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• (1205)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.)): Welcome to meeting number six of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

We're continuing the study of the Centre Block rehabilitation project and block two redevelopment as part of the long-term vision and plan, the LTVP, as it's referred to.

Welcome to our meeting, Minister Anand, and welcome back, Mr. Wright and Mr. Matthews, deputy minister and assistant deputy minister.

We will start with the 10-minute presentation by Minister Anand.

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement): Good morning, Madam Chair.

I would like to acknowledge our presence on the traditional territory of the Algonquin peoples.

Let me begin by thanking all of you for being here and for giving me this wonderful opportunity to speak with you today.

[Translation]

Thank you for inviting me to discuss the long-term vision and plan for Canada's parliamentary precinct in my role as Minister of Public Services and Procurement.

[English]

Joining me today is Bill Matthews, my deputy minister, who leads an outstanding team of professionals and whom I am proud to work with every day. Also joining me is Rob Wright, assistant deputy minister for the science and parliamentary infrastructure branch, whom I believe you have had the pleasure of getting to know over the last week or two. Thank you both for being with me today, and thank you for the excellent work you do at PSPC.

Madam Chair, the buildings and grounds on and near Parliament Hill are symbols of our democracy and part of our history. We need to ensure they meet the needs of a 21st century Parliament. At the same time, these buildings should reflect the values of Canadians and be places where all Canadians are welcome. That is why our focus is not only on functionality, restoration and preservation, but also on making these spaces more accessible, sustainable and secure. You will hear me speak today about these values.

[Translation]

As you well know, our work in the precinct extends beyond the Hill and includes revitalizing the city block facing Parliament Hill, specifically the buildings between Metcalfe and O'Connor and Wellington and Sparks, also known as "Block 2".

Officials from my department have already told you about the works we've completed so far in these areas and our plans going forward.

To date, the department has delivered 24 key projects in the precinct on time and on budget.

[English]

Our biggest milestone was the historic transition of Parliament from Centre Block to the newly restored West Block and the Senate of Canada Building, but there are also other milestones, such as the successful renovation and addition to the Sir John A. Macdonald Building and the extensive renovations on the Wellington Building.

As my officials mentioned at this committee, this milestone was the culmination of well over a decade of work restoring and modernizing facilities in the precinct to now moving to undertake our most significant project, the rehabilitation of Centre Block.

[Translation]

All Canadians can take pride in the fact that our achievements thus far are earning acclaim and recognition around the world. It is worth noting that Canada's work to restore and modernize the parliamentary precinct has received over 57 awards in the areas of architectural excellence, sustainability and heritage conservation.

[English]

This work is complex, balancing restoration with modernization. As my officials outlined for you, that complexity will only increase now that we are turning our collective attention to Centre Block, the largest project of its kind ever undertaken in Canada.

Madam Chair, I know that you and this committee have had the pleasure of touring the exterior and interior of Centre Block to see first-hand the important work being done. I had the pleasure of doing the same with Rob Wright in one of my first activities as minister. I think we can all agree that the magnitude of the place and the work ahead of us are extraordinary, to say the least.

● (1210)

Beyond the difference in scope and scale, Centre Block has another major difference when compared with projects to date.

[*Translation*]

With Centre Block, we are now shifting from projects serving a single partner—the House of Commons or the Senate, for example—to those serving multiple partners.

[*English*]

Instead of meeting our needs as members of Parliament, Centre Block must work in a way that meets the needs of all parliamentarians as well as those who support us, namely, the Library of Parliament and the Parliamentary Protective Service.

Several key decisions are required in the months ahead, including some that have the potential to impact the way Parliament has traditionally operated.

The particular challenge is this: Governance and decision-making within the long-term vision and plan is unique, complex and very important to the success of this plan. With two chambers and two branches of government, decisions affecting the home of our democracy cannot be made unilaterally or by one single person.

My responsibility as minister, with the support of my department, is the day-to-day operation of the buildings and the planning and delivery of major restoration and modernization projects, as well as managing the associated budgets and seeking approval from cabinet and Treasury Board.

Each chamber is responsible for the identification of long-term goals, objectives and outcomes. They are also responsible for ensuring and coordinating engagement with their respective arms of Parliament, as well as securing the endorsement of MPs and Senators. The parliamentary administration, for both House and Senate, is the lead for engagement with parliamentarians.

