings. It is also envisioned that this underground facility will provide functions that directly support the operations of Parliament, such as committee rooms.

You will see in the upcoming presentation that the design and construction of the visitor welcome centre will join the West, East and Centre Blocks in one parliamentary complex. As we move forward, thinking of the Centre Block as a central part of this unified parliamentary complex should provide some interesting opportunities. Approaching the Centre, West and East Blocks as a parliamentary complex is part of a larger initiative to transform the precinct into a more integrated campus. This campus will tie together the facilities on the Hill, as well as important buildings in the three city blocks facing Parliament Hill, such as the Wellington, Sir John A. Macdonald and Valour buildings.

This shift involves moving from a building-by-building approach to a more holistic strategy on such important and interconnected elements as security, the visitor experience, urban design and the landscape, material handling and parking, the movement of people and vehicles, environmental sustainability and accessibility.

Gaining your feedback on the functions you feel should be contained in the Centre Block and the visitor welcome centre and how the space should work for parliamentarians, media and the public is invaluable for our work going forward. We are happy to be back at this committee to hear your thoughts, and we are very eager to continue engaging with parliamentarians on this important work.

I will now ask Ms. Garrett and Mr. Malcic to walk you through the presentation. Along with my colleagues from the House of Commons, I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

● (1105)

Ms. Jennifer Garrett (Director General, Centre Block Program, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee.

With regard to how are going to roll out this presentation, I'm going to take you through what I call the programmatic aspects of the presentation. Then I'm going to hand the floor to Mr. Malcic to take you through some of the initial ideas that the architect has to respond to the 50% functional program that we've received to-date from our parliamentary partners. Then we'll close with you on the next steps.

This next slide depicts the project scope for the program. Launching off the successes of both this building and the Senate of Canada buildings, we're now launching the biggest heritage rehabilitation program that PSPC has ever done. That program contains essentially two key components, the first being the modernization of Centre Block program proper, which is effectively a complete base building upgrade from masonry to structural to seismic to modern and mechanical and electrical systems, just to give you a sense. Essentially, the entire base building needs to be upgraded to meet modern standards. Along with that, there needs to be design to address a functional program to ensure that we're supporting modern parliamentary operations well into the 21st century.

The second component of the program scope is to construct phase two of the visitor welcome centre. Essentially, if you look out in front of Centre Block—and yes it is an underground facility—we're going to dig a very large hole and build that visitor welcome centre

phase two. That facility will have capabilities to support parliamentary operations and services in support of visitors who are coming to Parliament Hill, and we'll connect the triad—the East, West and Centre Blocks—effectively forming what Mr. Wright referred to earlier as a “parliamentary complex”. That triad will obviously be part of a broader parliamentary campus.

The next slide shows this joint effort between the House of Commons administration and us to map out for you the construction and the design process as we go through the program.

I would say that at this point we're still working with our construction manager to formalize the final project schedule, but we have key milestones that we can share with you this morning, and we basically have a three-year outlook for the program at this point.

In terms of design, we've essentially launched the functional program phase, as well as the schematic design process. By the end of this fiscal year in March, if you're following along the two top rows of arrows—the functional program and the design arrows—our target is to effectively have a preferred design option at the schematic design level for the Centre Block and visitor welcome centre. But if we start to move down a row and start to follow the construction activities, this is a layered integrated program approach. We're not waiting for the design process to be complete, but are starting construction activities. Two key construction activities that we are going to be launching through the fall and winter time frame are targeted demolition and abatement in a November time frame within Centre Block, as well as the start of excavation in a winter 2020 time frame. To do that, our construction manager has already started the tendering process.

That is the key outlook for the big programs standing up.

The other thing that we're going to be doing, which we've already launched and are actively working on, is completing that comprehensive assessment program that Mr. Wright referred to in his opening remarks and completing the projects that we call the “enabling projects”, things like the temporary loading dock. The books of remembrance relocation was part of that, and there are temporary construction roads, and there's effectively standing up the construction site.

Regarding the next slide, perhaps some or all of you may have seen an early drawing of what we expected to be the construction delineation site early on in the program. This slide in front of you represents our latest thinking and our interactions on planning with the construction manager. It represents our understanding of what we think that site construction delineation is going to be for the program. Effectively, what you'll see, if you look to the left of the slide, is that we've outlined where visitor welcome centre phase one is, and the grey hatched in area is essentially the footprint for the proposed visitor welcome centre phase two, based on the functional program requirements we've received from parliamentary partners to date.

● (1110)

That effectively drives it in combination. The three considerations that drive the delineation of that line are support of existing parliamentary operations, the construction needs of what is going to become a very large construction site, and also managing the visitor experience.

We want to make sure that we're balancing all of those, so there has been a significant amount of activity and coordination to ensure that we're setting that line with the administrations of the House, Senate and the Library in consultation with our construction manager. The line we think will allow us to continue to support parliamentary operations and enable a program of visitor experience on the front lawn but allow the construction manager to execute the program.

I'll go to the next slide. Before I hand the floor over to Larry, there are some things or key design challenges that I wanted to flag that we know about right now and that we will start to work through in the coming months over the course of the program. As I referred to when we were talking about the scope slide, base building modernization is going to be significant in terms of Centre Block, and it will take up space. In studying that, what we know to date right now in terms of our assessments and our understanding of modernization and code requirements is that it's going to take up space from the functional program in Centre Block proper to the tune of about 2,500 square metres.

To give you a sense of what that means in terms of physical space, that would be the equivalent of all the offices on the fourth floor of Centre Block. That's to put in things such as conduits for modern HVAC and to increase the structural: put the seismic solution in place, washrooms, IT closets, etc., all the sort of space-building functional requirements. That's the first one.

The second one is the technical challenges of actually modernizing and undertaking a very significant modernized program in what is one of our highest heritage buildings in the country. Rest assured that we have conservators and all sorts of experience with us to do that, but it is not an insignificant challenge. In support of that, we've mapped completely the heritage hierarchy of the building, and we are doing our very best to put design into the building or to design the building so that we're having the least amount of impact on heritage in heritage areas where there would be a lower hierarchy in the building. We're working through that.

Finally, the functional program demand that we have received to date from parliamentary partners does exceed the availability or the supply. We have a demand-and-supply issue, so part of the work that we're going to be going through in the coming months is working through that. There's a series of key decisions that we'll bring you back to, once the architect has taken you through the program, to have a bit of a sense of how we're going to go through that.

We'll go to the next slide, and without further ado I'm going to pass the floor to Mr. Malcic.

•(1115)

Mr. Larry Malcic (Architect, Centrus Architects): Thank you.

I'm pleased to return to this committee to share information and ideas regarding the rehabilitation of Centre Block.

It is, as Mrs. Garrett has said, a high heritage building, and we wish to preserve that key important heritage. But it's also the working heart of the Canadian parliamentary democracy, and that has evolved over the last century since the building was designed and built. What has remained constant is the importance of the fundamental planning principles that created the building and,

indeed, the triad of buildings in the first place. Those are the beaux arts design planning principles that have emphasized the hierarchy of spaces and the importance of both ceremonial circulation and processional routes, as well as providing a very strong infrastructure for the functional aspects of the building. You have the symmetrical displacement of the two chambers, the House and Senate, the placement of the library on axis, along with Confederation Hall, and in more recent years the Centennial Flame. We want to ensure that as we move forward with the project, we extend that beaux arts plan to create a campus or a complex of buildings that are appropriate in every way to the historical intentions of the original creators of Parliament Hill.

We see, as we look at this in a conceptual way, the way in which we plan to maintain the axiality of the design. In fact, we'll draw it together more closely, so that we can integrate the collection of buildings in a better way that relies on the fundamental principles, by adding the visitor welcome centre complex, phase two. This will knit together East Block and West Block and provide additional spaces that have long been lacking in Centre Block, particularly new committee rooms, a new entry to the overall complex, especially for visitors, and the connections, as I said, to the other buildings.

I want to specifically begin today perhaps with the House chamber and the modernization considerations that are important there. The House chamber, as a focal point in the overall building, encapsulates the issues faced throughout the building. We want to ensure that the design is "future-proofed" so that it can accommodate, as the nation grows, the growing number of members of Parliament. We have to find a way to accommodate that.

Now, one of the fundamental questions is: Will we accommodate that within the footprint of the existing chamber, or should we develop an expansion of that?

There's the question of furniture, and whether the existing furniture that has been part of the original design can be reused, or whether we shall be looking for something newer for that.

As the number of members of Parliament grows, so the lobbies themselves need to grow as well. The question is, how do we accommodate this important growth, which really reflects the growth of the nation, in the actual physical building itself?

Finally, there's the provision of universal accessibility, which is important throughout the building and is something that the original architects never considered.

If I begin with those considerations of the Commons chamber, the fundamental issues include life safety and code requirements, especially the code requirement for universal accessibility and, as I said before, the seating capacity in line with the growing population and the number of parliamentarians. These will be measured against the heritage assets that are in the building; future broadcast and communications technology; modernization of all heating, cooling and plumbing; and the design for seismic activity, which was of course never considered in the original building.