PSPC is responsible for delivering the built environment that meets the needs of both chambers, as defined by their respective administrations in consultation with MPs and senators.

Integrated, stable decision-making is critical to ensuring the success of projects that will shape our country's most important national symbol of more than 100 years. I am so honoured to be here today to speak with you about this shared national symbol.

The reality facing us is that a number of key decisions will need to be made in order for current and future projects to progress. Most of these decisions, particularly around Centre Block, are arguably now more important than ever. Now is the time to take collective and collaborative leadership and ownership and explore new avenues for effective decision-making.

As you know from your discussions with the professionals in my ministry, the department has developed options for consideration by MPs and senators to support key decision points relating to the parliamentary precinct, in particular, Centre Block.

During this committee study, officials from my department and the House administration, accompanied by partners from the Library of Parliament, all working closely together over many

months, outlined these decision points. They are now asking us to consider the path forward. They are asking parliamentarians what they require of a rehabilitated Centre Block. These are the critical decision points that have to be addressed before we can move forward, before our officials can finalize design, costing and timelines.

For example, decisions are needed on whether to increase the size of the chamber, or to modernize the chamber within its existing footprint and to make other adjustments to the way in which the chamber functions. We need to make decisions regarding the core functions of the visitor welcome centre, which is a facility that plays a number of roles, but most critically it provides the connection that transforms the parliamentary triad, which consists of the West, Centre and East blocks, from three buildings into one seamlessly linked complex.

● (1215)

We need clarity on the needs of the House and Senate for the block two redevelopment as well. We need decisions on parliamentary participation in the jury for the international design competition. This project will reshape the city block directly across from the Peace Tower, blending heritage and function for the future and further advancing the creation of our parliamentary canvas.

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, in the time that I have been minister, it has become clear to me that the dedicated employees of Public Services and Procurement Canada take great pride in their work.

[*English*]

From the work of this committee in the last session of Parliament, to the prescient work by parliaments dating back nearly half a century calling for the creation of a visitor welcome centre and securing the blocks opposite Parliament Hill for future requirements, both of which will now be realized, I am so proud of the role my department plays in the long-term vision and plan for the precinct. I am grateful for the talented public servants, architects, engineers, project managers and construction workers who are seeing it through every single day, as well as the parliamentary administration, which is working with the very same degree of professionalism, commitment and expertise.

[*Translation*]

I am most heartened by how very well all of our teams are coming together on this massive collaborative undertaking. I can tell you that they are all ready to move forward on the next phase of our plan.

[*English*]

We are at a critical juncture in our plan. It is important, imperative, that we get this right. Our challenge now is how we can best come together as one Parliament to make sound, enduring decisions.

I hope this committee will work with my officials on the decision-making process by exploring ways to fill the gaps in the current governance structure and resolve the outstanding items we have raised so that we can continue our success.

As always, I welcome your views, your ideas and your discussion on any and all of these matters. After all, the work we are doing today will serve Canadians, regardless of political party, for generations to come. I look forward to working with you and with the rest of our fellow parliamentarians to revitalize the heart of our democracy by making these historic buildings more functional in a modern world, greener and accessible to all Canadians.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll begin with our first round of questions at six minutes each.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thanks, Madam Chair.

Last week we had a presentation from your officials. You mentioned that. That presentation gave us an array of different options for a variety of different things, for example, the size of the visitor welcome centre and what to do about that, and the chamber.

It was fairly clear that one critical thing was lacking, and that's the mention of costs. Would you consider it good decision-making or governance practice to make those kinds of decisions without knowing the cost implications?

Hon. Anita Anand: As the minister overseeing the day-to-day activities of the project, and indeed the parliamentary precinct restoration, I can assure you that the issue of costs and budgeting is front and centre in my mind.

Let me assure you that decisions have not been taken about the way in which the restoration is going to proceed. I believe, that is the very purpose for which the parliamentary administration and the governance structure are set up.

What I will say is that once these decisions are taken, my team will be in a better position to provide costing and timelines to this body and to the BOIE.

• (1220)

Mr. Blake Richards: May I interrupt?

Hon. Anita Anand: Sure.

Mr. Blake Richards: As parliamentarians, we're being asked for input, but we're not being provided with any estimates of cost. I understand you're saying that once decisions are made, we can come up with costs.

From my understanding of your career pre-politics, governance had a fairly heavy role. I understand you were professionally honoured for your contributions in governance. Based on that deep professional background, are you satisfied with these governance arrangements for this long-term vision and plan, especially for the Centre Block?

You're saying to me, "Well, let's make some decisions and then we'll make the costs up after that." That doesn't sound to me like a really strong governance plan, but I want to hear your thoughts.

Hon. Anita Anand: Sure.

Mr. Blake Richards: Are you satisfied with that, or do you think there are some areas where that could be improved?

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you for the question and for highlighting my relevant background in this area, which I did not do myself.

I will say that I have asked my team to ensure that there is a back and forth relationship with the parliamentary partners, to ensure that we can collaboratively work together to provide you with the information you need to make the decisions that are on the table. We would be prepared to provide a preliminary costing analysis, along with the key decision-making points, so that you can be informed in making the decisions that are before you.

I'll ask my deputy minister to step in on preliminary costing availability as well.

Mr. Blake Richards: Sure, and it would be appreciated if you could make that quick as I don't have a lot of time. Will you be able to give us some sense as to when we would be able to receive that kind of information?

Mr. Bill Matthews (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Works and Government Services): I'll be very quick on this.

It is a bit of a chicken and egg situation, Madam Chair.

What we're looking for is to make sure that we have a sense of the vision. These are some big decisions. Two are very important: the chamber and the welcome centre. Those are two that I would suggest we focus in on. We can come back and do some preliminary costing and put those on the table, but it would be very helpful for us if we found out from the stakeholders and decision-makers which of the three options, if any, are not on the table. If there are some that aren't of interest, we don't want to waste our time costing those.

We'd like to get a sense, Madam Chair, of whether we're on the right track, and whether there are some that are of more interest than others. Then, we'll focus on those two, if that's acceptable, and we'll come back with timelines.

Mr. Blake Richards: If the committee can provide some feedback there, then we would be able to receive some costing fairly quickly.

The Chair: You have one minute, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Minister, are there any requirements or requests within this project that you've heard about or been briefed on since you took over the file that gave you any pause? Is there anything that you heard that made you say that we had better go back to the drawing board on this one? Is there anything that you have concerns about?

Hon. Anita Anand: As you highlighted in your first question to me, budget is always of concern to me, not just with regard to Centre Block, but with regard to everything I do as a minister of the Crown. I'm very conscious of budgetary asks, needs and requirements. I will maintain a very close eye on costing as well as what—

Mr. Blake Richards: Sure, but at this point is there anything that you've seen...?

I'll give you an example. I know there were some eyebrows raised about the idea that the Senate is requesting 10 new televised committee rooms. Is that something you would have challenged or questioned? Are there other things, at this point, that you've seen that you've challenged or questioned?

Hon. Anita Anand: I take the question.

Again, I am not overly engrossed in making suggestions about what we should be considering.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay.

Hon. Anita Anand: I'm very clear about the fact that these decisions need to be made by you, as parliamentarians.

Mr. Blake Richards: Being conscious of time, I'm sorry to interrupt.

Obviously, there are a number of different people involved in determining allocation of space in the Centre Block, and I want to get a sense of who's responsible for that allocation. Who would make a final decision if there's disagreement?

If the Prime Minister were to say to you that he wants x amount of space in Centre Block's south side for the PMO, for example, and if that were to clash with something requested by parliamentarians in the House of Commons, how would those decisions be resolved? Who has the final decision-making power? How would disagreements be resolved in those areas?

The Chair: That's all the time we have, unless you have a very short answer for that.

Hon. Anita Anand: I would be more than happy to continue the conversation if we have another time to do so in this session or—

Mr. Blake Richards: She's offered you the opportunity to provide a short answer.

Hon. Anita Anand: I believe that the current framework could be improved to streamline decision-making. I don't view myself as the final arbiter of decisions where there is a disagreement.