As we do our discovery and investigate all of these aspects of the building, we're developing a fundamental set of drawings. You see one of them here, a section through the Commons chamber that shows the degree to which we're using modern technology as well, including photo autometry to integrate actual photographic imagery of the building with the drawings themselves.

• (1120)

Let's look at the organization of seating in the House of Commons chamber. The chamber as it is does not currently meet building codes for life safety or accessibility. We need to correct those deficiencies and we also need to provide additional seating, ideally to achieve 400 seats plus the Speaker's chair, to provide for growth over the next decades. We can make significant improvements and get to some of that capacity. Obviously, though, it will require changes, and some of those changes may require compromises. We expect that we can achieve code compliance and accessibility from the floor of the chamber to the ambulatory, as shown in one of the options I developed to have the 400 seats.

This potential solution is based on maintaining the House's tradition of parallel seating—and, although other chambers in other places do other forms of seating, the actual configuration of the existing room itself lends itself to the parallel seating.

In looking at the chamber, we need to look not only at the actual floor of the chamber but also at the galleries surrounding the chamber, because they too are equally challenged in terms of contemporary life safety and accessibility requirements and must be updated. We've designed options to make these improvements, but they will come at a cost of capacity. Currently there are a total of 553 seats in all of the galleries combined. Meeting current code standards and providing accessibility may reduce that number to about 305 seats. This would require reorganizing the seating and reducing the steep rake of the north and south galleries that no longer meets code.

The functional program, I should point out, includes the request for a remote chamber to be located in the visitor welcome centre to allow people to view proceedings in a more appropriate setting with multimedia displays, which could be a contemporary and appropriate way to expand the viewing of the House in its meetings.

Just to look in more detail at the north gallery, here is an option for it: reduce the steepness of the pitch of the seats, provide fully accessible viewing positions and achieve building code compliance. You begin to see the way in which modern building codes will impact the existing space.

Similarly, in the south gallery, a plan for it includes, in this case, the console operator booth. These are ways that we can, without altering the historic fabric or indeed the look and feel of the room that are so important to the dignity of Parliament, make the accommodations necessary.

With regard to committee rooms, the importance and use of committee rooms has changed dramatically over the last 100 years. They are now an integral part of the legislative process and much in demand. Both the Senate and the House need new committee rooms, and I would ask Mr. Wright to elaborate on that.

Mr. Rob Wright: Thanks, Larry.

As has just been positioned, there will be a number of choices, and the options that are shown there are just illustrative. There will be many more options that will be considered over time, so this is really the start of a conversation—which is the important point. It's not the end of a conversation, but a critical piece.

Committee rooms are along that line. We have clarity on the requirements. It's a question of where committee rooms should be situated. It's important to consider the location of those committee rooms in the fullest context of the parliamentary precinct. There's a tendency, as we are focusing on the Centre Block project right now, to want to try to fit everything into the Centre Block, but we may be well served, and Parliament may be well served, by thinking of the broader context as we try to move forward into an integrated campus, with the facilities increasingly being integrated with tunnel infrastructure, for example. So this decision of where to locate committee rooms will be very important.

The last point I'll make on this slide is with regard to the heritage committee rooms within the Centre Block. There are challenges with bringing those up to a high level of security that, for example, a caucus room would require. We have made investments in the West Block, and as we move to a parliamentary complex it may be useful to think of how the West Block and the Centre Block could be used in tandem as an integrated facility.

I'll move to next slide.

This gives you an illustration of where committee rooms are right now, as the Centre Block is now offline. Many of those committee rooms now are not on the Hill proper. You can see that for both the House of Commons and the Senate, there have been a number of major investments off the Hill.

How can we leverage those investments over the long term and ensure that the parliamentary operations remain the primary driver of where the functions that serve Parliament should be located?

The next slide attempts to articulate a diversity of locations where committee rooms could be located. You can see, in the Centre Block, the return of committee room functions that were in the Centre Block, both for the House and the Senate. You can see the potential for committee room locations within the visitor welcome centre phase two. You can see the idea of what are called pavilions on the north end of the Centre Block, and the idea of putting committee rooms where the chamber is in the West Block.

The East Block will go under major restoration for the Senate. Committee rooms could be added there. Of course, the existing committee rooms in the Wellington Building and the Valour Building are there. They remain as important investments. Also important to consider is the fact that we will be working to develop new facilities for both the House and the Senate of Canada adjacent to the former U.S. embassy at 100 Wellington, initially to provide swing space so that we can empty the Confederation Building, which requires restoration as well as the East Block, and then over the long term those would become permanent accommodations for Parliament. That again is a potential location space for committee rooms.

We have to sequence all of this over time to make sure it meets the needs of parliamentarians, but it's an important conversation about how to move that along over time to make sure we're making the best investments on behalf of Parliament to serve the needs of a modern parliamentary democracy.

Again, it's an important dialogue that will take place over the coming months.

I'll pass it back to Larry to continue.

• (1125)

Mr. Larry Malcic: Thank you.

Circulation and connections are fundamental to any building's functioning. Centre Block itself, because of the nature of its beaux arts plan, had a very clear plan of circulation. Once again, however, what we are planning and now designing are ways that we can extend the clarity and power of that circulation system.

It's one in which we need to bring together many different things. Here you begin to see the way in which we want to create the new front door for Parliament in the visitor welcome centre, and to use that then to provide a clear public entrance and public circulation.

We want to ensure that the circulation for parliamentarians and their staff is equally efficient and effective and, ideally, that it would be a circulation system that runs independently of the public circulation. We also have to consider, as part of circulation, the building's servicing. How do we bring goods in and distribute them throughout the building? How do we bring rubbish and garbage out of the building in a way that doesn't have an impact on any of the building users?

All of these things intertwine. We also have the additional layers, in terms of circulation, of bringing the building services into the plan, because those, too, have to be considered as part of the circulation system. The goal is for all of the buildings to become interconnected so they will work as one campus and a complex of buildings. In this way, you will have the benefit of all of them working together rather than simply independently.

At the moment, this is still very much in development, but you begin to see, here in the green, the way in which public circulation could be brought in through the visitor welcome centre. It could come in horizontally across the visitor welcome centre, and then vertically into what are currently the light wells or the courtyards of the building and be given direct access. The public then would have direct access into the galleries. The paths of visitors and members of the public would not necessarily cross those of parliamentarians and those doing parliamentary business. However, it does show that we're considering the courtyards as a fundamental part of the solution for a much better, more operational Centre Block. By glazing them and enclosing them, we are actually able to reduce the overall external footprint of the building and improve its sustainability by reducing its energy consumption. We could then provide a series of spaces where the new functions, including the circulation, could be introduced.

Finally, we've already touched on the visitor welcome centre and its relationship with this, but this shows diagrammatically the way we view it, which is as a great opportunity. It's the opportunity, I

guess, of this century, to take Centre Block and expand it—in the green you see the expansion of the House of Commons—to provide committee rooms and other support facilities, which are very necessary to the operations of Parliament.

In red, you see on the east side the expansion for the Senate.

In orange, you see the requirements of the Library of Parliament to provide a better, more appropriate visitor experience.

In yellow, you see the entry sequence, which will actually provide a fitting entrance, one that reflects the dignity of Parliament as it's traditionally defined. We would therefore integrate into a single campus the group of buildings that exist there now, create the connections to the East Block and the West Block and provide the new space for both the Senate and the House. Centre Block itself, freed up and opened up once again, will be able to function as it was conceived and designed, maintaining its dignity, history and prominence while ensuring it has an effective and efficient role as the centre of Canadian parliamentary democracy.

• (1130)

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: Earlier, in terms of the presentation, we talked about making some key programming decisions. In delivering this program, the intent is to make decisions in layered approaches, going from the highest level down to the more detailed, so that they can be made in the appropriate time frame. We're looking for enduring decisions, because change is obviously the enemy of projects like these. Once you've designed something and you're going back to reverse decisions that you've made, it costs time and ultimately money.

With regard to the programmatic decisions in support of the program, you'll see that there are some related to the base building modernization effort, and there are those related more to the functional or the parliamentary program. We are working very closely with the administrations of the House of Commons, the Senate and the Library of Parliament to make sure that we are landing those decisions and releasing work for the architect in a way that will benefit the program.

Things like asbestos abatement, the seismic approach, as well as key programmatic decisions around the functional program—what the hoarding is going to physically look like, what the chamber size inlaid is going to be—are all key decisions that we need to make in a transparent fashion. This is in terms not only of their design but also of their impact in support of parliamentary operations, as well as cost.

We're having similar discussions with the other partners and engagements with parliamentarians accordingly. Obviously, some of these will benefit from much-needed feedback from parliamentarians. We look forward to working with the House of Commons to receive that feedback.

I'll close the presentation and give you a sense of what the next year looks like for the Centre Block rehabilitation program. As I referenced earlier, we are going to both refine the functional program and schematic design with a view to landing on the preferred design option in a March time frame. We have a whole bunch of enabling projects at work. The work in the east pleasure grounds and the relocation of monuments to get ready for the substantial construction program are ongoing as we speak.

This is your last year for Canada Day celebrations as traditionally planned on the Hill, because sometime after Labour Day you will see fast fence go up along that site delineation line you saw earlier in the presentation, and the actual construction site for the Centre Block rehabilitation program will take place. For example, you'll see things like the dismantling of the Vaux wall and construction trailers will start to show up on site, as well as the construction hoarding.

We continue to work on the site implementation plan and the hoarding design. We'll soon have some good information on that. We will complete both the comprehensive assessment program, which will feed into the design process; what we know about the building; as well as formed substantive cost, scope and schedule early in 2020.

That's it for the presentation.

We'd be happy to take any questions the committee may have for us.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you for that very detailed and helpful presentation.

We'll start with questions, Madame Lapointe.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for your presentations.

Frankly, I would have liked to see it in December or March. By showing us far more specific documents, the direction you are taking seems much clearer. You seem much better prepared than the last time you were here, thanks to those supporting documents.

Earlier, you said that you would connect the different buildings together. Right now, we can go from the Centre Block to the East Block through a corridor. Does that mean that we'll have the same thing between the building...

Will you connect the Valour Building and the Victoria Building, so that parliamentarians can walk between the two through inside corridors?

Mr. Rob Wright: Yes, exactly. In the future, the goal is precisely to have a parliamentary precinct integrated into the infrastructure and to create buildings connected by tunnels in particular.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: You mentioned the Valour and Victoria buildings, but you haven't said anything about the Wellington, Confederation and Justice buildings, where most of the MPs' offices are currently located.

Mr. Rob Wright: Yes, it's exactly the same thing.

The same idea applies to the Wellington and Sir John A. Macdonald buildings, as well as the Confederation and Justice buildings.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: It may take a number of years to get to that point. If I understand correctly, are all those little buses going to disappear?

Mr. Rob Wright: That's a question for Parliament to figure out what the best solution is.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Okay.

Mr. Rob Wright: In Washington, there is a shuttle service in a tunnel to allow staff to move around.

It might be a good idea to borrow, it might not. That's a different discussion.

• (1140)

Ms. Linda Lapointe: The little buses that go everywhere are not making the task any easier during construction, that's for sure.

It's interesting anyway.

In your documents, earlier, you mentioned that 2,500 square metres will be used for the operations of the buildings, which is equivalent to the area of the fourth floor of the Centre Block. Right now, the Centre Block works fine. How much space is needed? I don't understand why more space is needed.

Since the heating and plumbing are a number of years old, even 100 years old, and today's techniques have improved, am I wrong in saying that less space should be needed?

[*English*]

Mr. Rob Wright: There are a couple of really critical things. One is that there are insufficient stairs and elevators in the Centre Block. They will take up significant space.

If you look at an example of the West Block, the amount of space required for mechanical space increased fourteenfold as we moved from the previous building to this modern building. It takes a lot more space to operate the systems. We anticipate that there will be more bathrooms to service parliamentarians, so that takes more space, including the plumbing.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: That's for sure.

[*English*]

Mr. Rob Wright: There's no central air conditioning in the Centre Block. It doesn't meet code in most respects. Bringing it up to code takes space, and modernizing it as well.

Making it a modern building so that it will meet modern codes will require space. One of the potential opportunities—and this is the beginning of a conversation—is to leverage the courtyards so that some of that space... Elevators, as you saw in the presentation, are one potential opportunity to leverage, so that you lose less space in the heritage interiors of the building. Those decisions will be fundamentally critical over time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Okay.

When you came to meet with us the last few times, we talked about consulting parliamentarians who worked in the former Centre Block. The Board of Internal Economy had to be consulted, and so did the members of Parliament. Was there a consultation with MPs to find out their views? I can give you mine.

In your document, for which I thank you, you show that there are currently 338 seats and that there will be 400. People are sitting in rows. I can tell you that folding chairs in rows of five doesn't work. I myself sat on a bench made up of folding chairs. Several colleagues are often not on time and you always have to get up to let them pass.

I'm not sure whether that's what you have in mind, but I'm telling you it's really inconvenient.

Are you consulting the parliamentarians who are currently working here?

With 400 seats, I'm not sure we'll be able to move around.

Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons): Thank you for your question, Ms. Lapointe.

In response to your first question about the suggested plan, that's only one option to demonstrate that the potential increase in the number of members of Parliament in the House of Commons must be taken into account.

The intent is indeed to present those options to the working group formed by the Board of Internal Economy. Then, it will also be a matter of consulting this committee, of course. So it's an option. You have seen throughout the presentation that no final decision has been made; these are just options. In addition, I think it is our common duty, at Public Services and Procurement Canada and the House administration, to present you with options to start the discussion and receive instructions to meet your needs as parliamentarians.

As for the consultations on your experience in the West Block, administration employees will meet with members of Parliament, for example, officers or staff from those offices to ask for their feedback, as well as their suggestions, advice and comments.

• (1145)

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Will it be in the next five weeks? Then the House will adjourn and it may be quite a while until we come back.

Mr. Michel Patrice: That's right.

We are quite aware of this particular period. What I am telling you is that meetings with parliamentarians or their staff have already begun. They will continue over the next five weeks and will likely continue in the post-election period.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Is that it? I still have some questions.

The Chair: Yes, it is. You can continue in the next round.

[English]

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): I was also enjoying Madame Lapointe's intelligent questions, and the answers were very enlightening as well, so I thank those witnesses who responded.

I want to thank all the witnesses who are here today, and in particular for the very helpful additional information you have given us. This deck you've presented to us is far and away the most informative thing we've seen so far, which we are all grateful for.

As one would expect, it raises many questions.

There was one question I wanted to start with before returning to the documents. This is for Mr. Patrice. When you appeared before us on March 19, you stated that the Board of Internal Economy had approved a governance model, which presumably would be highly relevant going forward. Could you table a copy of that governance model with our clerk?

Mr. Michel Patrice: Yes, I will provide you the decision taken by the Board of Internal Economy. The governance model will be defined, frankly, by the members of that working group, but obviously, that working group, as per the discussion at the Board, will report to the Board, and it will also consult and meet with this committee and other stakeholders going forward toward a successful program.

Mr. Scott Reid: Would it be unreasonable to ask you to table the relevant documentation in time for us to look at it at our Thursday meeting, which will also be on the same subject?

Mr. Michel Patrice: I will do my best.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'd really appreciate it if you could.

Thank you for the very helpful Gantt chart. I look down it and see that you divided things up timewise. The first one is April to September—we're in that period now—when certain things commence.

The one thing that ends in September 2019 is the Centre Block decommissioning. That is done sometime in September. A number of things start in the period we're in now, and continue on post-September. The one that strikes me most significantly is the schematic design issue. It seems to me that starting that process before the next election is highly problematic in terms of getting input from the House of Commons and us.

Additionally, I should note that construction management—the tendering—starts in September, so there may actually be tenders that are put up before Parliament or the House of Commons has a chance to do any oversight. We are going to be in the middle of an election; no one will be in a position to do oversight. I think that is problematic.

In the interest of the House of Commons—which, after all, is the body that oversees expenditures—having its appropriate share of control over this, both on the costs side and what the costs are being incurred for, I encourage you to put that off until the post-election period. I recognize that this would not speed up the project, but this is one of those times when I think it might be appropriate. My colleagues may contradict me on this point, but that's my initial observation. That is a problematic timeline. I just throw that thought out for your consideration.

Mr. Malcic, thank you for being here. I found your comments with regard to the architectural issues very informative. I did have an administrative question for you. From whom do you formally take your marching orders or instructions? Or, if you wish, who are you contracting with?

Mr. Larry Malcic: We are contracted to Public Works.

• (1150)

Mr. Scott Reid: I see Ms. Garrett raising her hand. Does that mean they take their instructions from you?

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: They do. PSPC is both the project implementer—the RC or financial authority for the project and the monies that we get for Treasury Board and the project authorities associated with it—and the contracting authority, through our department. We tendered Centrus' contract, and they take instructions from us as the technical authority for that contract.

In terms of that, we get requirements from parliamentary partners, which we translate into scope and a mission for the designer to execute, but they do get their instructions from PSPC.

Mr. Scott Reid: Is it just one contract that you folks have, Mr. Malcic, or is it more than one?

Mr. Larry Malcic: It's one contract.

Mr. Scott Reid: I assume that contract is a matter of public record. I shouldn't ask you, Mr. Malcic; I should ask you, Ms. Garrett. Would you be able to submit that to this committee?

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: Absolutely, we can submit that. In fact, we provided that information to the administration of the House of Commons, and it's on buyandsell.gc.ca publicly. It was publicly tendered and is publicly available. We will absolutely get that information to you.

Mr. Scott Reid: With regard to the construction management design packages, I assume there's some tendering that may be going on. While the tenders won't be put out, is it possible to submit what their content will be—what the tenders are for—to this committee? Is that done at this point, and if so, could it be given to us?

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: Absolutely. We'd be happy to do that. Maybe I could premise that with just a bit of context for you, because it might help put you at ease a little bit.

We're cognizant that we're working in the time frame of an election. We are trying to do engagements and get some feedback to make sure that we can continue to work on the program. Fortunately, some of the early decisions are really around the base building aspects, particularly in support of the two key milestones that I was talking about earlier in the presentation, starting with targeted demolition and abatement, which needs to be done one way or the other within Centre Block itself, as well as the commencement of excavation. We're not talking about tendering our entire program to execute through the construction manager. We're talking about tendering associated with those early works.