• (1225)

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, you have six minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Minister, thank you so much for being here. It's really great. I really appreciated the opportunity to tour the Centre Block and see the incredible work being done. I was really impressed by your team, the amount of information they provided, and the attention to detail. It's really clear to me that you have highly competent people working with you.

I have three questions.

My first one is about sustainability. I'm a sustainability expert who came into politics just this term, so it's always been an area that's important to me. As we know, in this Parliament, energy effi-

ciency, clean growth and sustainability are becoming imperatives for all of us. It's something that Harvard Business Review called the new mega-trend about seven or eight years ago, which they had sort of paralleled with information technology.

If you think about sustainability, in the next 100 years it's going to be something so commonplace that I'm interested in knowing how Centre Block might be an opportunity to showcase how innovative we can be and how committed we are to sustainability as a country. Can you tell me about what opportunities you see?

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you so much.

As Mr. Wright likely told you, we are committed to continue to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across government buildings, including the precinct, and greening our operations. The precinct has become a model of what can be achieved in meeting tomorrow's sustainability targets while protecting and preserving the heritage of the space.

Sustainability targets are built into every project in the LTVP. I am proud to say that we are exceeding these goals. We are similarly reducing our construction waste with each project by recycling 90% of demolition materials.

I will ask Mr. Wright if he has anything further to add on this issue.

Mr. Rob Wright (Assistant Deputy Minister, Science and Parliamentary Infrastructure Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): That was a really good overview, Minister. I'll just add a couple of pieces of colour commentary.

We are, I think, doing a really good job here in the precinct, and we're reaching further, as the minister indicated, with the Centre Block, for it to be a symbol of sustainability. We have made a range of efforts across the precinct, from solar panels to green walls to urban beehives at the Senate of Canada Building, for example. But, the core is really about making sure that we have very efficient mechanical equipment, harvesting of rainwater and modern lighting that consumes a lot less energy. We are working hand in glove with the modernization of the central heating and cooling plant as well, which will provide multiple benefits for the whole central core of the capital, including the parliamentary precinct.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks very much. It's great to hear that this is being made a priority.

The 42nd Parliament undertook two separate studies to foster a more family-friendly House of Commons. Several recommendations were made on that front. I have a young family, so it's of particular interest to me to know how we can ensure that the new Centre Block creates an environment that is more family-friendly for people and members like me who have young children and young families.

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you so much for that question. As a mother of four, I share concerns about family-friendly environments. I think, as elected members of Parliament we are all concerned about families and space being accessible to families and other individuals, persons with disabilities, for example.

Accessibility is a huge issue in the renovation and restoration process. By making the space more accessible, we are also making the space more family-friendly. We have increased the size of elevators in the West Block, for example. That has allowed for strollers and motorized wheelchairs to be used around Parliament. We've also enlarged and upgraded washrooms to provide for changing spaces across new buildings.

We have heard that this is a priority for members of Parliament, and it is something we are taking on board as we proceed with the restoration of Centre Block.

Rob, did you have anything to add on that?

• (1230)

Mr. Rob Wright: I think that's perfect, Minister.

As the minister indicated in her opening remarks, engagement with parliamentarians is the critical foundation to ensuring that the Centre Block meets their needs. We are completely open in wanting to have that engagement to understand how the facility, as part of its modernization, can meet the needs of parliamentarians. The nature of parliamentarians has changed a lot over the last 100 years, and will continue to evolve. We want to make sure this building meets the needs of parliamentarians when it opens and for generations to come.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you. That segues perfectly into my last question, which is about governance.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: There are several clients or key stakeholders, including the Senate and House administration, MPs and senators. Have you any thoughts about the optimum governance model? I think there is some preference for a joint committee, but potentially we could see two independent committees with some mechanism for resolving any differences between them. I'm wondering whether you have a preference for one or the other.

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you, again.

The Chair: Make it very short, 10 seconds.

I think the other members will pick it up.

Hon. Anita Anand: Okay, then let's proceed to that.

The Chair: Mr. Therrien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Thank you.

Madam Minister, thank you for joining us today and for making an effort to speak French. We appreciate it.

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you.

Mr. Alain Therrien: How much time do I have left, Madam Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I won't use all my speaking time because I want to leave some time for my colleagues.