We'd be happy to provide those details when they're ready. We're working on that documentation right now.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

If there is anything you can submit to us, we would like to have it. I'll leave it at that and perhaps we can follow up with our clerk at the next meeting as to what you were able to submit.

Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have eight seconds.

Mr. Scott Reid: In that case, thank you all for being here and for your very informative responses.

The Chair: I forgot to welcome Dominic Lessard, deputy director, real property, with the House of Commons.

Thank you for joining us.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): That's great. Thank you, Chair.

Thank you all for being here.

It's interesting, quite fascinating, to watch this evolve.

To me it looks like one of the tricky things going forward is the possibility of a parallel chamber. The good news is that this would enhance our democracy; we've already had an initial study. We haven't made it yet, but my hunch is that there'll be a positive recommendation going to the House that we continue to look at this.

The downside is that it's not a decision that's going to be made right away, yet it may be an important ingredient because of the space. It has to be dedicated; it'll just be for that purpose if it's the way we're currently looking at it.

I'd appreciate your thoughts on how we would move forward with that, given the various timings here.

Mr. Michel Patrice: We're going to adapt to the requirements of the House of Commons. Obviously, we've been listening with interest to the committee's discussions on the parallel chamber and are looking forward to the report of the committee and the decision of the House on this matter. It's our role to respond to and adapt to the needs of the House and its members.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, I get that. I'm looking for a little more.

Mr. Michel Patrice: It depends on the size of the parallel chamber that you're talking about. I've read and learned that in some jurisdictions the size is not necessarily as significant as the existing chamber.

• (1155)

Mr. David Christopherson: No, not at all.

Mr. Michel Patrice: We've got quite a few options, if that's the case.

Mr. David Christopherson: My curiosity is around trying to make the timing work so we can make an informed decision. Parliament is not known for rushing, to start with. You, of course, are on a deadline to make these decisions. Give me your thinking on how that's going to unfold.

Mr. Michel Patrice: I'm thinking of an existing committee room, for example. Depending on the size of this chamber and how frequently it would meet, it would probably depend on rearranging some existing space.

Mr. David Christopherson: It could be daily.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Then maybe it's a question of blocking out the time for that facility and that space and preparing it in a way that would work for what you decide.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay, that's fine.

Mr. Michel Patrice: We've got a good team and we're able to respond. They're always up to the challenge.

Mr. David Christopherson: I have no doubt.

It sounds as if you've taken the election period into account. I want to be very clear: We leave here near the end of June.

This Parliament's not coming back. It'll be the next Parliament. That could be any time in November or later, and then, once Parliament sits, it sometimes takes weeks on end to get committees running—although this one gets set up first. It wouldn't be unreasonable for that to tip us into the new year before committees are on the ground and functioning.

Have you taken that into account, that you're not going to have access to MPs for a period of months, starting Canada Day, recognizing that you've got decisions that have to be made?

Mr. Michel Patrice: Yes, we have taken that into account and have received two names for that working group, and are waiting for the third one, which I believe I'm going to receive this week. The hope is that we're going to have our first meeting following the coming constituency week, and then we'll be in a position to engage with those members and start making early decisions. Here I'm thinking of hoarding design and things like that. They'll have to look at options and see what they prefer and make recommendations. Then there's also the benefit that the Board of Internal Economy will continue to exist.

Mr. David Christopherson: Here would be my concern if I were returning, which I am not. When we come back and start to ask questions, we might hear, "Oh, sorry, we had to make that decision on a deadline and you weren't around."

We don't want to hear that. I need an assurance from you so that the 43rd Parliament doesn't get the answer: "Well, we had to make that decision because you weren't here."

Mr. Michel Patrice: I understand that. For some of the decisions, the beauty of communication right now is that we're going to be able to reach them. We'll have to assess whether there are key decisions that affect members that would need to be made between, let's say, June and the post-election period.

From what I've seen and what I've glanced over in my discussion with our partners, with Public Works, they understand the context and that things will occur. Certain key decisions will have to wait until the post-election period. There are some decisions that I think can be made before the House rises in June, but that is going to be for the members to decide.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Obviously, there are going to be some decisions made regarding the demolition of the building, and so on. I could be wrong, but I'm not sure that you're interested in making decisions on that piece.

Mr. David Christopherson: No, and that's a perfect segue to my last question. Would this committee be able to get both a list of key decisions that have to be made, and also the timing of those decisions and the process? Could we get those from you?

We're getting closer to understanding this, but it's still a little bit nebulous about who's making the final call. BOIE represents us... almost. Remember, they're under the string of command that starts with the leaders. We are not. When we sit in these committees, we are each sovereign.

Therefore, I, as a member of this committee, would like to see what that critical path is, with all the decisions listed that have to be made, what the timing is for those decisions and what the current process is, if it's different from a general process of decision-making and specific to any of the particulars. Can we get that?

• (1200)

Mr. Michel Patrice: We can certainly provide you a list of what I would say are key elements, or eye-level elements, of the decisions that need to be made.

The timing depends also on the members, so I won't commit to timing. If a decision needs to wait until the members are ready to make that decision, we can give a general ballpark estimate of the season, and all of that. As I see it, we won't impose our schedule on members. It's not our role to impose that on members.

Mr. David Christopherson: I appreciate that. You did hear us, and you're responding as though you have it posted above all of your desks.

That's excellent. We appreciate that.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Yes, we will provide you with a list of decisions that we believe members are interested in.

Mr. David Christopherson: Can I just leave a thought, and then I'm done?

Mr. Michel Patrice: You might tell us, "On this, we don't want to have any say in it".

Mr. David Christopherson: I don't think for one minute that you're going to try to run out in front of us. In fact, in this current system, that's the last thing you want. If anything, you're probably going to be hounding us to make sure. There's lots of CYA here; I get it. That's good. That's what we want.

Here's the point, though: There are some decisions that are mechanical, with one following another, but again, I just want to be clear that there aren't going to be any such decisions that, because they have to be made, negate the ability of Parliament to make a further decision. This might throw things off a bit, but I just want it to be crystal-clear in the committee evidence that there won't be any decisions that preclude this committee's ability to have input and their opinion, both by virtue of optional things and things that have to be done from a construction point of view.

I just want that reassurance.

Mr. Michel Patrice: That is noted.

Mr. David Christopherson: Good.

The Chair: Before I go to Mr. Graham, I have a question.

Ms. Garrett, you mentioned some consultation with MPs.

Mr. Patrice, you mentioned two names related to the consultation process of the Board of Internal Economy.

Could you tell us who those MPs are and how they were chosen?

Mr. Michel Patrice: Those names are chosen by their respective House leaders at the Board of Internal Economy, I would suspect in consultation with their parties. I won't provide you the names until I have the three names.

The Chair: Ms. Garrett, are those the same people you were referring to?

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: I was only referring to an intention of the House administration to do an engagement with parliamentarians. It has been clear to PSPC that the engagement process will be executed through the House of Commons administration, so I defer to Mr. Patrice's comments on that matter.

The Chair: Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): I would also encourage you to have a panel of former parliamentarians involved, because as we get further and further from 2019, there will be fewer and fewer people who remember what Centre Block is supposed to be like.

I'd say, "Call David"—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David de Burgh Graham:—because he would be a good asset for you because he will soon be a former MP, sadly.

On the topic of the secondary debating chamber—this is more of a comment than a question—I would encourage you to look at a permanent space as an idea, not at a committee room that we can reassign, because the structure of the room would be physically different. It would have to be. With the galleries and the television, it would be a different structure. If you leave it as a committee room that gets reassigned, then one week it will have three days. The next week it will have two days. The next week it will just be forgotten. So, it has to have its own structure in place. I want to put that on record.

With regard to Linda's comments on the *rang d'Oignon*—which is a phrase I love—looking at the 400-seat arrangement you have.... I had the distinct pleasure of having the middle of the five-seat section in the last chamber, and while the chairs were way more physically comfortable than the chairs we have now, the actual egress and entry to those is an absolute royal pain in the ass. If we cannot do that, I would be much obliged.

Mr. David Christopherson: Nicely put.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Yes.

Is there any physical possibility of physically enlarging the chamber?

Mr. Rob Wright: That option illustrates the challenge, I think. It's not an option that we're saying or advocating should be implemented. We're working on a broad range of options. What that indicates is that if the House wants to maintain its existing set up, that's essentially how to make it work. There are a lot of downsides to that, and that's recognized.

Then it's a conversation about what other ways would work for the House of Commons, whether that would be—and I'm just kind of speaking out loud here—kind of progressing towards benches similar to the U.K. model over time; whether that is taking a very different, more radical approach to putting in the seating; or whether that is enlarging the chamber. These are very important considerations that would, as Ms. Garrett indicated, make it critically important to take decisions as early as we can and have those decisions last until the end of the project.

Enlarging the chamber is very challenging in its own right. There are some significant challenges from a structural and architectural perspective in that part of the building. It's possible, as most things are, but there would be significant costs involved. To make that decision, we would have to, I think, make sure that we've touched bottom on a broad range of options and really be sure that we settle with consensus on what we feel is the right option.

• (1205)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Is the railway station, now the Senate of Canada building, going to remain as part of the parliamentary precinct after the renovations of Centre Block are finished?

Mr. Rob Wright: The reading and railway rooms?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: No, the railway building, the station.

Mr. Rob Wright: Oh, sorry.

At this point, those are considered temporary buildings. For the Rideau Committee Rooms, I think we have a lease in place until something like 2034 with the National Capital Commission, so they were planned as temporary accommodations.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: You showed a map of the front lawn that shows that we will lose about half of the lawn with the new building. Is that correct? The road would also be quite a bit farther south than it currently is. Is that also correct?

Mr. Rob Wright: That's just during the construction phase.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: That's not a permanent thing.

Mr. Rob Wright: It's not permanent at all, no.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: The road will go up above into Centre Block again.

Mr. Rob Wright: That would be all underground. The entrance would be as close.... So, you'd walk up South Drive, for example, and you would enter in almost at grade. There would be a slight downslope to enter into the facility, and essentially the Vaux wall would be on top of that facility, so the look and feel of the Hill would return to what it is today.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: How long are we going to lose the lawn for, and where are Canada Day celebrations going to go?

Mr. Rob Wright: Those are two important questions. One thing we could consider, if it were something that Parliament wanted, is a phasing of the visitor welcome centre in the Centre Block. It would be possible to open the visitor welcome centre perhaps significantly ahead of the Centre Block. We haven't really looked at that in a detailed way yet, but if it were a desire of Parliament to phase that, then the visitor welcome centre could open in advance. I would be careful about how much time in advance that would be, but let's call it a significant period in advance of the Centre Block. It would potentially do a couple of important things: It would return the look and feel of the Hill more quickly and it would provide additional amenities for visitors as well as important services to support the operations of Parliament. So that's a conversation.

For Canada Day, we have been working very closely with Canadian Heritage, who's the lead on that, as well as the parliamentary partners to try to ensure that all of those core activities that occur on the Hill, especially during the summer months, remain in a modified form. This year there will be zero impact. Then, as we move forward, there will be modified.... We're looking at having a modified sound and light show, trying to ensure that it remains, and an element of Canada Day; it would have to be modified. There's the changing of the guard and all of those elements, from making sure that the flag continues to be changed on the Peace Tower to making sure that the carillon continues to be played as long as possible.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: When I started on the Hill almost a decade ago, I heard rumours that there was consideration given to using the front lawn of Parliament as an underground parking lot. Has that ever been considered in a serious way?

Mr. Rob Wright: I don't think it's ever been considered in a serious way. I think there have been some exploratory elements. We have looked at removing surface parking, which is a principle of the long-term vision and plan. For the most part, most of the feasibility, I'll call it, has looked more at the western area of the campus rather than the front lawn.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Linda touched on the tunnel access between buildings. Confederation and Justice had a tunnel built a few years ago. I think I mentioned this in the previous meeting. In 2011 they ripped out the lawn between those two buildings. It still hasn't reopened. It was supposed to be closed for a year or two.

That tunnel was built recently, within the timeline of the LTVP, but it was not done in a way that staffers and parliamentarians could use it. Why not? Will there be some remediation of that? What is the long-term plan to have all the buildings interconnected by tunnel?

• (1210)

Mr. Rob Wright: I'll have to get back to you on the specifics of that, but the long-term plan, working with Parliament on what services you need, is to have an interconnected campus where, for example, Wellington Street is less of a barrier within the campus, and the Wellington Building, the Sir John A. Macdonald and Valour buildings and the West Block are interconnected, as are Confederation and Justice, and then the visitor welcome centre in a much more meaningful way. It almost becomes one integrated facility.

That is the planning on a go-forward basis. We have conceptual but not detailed plans on those tunnels. We have worked that out on

a conceptual level, but that is an important conversation as we move forward together.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you. I'll come back to you later.

The Chair: We now move to Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): I appreciate our witnesses joining us today.

I want to start with a comment, which I mentioned at a previous meeting that Mr. Wright and Ms. Garrett were not at. It's about this building itself. I find it very disappointing that Public Works, the department that's responsible for accessibility, which I personally find very important, would allow a room to be built in this building on the fourth floor that's not accessible. I'm someone who has a close family member who uses a wheelchair for mobility. My family uses strollers to get our three young kids around. So I find it very disappointing that the room is not accessible. I want to put that on the record once again for the benefit of a department whose responsibility includes accessibility. I am very disappointed by that. It's an exceptional building, but the fact that we have a room that's not accessible to people with mobility issues is disappointing. Frankly, I think it's unacceptable for the Parliament of Canada, and I want to put that on the record.

I would like to follow up on the slide that's here right now, which you touched on earlier, Mr. Graham. Am I right to assume that the visitor welcome centre, phase two, is going ahead? It's been approved and it's happening. Is that a correct assumption?

Mr. Rob Wright: Well, I would say that maybe the best answer to that, in a way, is yes and no, in the sense that the concept of a visitor welcome centre I think dates back to 1976 with the Abbott commission. There's a long-standing discussion around a visitor centre. As the security and threat environment has continued to evolve, the importance of it being a security element outside of the footprint of the core Parliament Buildings has increasingly become important.

With its becoming a priority as a project for Parliament, we did a review of the long-term vision and plan in 2005 and 2006, and this project was identified as a key priority of Parliament. There have been approvals that have been sought to proceed with this project. At the same time, what I would say is that on this slide you see here a footprint that exists because of the functionality that Parliament wants to be in there, which is an ongoing conversation. We haven't come to the end of that conversation. The shape of that facility I think is still very fluid in working with you.

It could become smaller, but I would say that my understanding at this point is that the requirement of having security screening outside of the footprint of the buildings is a fundamental objective of the long-term vision and plan. The visitor welcome centre exists first and foremost to meet that need, and then it provides multiple other benefits to Parliament in terms of providing interpretive services for visitors as well as core functions for Parliament that are difficult to fit within the heritage buildings themselves.

Mr. John Nater: Okay. I want to maybe step back a bit, then. You mentioned that approvals had been sought, and I assume approvals have been given for certain elements. Can you share with the committee what those approvals have been, when they happened and what specifically was approved?

I don't think anyone is going to disagree about the security requirement and having it off-site. I assume that's the visitor welcome centre. One is that it's separate and apart, but I think very much knowing what has been approved, what exactly has been approved thus far going forward.... The front lawn of Parliament is Canada's front lawn. Having a massive hole into bedrock for potentially a decade I think would be a concern to the general public, which leads me to my question.

Where has the public been on this? Has there been any consultation whatsoever with the public at large in terms of having a massive hole on Parliament Hill shrinking the size of the front lawn for potentially a decade? Has there been any engagement?

• (1215)

Mr. Rob Wright: As far as public engagement goes, we work very closely with Parliament and want to ensure that parliamentarians are engaged. I think the public consultation—and perhaps Mr. Patrice can add to this—would be done in coordination with parliamentarians, which would be very important. We work hand in glove with the administration of Parliament. Essentially, one of our core objectives is to meet the needs of Parliament.

Our understanding is that the visitor welcome centre is a core priority of Parliament, for both the security requirements and the visitor services as well. Yes, there is the challenging path to getting to a better Hill, I guess, in the sense that there will be disruption, but one of the key objectives of the visitor welcome centre is to enhance the Hill for visitors—for Canadian visitors and for international tourists.

To get to that point requires disruption. There's no way around that. That's a choice for Parliament to make.

Mr. John Nater: I am out of time, but the chair did give me a brief leeway.

Based on the current approval process, approvals that had been given to the Department of Public Works under the current timeline, when will a shovel go into the ground to start digging phase two of the visitor welcome centre?

Mr. Rob Wright: As I think Ms. Garrett indicated, this would be early 2020.

Mr. John Nater: At this point, if we're looking at early 2020, this committee will disappear in five weeks' time and potentially may not come back until January of 2020, depending on when.... There will

be no further opportunity for this committee to have input on the visitor welcome centre's phase two.

Mr. Rob Wright: But absolutely on what is in the visitor welcome centre, phase two—

Mr. John Nater: But shovels will be in the ground. It's going to happen in that general....

Mr. Rob Wright: Unless we are given some direction to stop, then yes.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Frankly, the committee would also have a chance to provide input on the actual size in terms of the requirement and all of that, but the concept, as Mr. Wright pointed out, of the visitor welcome centre goes back a decade or so in terms of its approval.

The Chair: Okay. Before I go to Ms. Sahota I assume that the visitor welcome centre phase two that Mr. Nater is talking about was approved by the Board of Internal Economy, because we just learned about it recently. We don't know anything about it.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Chair, if I might, it was suggested that one of the things that's left flexible and yet to be decided is the size.

The Chair: Right.

Mr. David Christopherson: How can they start digging if they don't know what size it will be?

I'm sorry, but you said that one of the areas where there was still some room for input and flexibility was the size of the welcome centre. How can you start digging it if you don't know how big you're going to make it?

Mr. Rob Wright: I'll make two points and then I'll pass it on to Ms. Garrett for some additional detail. The visitor welcome centre has been an important part of the long-term vision and plan for some time and has been in public documents for probably longer than a decade, I would say. We've made efforts to communicate that to parliamentarians and the broader public. Maybe we can make better efforts at that. We have an annual report that is posted on our website. It's outlined as a priority within that as well.