From what I've read and heard, what caught my attention was the fact that you delivered previous projects on budget. We ask a lot of questions about budget and costs here. However, we were not necessarily convinced that there was a particularly firm budget. Of course that is a bit worrisome.

You said in your presentation that previous construction projects in the parliamentary precinct were delivered on budget. Are we talking about the initial budget or a budget that was subsequently adjusted for some reason?

[*English*]

Hon. Anita Anand: Yes, you are exactly right. I care a great deal about

[*Translation*]

budgets and I think it's very important to review budgets from time to time.

[*English*]

I just remind the committee that West Block, the visitors welcome centre, the Senate, 180 Wellington Street, the Library of Parliament and the Sir John A. Macdonald Building were all delivered on time and on budget.

There are revisions to the budgets that occur from time to time, but those are discussed with the parliamentary administration. I want to stress that at no time do we go off on a frolic of our own and decide our budgetary parameters without consultation.

I will hand it over to Rob Wright to continue with this point.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rob Wright: Thank you.

As the minister said, we have a very solid record when it comes to on-time delivery.

In answer to your question, those were initial budgets.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Okay.

Mr. Rob Wright: Those were Treasury Board budgets, and we stuck to them.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Okay.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Can I add a little context?

Mr. Alain Therrien: Okay.

Mr. Bill Matthews: We have already talked about the idea of providing the costs associated with the options presented.

[English]

We will be presenting initial estimates. That will not be a budget, just to be clear.

[Translation]

The budget is established once we have determined all the details.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Correct me if I'm wrong, but if I understand correctly, there are several possible scenarios.

Will you present all of them and their associated costs to the committee and to Parliament?

• (1235)

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you very much for your question.

[English]

We will be happy to provide preliminary cost estimates for the welcome centre and the chamber, and we will aim to do that very quickly, likely within four weeks or so. Then we will present those to the committee for discussion and consideration.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Okay.

We're always concerned about the fact that this is taxpayers' money. We shouldn't buy a Ferrari to pick up letters at the post office when a Honda will do. We have to make sure that we're meeting worthwhile needs rather than embarking on impressive construction projects. Otherwise, taxpayers will wonder how the government can justify grandiose buildings when the important thing is that the buildings be safe and functional.

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you very much for your question.

Those are very important questions to consider.

[English]

The taxpayer is ultimately important here.

[Translation]

I agree with you on that.

[English]

Let's think about the visitor welcome centre, just as an example. I know that Mr. Wright raised the different scenarios with you, but it's a great example.

There are different scenarios, and the costing would differ depending on them. For example, in the visitor welcome centre, phase two, we could have one point of entry or multiple points of entry. The decisions taken surrounding those items are going to cost different amounts.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Okay.

[English]

Hon. Anita Anand: I use that as an example. I will ask my team to present preliminary costing to you to help inform your decision-making process.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, for six minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you so much, Minister, for being here today. I appreciate the time you took with your presentation.

I enjoyed very much my tour of Centre Block. As a member who served in Centre Block—we've mentioned this before—I found it definitely a bit hard to see it under construction, but also it was good to be back.

One of the issues that's coming up here, and I think it is very important, is money, making decisions around money and understanding more clearly the process of how those decisions are made.

My first question for you, Minister, is on the sense of vision around cost. How is the process being done in figuring out what is required and what is wanted? How do you find the space between those two issues? As Mr. Richards mentioned earlier, the Senate is making some interesting requests for what they want. It's also about looking forward to the reality that the House and Parliament will change as a reflection of a growing population.

How are parliamentarians working with that process, for example, the input and the accountability, so that we can assess and understand, as representatives for our constituencies, the tax dollars that will be spent on those types of projects and choices?

Hon. Anita Anand: There are two main questions you're asking. One relates to the process for deciding costing, and the other relates to parliamentarians having input into the process. I'll take each of those questions in turn.

In terms of our process, I think we would all do well to remember that the long-term vision and plan set out in 2001 and then again in 2007—the plan for the parliamentary precinct—has been in place through multiple different governments. Some \$4.5 billion in funding was approved for the LTVP, of which \$3.5 billion has been spent to date. The LTVP is designed to be delivered through short-term rolling, government-approved programs of work, each of which is clearly defined and measurable with performance targets and schedule and budget milestones. Every year we produce an annual report, which my department will be more than pleased to share, that contains these milestones, the timelines and the budgetary considerations that we've been working under.