As far as the excavation goes, the visitor welcome centre phase two is going to have a significant footprint regardless of what goes in it. There's some fluidity, though, on making sure that it's sized appropriately given the engagement with Parliament.

I'll pass it over to Ms. Garrett.

• (1220)

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm sorry, I still didn't hear an answer. If there's still some flexibility about the size of it, how can you start digging the hole? That's all. How can you know how big a hole to dig until you know the size? You're telling me the size is flexible, yet we're going ahead and starting digging. I just need some help understanding this.

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: Perhaps I can provide a little bit more clarity.

In terms of digging the hole, you're correct, that it is important when you go out to tender that you give that contractor whom you're tendering the work to a sense of how big that hole is going to be. I think that in the context of the comments that were made earlier and back to my earlier comments about layered decisions—

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes.

Ms. Jennifer Garrett:—how big that hole is going to be is of critical importance.

Then to the other comments that were made, what goes into it will become equally important, but that decision can be made at a later date when there's a little bit more information known and some more consultation completed.

Mr. David Christopherson: We're getting....

Go ahead.

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: To answer the question more specifically, to manage that risk because of where we are, there are options in front of us. We can start digging the hole by making some assumptions about the minimum size of that hole.

And just going back to when we met about the elm tree, one of the things the committee actually asked us to look at doing was advancing excavation so that we could replant in the east pleasure grounds sooner than later, and we are looking at that.

But what is the minimum footprint that we know we're going to need to make it safe to start digging that hole, so that when Parliament comes back we can talk a little bit more? Having said that, some of the early decisions and engagements that we're trying to get at are discussions that we presented here today around things like committee rooms, which would ultimately influence decisions around how big that hole is going to be, as an example.

I can continue to try to clarify this. I'm trying to answer your question directly.

Mr. David Christopherson: Let me just try to repeat that in my words and see if I've got it.

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: Sure.

The Chair: Briefly, David.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, I'll be as quick as I can, but I need to be clear.

There's a minimum size and you're going to dig that anyway, and once you're in there you have the options of making it bigger or not, depending on what decisions are made about committee rooms and where they're placed. It sounds like you can start digging without knowing the final size, because you do know a minimum size and it requires the same kind of start. Am I starting to get it?

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: The answer to that question is yes, recognizing that it makes the contracting aspect a little more complex, but it's manageable. This is a very large and complex program, and that's what we're here for, to manage those types of risks.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thanks.

The Chair: I assume any parking spaces will have electric charging stations.

Ms. Sahota, you're on.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): My legislative assistant, Caroline, is amazing. She lived in Europe for a while. She just informed me that with a lot of the excavation projects there, archeologists are often involved if there is anything to be found underneath. Especially with the amount of excavation that's needed for this project, there may be historical artifacts.

Are there archeologists involved in this project?

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: Absolutely, there are. In fact, we've found some interesting things.

Right now, if you stroll by the east pleasure grounds and look through the fencing, you'll see quite a significant archeological dig under way. They've uncovered the old barracks and guard houses. Because there is potential for artifacts on the Hill, we've mapped the potential impact and where we might find those as high, medium and low, and before we do any work—for example, build an east interconnect, or a construction road on top—part of our assessment program is to assess whether or not there are archeological resources, and when we find them, to fully excavate and document them accordingly.

If there's further information this committee would like to have on what we've found and the approach we're taking on that, we'd be happy to provide it. We have very good expertise and capability at Centrus in archeology.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I would love to hear more about whatever you find. I think that's fascinating. It should definitely be showcased and highlighted—maybe in the visitor centre. People could come to learn about it and understand our history.

Has there been any consultation with the Algonquin peoples, since it is unceded territory of the Algonquin?

• (1225)

Mr. Rob Wright: Right now, as you may know, we're working in a very close partnership with the national indigenous organizations and the Algonquin on the former American embassy to turn that into a national indigenous space.

We're working almost daily at this point with those groups, including the Algonquin Nation, on a wide variety of elements in addition to the 100 Wellington project. We're looking at opportunities to do some capacity-building as well as contracting opportunities to increase their participation in the work that's happening within the precinct.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I have a question on the West Block, and then on how that relates to the entrances for Centre Block.

Why are the larger, grander main entrances of West Block usually locked off and not used as everyday entrances for MPs? For example, the double-door entrances on the side and the Mackenzie Tower are all shut down.

Is that something we can expect at Centre Block? Are we not going to be able to go under the bell tower anymore? Will there be just side routes for everybody, or through the visitor centre at the bottom? How's that going to work?

Mr. Stéphan Aubé (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons): Certainly in the future, the goal is to have these facilities accessible to members as well as visitors so they can have access. In the context of the West Block, the Mackenzie Tower entrance and the Speaker's entrance—these are the main entrances at the sides—have been reserved for specific access for members and visitors right now from other countries, for example the Croatian president, who was here this week. We're reserving these entrances for that. The other entrances are for staff, members and administration.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Are there similar plans for Centre Block? Before, the Centre Block doors were open for all members to use, and if staff were accompanying them, they could use them as well.

Mr. Michel Patrice: I must admit we did not look that far ahead, but I would suspect it's the intent that these doors will still be accessible for members and staff.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'd like to say that—

Mr. Michel Patrice: The concern is more about the visitors going through, for security purposes obviously, but—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'd like to—

Mr. Michel Patrice:—I suspect we'll have to look at that, but in my mind those doors would be still accessible above ground by members and parliamentary staff.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I hope so because I definitely think there was a special feeling of entering through those doors, and some of that feeling has been lost since we've been here in the West Block. It's a beautiful building, but I hope we're still able to use some of those entrances.

I'd like to share the remainder of my time with Linda.

Is there anything left?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: The visitor welcome centre is the area where almost all of my concerns are focused.

When it comes to issues like putting elevator shafts into the current courtyard areas in the Centre Block, on its face, I think that makes sense, and so on.

My concerns are entirely around the visitor welcome centre and its colossal size. It really is big. It's going to be very expensive. It's bedrock down there. I don't know if it's granite, sandstone or limestone.

Does anybody else know?

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: It's a lot of bedrock.

Mr. Scott Reid: There's a lot of rock, yes. When it comes to archeology, I thought, well, you don't go down very far before there are no more archeological possibilities. There may be paleontological possibilities. I don't know.

Anyway, here's the thing about it. Once the shovel goes in the ground, once the contracts are given out for the shovel to go in the ground, all of which is scheduled to happen before the election—or at least part of it is scheduled to happen before then—inevitably, many dollars will have been spent that are unrecoverable. The bigger the footprint, the bigger the space we're committing to, even though we do not have a consensus on what should go in there.

I can tell you that, among the things you're showing, I am vigorously opposed to a number of them. Let me tell you, I do not agree with putting the Library of Parliament, which I assume is a museum, there. It's not that we shouldn't have a museum of parliamentary history. As a historian, I love the idea. It's just that there are a lot of other buildings that could go into it. It doesn't have to be attached to the Centre Block.

Viewing rooms to watch parliamentary procedures when there's overflow do not have to be underground there. In the event we think something like that is going to happen, we can set up seating in other places. To go back to the Westminster model, parliament traditionally involved multi-purpose rooms, Westminster Hall being the most obvious and most glorious of them, and that's almost a thousand years old.

On the issue of security, we already have the place people will come in for security reasons. We could put a second spot in, but we have a place that is designed to maximize security. It's well-designed. It serves its purpose well. It's outside of the buildings.

In terms of access from that area to the House of Commons and Senate chambers, well, the Senate is a little more difficult, but for the House of Commons, the tunnel shown there in grey to the west of Centre Block could be a way of accessing viewing areas in the House of Commons, so there's no need to run that in front, underground, which means that you could get that access underground without disrupting Canada's front lawn.

There's room on the side and back, in your plans themselves, for potential pavilions. That might be controversial. I assume those are above ground, but we don't have a chance to speak as to whether that is less intrusive, or to get public feedback. I literally didn't know of this possibility until today.

I know you have a little strip along the belvedere that you've opened up, and I have a personal sentimental reason for wanting that to be open for the next few years. That is the spot where I first kissed my wife, actually, but for the many other people who don't have that particular sentimental attachment, the front lawn is more important.

The pleasure of viewing the side, which is where the Senate extra buildings...that could be done.

On House of Commons committee rooms, none of them should be underground, under what is now the front lawn, because we have a large number of other rooms available to us. Throughout my entire lifetime—and I'm more than half a century old and have lived in Ottawa my whole life—the conference centre, now the Senate, has been sitting there as a great big empty black hole. It's finally being used. Now that it has been reconditioned, we could use that for some committee rooms.

For number 1 Wellington, the old railway tunnel that's being reconditioned, I know we have a lease that expires—in 2034, I think you said—but it's a lease between ourselves and the NCC. We can use those permanently, and they're lovely rooms, so I think we can increase the number of committee rooms easily. In the Macdonald Building, those rooms could be multi-purpose and turned into committee rooms, or at least some of them could be—those in the upstairs part.

You see what I'm getting at. There's lots of room for all these things without doing what is the most intrusive thing of all the different things we're doing here, the most expensive and the one with the least certain timelines.

I know I've used up all of my time, Mr. Chair, but I will say, speaking for myself only, that in my opinion, the absolute... I would like to see nothing happen with regard to the visitor welcome centre phase two, even if it means missing a building season, until you have the consent of the House of Commons. I feel very strongly about that. If this stuff goes ahead before the next election and we've spent a bunch of money before the House comes back, regardless of which party is in government—it happens—I know that I for one will be distressed.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you.

Personally, I don't agree with you, but I won't bring that up now. We've got lots on the list still.

Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: What's the story with the elm tree?

Mr. Rob Wright: I'll pass this to Ms. Garrett in a moment. As you know, we were here some time ago—

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: We know very well.

Mr. Rob Wright: We had a good discussion on the elm tree. As we discussed, the elm tree was to be cut. The wood is being stored, so that it will be cured and could be used for a future parliamentary use in consultation with Parliament by the dominion sculptor. We are working with the University of Guelph as well to grow some small saplings. I think the survival rate of those saplings was quite low, which was indicative of the health of the tree itself.

I'll pass it off to Ms. Garrett to give more detail.

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: Thank you, Mr. Wright.

Mr. Wright pretty much covered it. The only thing I would add is that based on the tree's health, we did take a hundred cuttings from the tree—the best cuttings the arborist could find. We sent them off to the University of Guelph and they picked the best 50 to try to

propagate them. Of those 50 saplings, only 10 have survived that propagation process. We have 10 saplings that are growing in a greenhouse at the University of Guelph and when they're strong enough, they'll be grown outside and then returned to the precinct when it's appropriate.

• (1235)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Okay. Thank you.

When I left my last round, I was asking about tunnels. If you go back to slide 17, on proposed circulation for parliamentarians, I'm wondering if you could provide access between East Block and West Block, so we don't have to go up and around. I just thought that the purple should cross, unless you want us all to go through the freight tunnels.

I don't have a lot left and I'll leave it to Ms. Lapointe in a second.

As we've been taking Centre Block apart, have we had any real surprises?

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: I would say we haven't had surprises, but there was a disappointment. We were hopeful that the shafts within the building would be sufficient to carry, for example, our mechanical and electrical.... They're much smaller than we were anticipating, which is causing us to drive to new solutions. We're still in the process of articulating designated substances in the building.

The most interesting discussion will be in terms of the structural work and assessments that we're doing right now. It's related to one of the upcoming decisions, namely, on how we will seismically reinforce the building. There are some opportunities around base isolation that would allow us to save a lot of the heritage hierarchy in the building and the structure that's above the basement in the building.

There have been no surprises from the perspective that we've got a very old building that requires a very significant modernization. Having said that, all of that allows you to do much more detailed planning for the design and costing of the program, which we're working on at present.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: There are no listening devices in the walls or bags of cash in behind things, or something like that?

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: There haven't been, so far.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I have one last question before I pass this on. When am I going to get kicked out of my office in the Confederation Building?

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: That's a good question.

Mr. Rob Wright: This is another point of engagement with Parliament on the broader campus strategy. Doing the major restoration of the Confederation Building will require swing space. We are planning to put facilities for the House and the Senate adjacent to the former U.S. Embassy to support the restoration of the Confederation Building, as well as the East Block. Those facilities are not designed yet, nor are they close to construction. You'd be looking towards or past mid-2025 to get to that point.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: If I have any time left, I'd like to give it to Ms. Lapointe.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Do I have any time left?

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Will I have more later?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Okay. I'll wait for the next round in that case.

The Chair: You'll go after Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: If Ms. Lapointe prefers to wait, I'll continue for another minute.

[*English*]

Is the Supreme Court involved in the LTVP? I know there's been talk about renovating that one as well.

Mr. Rob Wright: Full restoration of the Supreme Court is in the plans. The West Memorial Building is the swing space for that facility. It's part of the long-term vision and plan from a planning principle perspective, but not from an implementation perspective.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: You mentioned the old U.S. embassy briefly. Is that also to be a swing space, or is it only for the...?

Mr. Rob Wright: That will be a permanent space with some adjacent space that will run through to Sparks Street for a permanent national indigenous peoples space.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson, you have three minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson: I have a quick question that I promised my daughter I would ask. I was going to do it quietly, but I'll do it publicly. I think I know the answer, but I'm going to ask anyway.

Are there any plans to reintroduce the cat world that existed prior to West Block's being closed?

I confess that walking over to see the cats was her favourite part of coming to Parliament Hill. It's a cool tradition.

Mr. Rob Wright: It was my grandmother's favourite part as well.

Mr. David Christopherson: There you go. See?

Mr. Rob Wright: I think at this point there are no plans to reintroduce it that I am aware of.

Mr. David Christopherson: I didn't think so, but it would be really cool if there were. I leave that out there. Maybe there are some creative folks.

I have two things, one point and then a question.

The point is that I really appreciated knowing for the first time how you're looking at the parliamentary precinct differently. Right now, truly, we have a frankenparl. In the decade and a half that I've been on the Hill, we added a committee space here and grabbed offices there. It's been pulled together with duct tape and bale wire. It doesn't make any sense when you talk about flow. So I'm pleased to hear that we're going to get away from that nonsense, take a step back and look at all the facilities as they all start to blend, and the idea that we may still have to be off the Hill, whereas we weren't in

the past. When I first got here, everything was nice and neat on the Hill. So I'm pleased about that.

I share some of the concerns that Mr. Reid has raised about the visitor welcome centre. When you're providing the committee with the list of decisions and the time frames, I assume this will be a part of that; that a detailed subset will speak to exactly where we are with the visitor welcome centre in the decisions that are made and are not being revisited versus those that, going forward, have not been made, and what your thinking is on when and how those decisions are going to be made. I would ask that you include that in the report you provide to us.

● (1240)

Mr. Michel Patrice: It's been noted.

Mr. David Christopherson: You keep saying "noted". I assume that "noted" is your word for yes.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Yes.

Mr. David Christopherson: That's very good. Thank you.

The Chair: Madame Lapointe.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I want to come back to some of the things that several parliamentarians and I have discussed, but I still feel that I've had no clear answer.

When you first came here on December 11, you said that the rehabilitation of the Centre Block was intended "to safeguard and honour its heritage... to support the work of parliamentarians; to accommodate the institution's evolving needs; to enhance the visitor experience; and to modernize the building's infrastructure."

I am very concerned about the part about parliamentarians.

On March 19, you said that the Board of Internal Economy would set up a working group. We raised the issue a number of times to find out who would be involved in the working group, but I have heard nothing yet about parliamentarians. However, recently, we were consulted about cutting down an elm tree. Since Parliament will probably not sit until January, who will be consulted if decisions on next steps have to be made by then?

Mr. Michel Patrice: As I said, we will have a working group of three people. So far, I have received two names and I prefer to wait until I have the third before—

Ms. Linda Lapointe: There are only five weeks left.

Mr. Michel Patrice: I should receive the third name by the end of this week.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: We were consulted about the felling of a tree. However, I think we have more major decisions to make than cutting down a tree.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Yes.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: That being said, I apologize to those who care a lot about trees.

I am thinking of questions such as when to decide on the number of members, whether or not to set up a parallel debating chamber or whether or not to excavate—my colleague said earlier that there is rock here, under the building.

By the way, I don't feel reassured, because I didn't get the answer I wanted.

When you renovated the West Block, you had to excavate rock because that's all there is under the building. You are now saying that you will have to excavate in front of the Centre Block. What did you learn from the excavation work you did here? What are the best practices you have learned that you will be able to apply to your work on the Centre Block?

Mr. Michel Patrice: I hope that the members of the working group will be able to meet after the next break. For the time being, the leaders of each of the parties in the House have appointed members to sit on this working group, as decided by the Board of Internal Economy.

The general and specific concerns of committee members were heard. The Visitor Welcome Centre will be one of the priority topics before the adjournment in June. Discussions will begin and a list of questions or concerns that parliamentarians have raised with the working group will be compiled. The group will then report to the Board of Internal Economy, which will present it to this committee as soon as possible.

As for the lessons learned from the construction work at the West Block, I'll let Mr. Wright tell you about that.

• (1245)

[English]

Mr. Rob Wright: There have been many lessons learned and I think we could have a deep conversation about that. There would be two that would be relevant to today's conversation that would be very important.

One is, as Ms. Garrett mentioned, the layered decision-making approach and to focus on those elements that we can get consensus on and to move forward on them. That lends itself to phased implementation. In the middle of the West Block we started to shift gears, in working between Public Services Procurement Canada and the House of Commons. We're going to apply that lesson learned fully for Centre Block.

It's the phased approach, really focusing on those structural elements, first and foremost, where we can get the greatest clarity early, and then, once we have the clarity of the functionality that we have, focusing the effort, from a construction perspective, on areas that need to be perfect for the operations of Parliament, the chamber being perhaps the most obvious of those, and committee rooms. They should be completed earlier and handed over to the House of Commons, which is the technical authority on the IT and broadcasting elements. The construction elements of the building and all of the critical IT elements should be finished at the same time, rather than being sequential, which is what we used to do previously in projects. The Wellington Building and the Valour Building and elements of that would have been more sequential. We think we can save time and enhance the quality by approaching it with a more phased approach.