On the governance structure that is in place for making decisions, the current framework involves three levels, but it is overseen by the parliamentary administration. Of course, there are BOIE and CIBA. Those committees work with parliamentary partners, the MPs and the senators.

In my view, and as I mentioned in my speech, the decisions with regard to how MPs are able to participate in the process rest with those committees and the parliamentary administration.

In terms of parliamentarians having input into it, again, it's my view that the governance structure that is overseen by the parliamentary administration could streamline this process to a greater degree, perhaps by having a combined committee, so that decisions are streamlined and more efficiently made.

It's not in my purview to make that decision, but it's one that I would support if it were made.

• (1240)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much for that.

I want to express my appreciation for Mr. Turnbull's questions on sustainability. As we look to the future, retrofitting and looking at how we're going to sustain moving forward is really important. You talked a bit about the success that you feel we've had in this so far. How is that measured, and how is that reported back to the larger public? Are we seeing an articulation of some of these successes, as you've framed them, to the rest of the Canadian public to look at leadership in this area?

Hon. Anita Anand: As I mentioned, sustainability targets are built into every project in the LTVP. We are constantly thinking of new ways for us to become more environmentally sustainable. In 2018, PSPC launched a three-year environmental sustainability strategy for the precinct. It focused on water conservation, waste reduction and energy use.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Wright, who will explain the public disclosure of this information.

Mr. Rob Wright: There are two elements that I can add to the minister's response. One is on GHG emissions. We had a specific target of a reduction of 40% compared to the 2005-06 baseline. In the past year, we've achieved a 56% reduction ahead of schedule. That's one element.

We have another specific target. The minister indicated the recycling of demolition materials. Our target is 80% recycling. We've consistently achieved over 90%. Between this building and the Senate of Canada Building, we achieved 93%.

We've achieved up to 97%. The Wellington Building was the highest we achieved, with 97% recycling.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I just want to go back to where we left off. I was asking you about the allocation of space and when there's a disagreement, such as if the Prime Minister were to say that x amount of space was needed for the PMO, yet parliamentarians were to say no, that they needed room for something else. You said you wouldn't be the final decision-maker or arbiter in that. Who would be? Who would make those final decisions?

Hon. Anita Anand: Well, as I said, the parliamentary administration is responsible for bringing together the members and senators in their respective decision-making bodies to determine what would be appropriate for the space that pertains to them, as well as their views on the budget and the timelines. My view is that the information would hopefully be made on a consensus basis and that I would be in a position to approve decisions that were made at committee.

• (1245)

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, but let's say those different bodies, or however we want to put it, the demands of the House of Commons and the demands of the Senate and the demands of the Prime Minister's Office were all to conflict with each other and there wouldn't be enough space to meet all those demands. Obviously, somebody has to make a final decision. Who is it?

Hon. Anita Anand: As set out in the Department of Public Works and Government Services Act, I am the minister responsible for the day-to-day operations of the buildings and I am the official custodian of the buildings and the grounds of the precinct. As such, I ultimately could make the decision. However, my preference is to have in place a governance model where it is not the minister of the Crown who is making crucial decisions. My preference, and I think the preference of all of us, is to have a collaborative decision-making model where MPs are heard and making decisions about the space that, as elected representatives, they will occupy.

Mr. Blake Richards: I understand. For sure, that puts you in a pretty awkward spot if there are those demands.

Say the Prime Minister were to really insist, as we've known him to do in the past with other ministers, on something being his way, that puts you in a very awkward spot. I understand that.

I know—

Hon. Anita Anand: Could I just...?

Mr. Blake Richards: I'd like to finish, because I have a question and I want to give some time to one of my other colleagues.

Before the election, I understand this committee came up with a unanimous report. One recommendation in that report was to have this committee have oversight of the full extent of the construction and the various actors within it. That recommendation wasn't adopted by the government before the election. I wonder if you would support that effort being renewed.

Hon. Anita Anand: As I just said, I believe it is imperative that we have input into the decision-making on the project from members of Parliament and those who have been elected to office. I myself, as a member of Parliament, feel this very strongly. However, I'm fully aware that we are a parliamentary democracy that has two decision-making chambers, one being the House of Commons and the other being the Senate, and in respect of that governmental structure, we need to ensure that there are participants from each house of government in the decision-making process.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. I will turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Duncan.

The Chair: You have a little over one minute.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): I speak really quickly, but this will challenge that.

Minister, thank you for being here. Congratulations on your new role.

Building on what you said, I appreciate your approach here. I struggle even still, after our meeting the other day, in regard to what role PROC has in this. We're a bit of a consultation; approvals go to BOIE. We have the House, the Senate, security, the library, Treasury Board and cabinet, and you. I really see a challenge here going forward with timely decisions and those types of things.

I appreciate your words and comments on some type of joint effort between the House and Senate, all these partners at the level of members and the Senate, whatever that may be. You mentioned that it is not for you to decide, but I think you could play a leadership role. It could be as simple as a letter or declaration. As the minister who has the final sign-off on this, your voice and, frankly, your background in corporate governance could go a long way towards doing this.

The comment I will make in my brief time is that these types of projects are important historically and culturally in terms of the building, but I also think it's important for us as elected officials. It's these types of projects on which members of the public look to us and we get a reputation, good or bad—and I say that in a bipartisan manner.

I will use the skating rink example. It used to be that Maple Leaf Gardens was the most popular skating rink in Canada. However, the one that was out on the front lawn a couple of years ago got more attention and more people talking.

Could you speak more about the role you could play or the voice you could provide to get this done? Being from a municipal background and coming here, my worry and my frustration is that we talk about it, the committee adjourns, and that's just the end of it.

Do you have a comment on that?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duncan. You're much over time now.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Thank you. I didn't talk fast enough.

The Chair: No, you didn't, but they were good points.

Ms. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and good morning, Minister. To you and your officials, thank you for coming. We appreciate your being so gracious with your time.

I would like to acknowledge my colleagues for recognizing your background, which is key in this role.

I will also touch on governance. After the fire of 1916, there was a joint committee struck, and Pearson reported weekly to that committee. The transcripts exist from that meeting. It's really important that the House, the Senate and the Library of Parliament, the parliamentary partners, work together.

I would welcome your thoughts.

• (1250)

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you so much for both questions, which actually relate to each other in terms of thinking about alter-

natives to the current, somewhat fragmented, model that we have in place.

I would be in favour of any improvements to the current framework that would lead to better, more integrated decision-making among parliamentarians and their partners. It is so important to me for us to have an efficient and effective decision-making structure, given the magnitude and the importance of the project in front of us all.

As you know, the current framework involves three levels at which my department, BOIE and CIBA, parliamentary administration and parliamentary partners interact on decision-making, direction and oversight. That worked with regard to West Block, the Senate, the Library of Parliament and the Sir John A. Macdonald Building, but given the number of decisions we have in front of us and the desire to proceed in a timely and cost-effective way, I would be supportive of an integrated decision-making framework among parliamentarians and their partners.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you so much, Minister.

I'd also like to talk about the heritage. This really matters.

Centre Block is in many ways a memorial. It's a war memorial. That column in the rotunda was dedicated to those who were at war. Pearson wanted a tower to replace the Victoria Tower, the one that was destroyed in the fire. The new tower, that Peace Tower, was to commemorate the great peace.

If we talk about the Memorial Chamber of the Peace Tower, Pearson initially wanted all the names etched in the walls, but it soon became clear that this was not possible. It was decided, then, to have the book with hand-drawn calligraphy. It took 32 years to get that book into the chamber.

When people came into the Memorial Chamber, Pearson wanted them to walk on the same soil as those who died in the war. The floor comes from France and the altar stone from England. In fact, it's Hoptonwood limestone, which is the same stone as was used by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

The early Remembrance Days, before the Peace Tower, happened on the lawn of Parliament. That Memorial Chamber is so important to our Silver Cross mothers. The Silver Cross mothers are brought to the Memorial Chamber. They turn the page to her child, the one who was killed, and the carillon plays the regimental tune.

In 2027, we will mark the 100th anniversary of the dedication of the Peace Tower and the Memorial Chamber. We need to make sure we have that 100th anniversary.