[Translation]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I still have some questions.

[English]

The Chair: One quick question.

[Translation]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: On March 19, when you appeared before the committee, you said that 20% of the decommissioning process had already been completed. Today, May 14, what is the percentage?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: I believe that 20% was in reference to the decommissioning process. We are approximately 40% decommissioned. We're on track to finish those decommissioning activities in an August 2019 time frame, with a view of being able to transition the building back from parliamentary partners to PSPC, and then a very rapid turnover to our construction manager, who will take over custody of the site and stand up the construction site.

There are key elements that need to come out of the building. We've moved quite a bit of the moveable assets, things like artifacts and furniture, especially those to support parliamentary operations, but there are residual assets in the building and some pretty important artifacts. A good example are the war paintings in the Senate chamber. Two of the six are down, and the remaining six will be moved by a mid-June time frame.

Most importantly, on the House of Commons side, is the decommissioning of the IT infrastructure in the building. That is ongoing as we speak and is well in progress, but has to be completed, as well as some of the activities to isolate the building, so it can be taken essentially off the grid.

[Translation]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Okay, thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Before I go to Mr. Reid, I have one question. It came up during our study on a family-friendly House of Commons and I think it was mentioned one of the times you were here before. It was the suggestion that one of the things you might look at is play space or a playground, either outside as Mr. Reid suggested, as part of the courtyard, or indoors. Has any thought been given to that?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. Nater, respect, please!

I'm hearing a long silence.

Ms. Jennifer Garrett: I can jump in and try to answer.

Part of what we are looking at is making Parliament more family friendly. We have been given requirements from our parliamentary partners to make sure that when parliamentarians and their families are busy, they can effectively support that.

With regard to exterior play, honestly I'd have to go back and check the functional program requirements, but with regard to the interior of the building, I know we've been given requirements for improved family-friendly space in a universally accessible environment and we will endeavour to make sure that those spaces are in the appropriate locations within the building.

•(1250)

Mr. Stéphan Aubé: There have already been discussions on possible play areas on the outside. Consideration was given to the visitor welcome area beside the West Block, but that hasn't yet been finalized. As you can see, we're just in discussions right now, first, on how circulation would happen both inside and outside the building.

The Chair: Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Very briefly, there are a few of us around the table who do have young families now. I joked that my daughter will be the MP by the time we get back into Centre Block, so it won't be relevant, but it would be nice if, when these discussions are happening, those who currently have young families have some type of consultation or input.

My family was up last week and they had a great time on the front lawn of Parliament blowing bubbles and running around. It was a lot of fun. That doesn't happen in the winter, so it would be nice to have some consultation with those of us around the table and in Parliament who currently have young families on the Hill.

The Chair: I have a six-year-old and a 10-year-old.

Mr. Reid, you're next on the list. Also Ms. Kusie hasn't spoken yet, which you might want to defer to. However, where do you want to go with your motion? Did you want to finalize that today or at another meeting?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, I think it would be preferable if we let that wait until a different meeting. There are still more questions. I know I'm not the only person who has more questions and we have all these witnesses here, so it's our chance to ask them.

The Chair: Okay. Do you want to allow Ms. Kusie to go, or do you want to go?

Mr. Scott Reid: Are you okay with my taking it?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Go ahead.

Mr. Scott Reid: I want to say a couple of things. First of all, I want to stress one area where I really admire the work you've done: your seismic work on this building to make it earthquake-proof. It was most emphatically not earthquake-proof before you started your work on it, so I congratulate you for that. I'm well aware of the challenges that Centre Block faces in that regard, and while I like to economize on many things, I'm not asking you to economize on that.

I think the fundamental problem that all of you face is that your parliamentary partners, as you describe the various groups that are submitting to you, have not told you what their needs are. They've given you a wish list, which is not quite the same thing. It's the difference between what I would like to have and what the economists talk about as supply and demand.

Demand is ultimately what I want to have and am prepared to pay for. None of us has made the hard choices. I'm not talking about you making hard choices; we haven't made the hard choices. We're imposing the arbitration job to a large degree on you, and that is profoundly unfair. I can see you attempting to deal with it and respond to everybody's needs.

We have to give you clearer guidelines, so I hope that what I've said so far is not understood as criticism of Public Works, the

architects or the House administration. *Au contraire*, it is a critique of the process that we are part of, and we need to get our act together.

On another note, I gather that the idea of swing space beside the former U.S. embassy has not been approved by anybody. I think it is a good idea. Right now, that is an unutilized space. It's a parking lot that doesn't even have cars parked there anymore. It makes eminent sense to put something in there that could be used as space, and then in the long run, the obvious flaw with the current building is that it is too small for an indigenous heritage history museum. There's no way there is enough space. The swing space might serve that purpose.

I do have to ask this question: How long do you anticipate the big hole, as you've called it, in the ground for the visitor welcome centre being there? We know it starts in September 2019. When will it be filled in and the ground covered over and be back to being usable?

Mr. Rob Wright: I think that would come back to one of the questions. If Parliament wanted to accelerate the opening of the visitor welcome centre, in essence, to prioritize the visitor welcome centre and return the front lawn and the operations that the functionality that would be provided there, that would be a different scenario than if you wanted the visitor welcome centre and the Centre Block to reopen on the same day. We could look at both of those scenarios. If there were a desire to prioritize the visitor welcome centre, it would be there for a shorter period.

•(1255)

Mr. Scott Reid: I assume the rationale for phase two of the visitor welcome centre being the first thing on your agenda is that the work that's going on in Centre Block initially for the first couple of years is not the heavy structural work that will be needed later on. It's a matter of figuring out what's there, removing items that are there. You're trying to do multiple things at the same time. I assume that's the logic of it.

If the visitor welcome centre or parts thereof were started later, thereby allowing us to figure out what should and shouldn't go out there, is it possible that either the amount of time the visitor welcome centre hole is in the ground or the amount of ground that's being dug up at any given time could be reduced, or some combination? I mean some part of the footprint being not dug up for all or part of the period and perhaps the period during which all or part of this being dug up being shrunk.

I worded that in a way that's difficult to answer, but I'll leave that with you.

Mr. Rob Wright: To be clear on the Centre Block, there will be significant interior demolition work beginning this fall. That's not the construction of particular spaces, but the demolition of large floor plates. Regardless of what you decide you want, that is the way to go. We're comfortable with that. Then the excavation of the visitor welcome centre is to happen in tandem. I understand what's coming from at least certain members of the committee, that waiting could perhaps reduce the footprint and save money, which is admirable. At the same time, waiting spends a lot of money. It's really important for the committee to be aware of that as well. The longer we wait, the more money is being spent. Both sides of the balance sheet have to be looked at.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you very much to all of you. I appreciate it.

The Chair: I want to thank you all too.

There are lots more questions and meetings. There is another committee coming in here.

Make it really short, David.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I have just a very quick question to validate.

Is the media being consulted to ensure that there isn't an area like the Hot Room again?

Mr. Michel Patrice: That is part of the plan.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you.

The Chair: I'll go to Mr. Christopherson in a moment.

Just so the committee knows, on Thursday, the first hour is the minister on the main estimates on the debates commission. The second hour is free, perhaps for what Mr. Christopherson is going to do. Then the first meeting after we're back, we had tentatively scheduled to have the review of the draft report on the parallel debating chambers. Sometime we have to get back to Mr. Reid's motion. And we have to get out of here at 1:00 because there is another committee.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: How much time does that give me, Chair? I can't see the face of the clock.

The Chair: There's about one minute on the clock.

Mr. David Christopherson: That's what I thought. I'll take this opportunity. I appreciate that. I only asked for the floor so that I can

formally move my motion: "That the Committee study the following proposed changes to the Standing Orders and report back to the House". The attached documents with the details of those changes have been circulated in both languages.

I don't know how much discussion we require here. I'm sort of going on the assumption that there's enough support in the back benches to at least explore, and give some air and time to, a lot of work that's been done by a lot of colleagues. I'm a little bit part of it, mostly just contributing thoughts as opposed to being a key player. My role is just that I'm on this committee, so I'm the one moving the motion.

I'd be looking for, either now or quietly afterwards, or at the beginning of the next meeting, but in some way, whether the study is going to become an issue or whether we can quickly deal with this motion and get on with having the delegation come in and start rolling up our sleeves and going through some of the proposals.

That's what I would be seeking going forward. The answer to that will dictate how quickly we can dispose of this motion and get on with the work, or if we're going to have to make a bit of a *cause célèbre* out of it, which I'm hoping is not the case.

● (1300)

The Chair: We'll certainly discuss that shortly, but probably not today.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I'm ready to vote.

The Chair: You're ready to vote.

Mr. David Christopherson: If I can win, I'll take a vote now.

The Chair: Ms. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I think we need some time to discuss it further before we go to a vote.

The Chair: Okay.

We'll bring it up soon, David.

Well, thank you again. Hopefully, these good discussions will continue, because you brought lots of great information today that was very helpful to us. Thank you very much for doing that and keeping us in touch as things proceed.

The meeting is adjourned.

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