I'd like to know how you're thinking about protecting the cultural heritage.

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you so much for those remarks and the brief history lesson.

As you know, the building has such a rich history. It was first built just prior to Confederation, and rebuilt after the 1916 fire, as the Speaker mentioned in the House yesterday. As I've mentioned, and I know Rob has mentioned also, the protection of the heritage and history is critical to the rehabilitation. Whether we're talking about the Peace Tower, Centre Block and the chamber, the West Block or the Sir John A. Macdonald Building, we have consistently had the importance of heritage and history at the forefront of our decision-making.

The department has just finished up the archeological work in the area surrounding the building. Thousands of items were actually found, including two arrowheads. We are undertaking consultations with the Algonquins regarding those arrowheads.

All of that is to say that, despite the focus I have been placing in my remarks on sustainability, security and accessibility, those values are balanced at all times with the importance we place, and we must place, on the heritage of these buildings.

Rob, did you have anything you wanted to add?

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. That's all we're going to have time for.

Mr. Brassard or Mr. Tochor, we have a bit of time if you'd like to get in a quick question.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Thank you, Minister.

We've been focusing on the main Centre Block, but we have also spoken about the parliamentary precinct, specifically Wellington and Spark streets.

The building that piques my interest, and I know piques the interest of many Canadians, is the former American embassy. Last year, the Prime Minister gave that building to first nations communities.

My question is twofold. First, do we know what the value of that gift is with respect to that property? Second, do we know what the rehabilitation of that building is going to cost Canadian taxpayers when it is fully integrated into an indigenous centre, which I presume was the intent of that gift?

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you so much, Mr. Brassard.

The spirit and intent of the Indigenous Peoples Space has always been that it must remain first nations, Inuit and Métis led.

We are actually playing a supporting role in this project. We're supporting the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and our indigenous partners to develop a concept and design for the permanent facility.

In terms of the value of the gift, I will turn it over to my deputy.

Mr. Rob Wright: It's a difficult question to answer, I would say, but we could do some follow-up work on that.

As far as the other question on cost is concerned, the requirements have not been developed. We're still at the concept stage. As the minister indicated, we're supporting the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and working with the national indigenous orga-

nizations and the Algonquin to develop that concept. Once that concept is developed and requirements are established, then—

Mr. John Brassard: I want to be clear, then. Is it the expectation that the department will pay for all of the costs related to the rehabilitation of that building, to make it the type of space that it's presumed to be?

Mr. Rob Wright: That was the initial intent of that project, to work in partnership to redevelop that as a national—

Mr. John Brassard: A partnership assumes that another side is going to pay. I'm asking whether the expectation is that the Government of Canada will pay the full cost of the rehabilitation or whether there will be a partnership.

Mr. Rob Wright: At this point, it remains a Government of Canada facility, and the approach would be for the Government of Canada to be redeveloping that in partnership.

As for those specific answers, I wouldn't say that we're at the point of how, once that concept is in place, the facility would be managed or would work over a longer term.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wright. Thank you, Mr. Brassard.

I would like to thank Minister Anand, her deputy minister and assistant deputy minister, for being here today and answering all of our questions. I think it was quite enlightening.

I may be putting the cart before the horse, but I believe this committee will be submitting an interim report at the very least, if not a final report.

You mentioned today in your presentation that you have some information that you may be bringing to us in four weeks. I believe it will probably be an interim report establishing how we can have that input mechanism, and then whatever information you have in the coming weeks to provide will be done according to whatever that recommendation is. We look forward to seeing you in the future.

Hon. Anita Anand: Could I make a couple of closing remarks?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to thank the members for their questions.

In particular, Mr. Richards, I'd like to thank you for highlighting the decision-making and governance issues. We do need to move and make decisions regarding a number of key points on Centre Block, so if you have recommendations in your interim report regarding that, I would be very pleased to see them.

As mentioned, we will be providing preliminary cost estimates for the welcome centre and the chamber to this committee.

In closing, I would also like to thank the interpreters for their excellent work during the meeting. As you may know, PSPC does take care of the interpretation across the parliamentary precinct, and we are very fortunate to have an excellent group of interpreters with us across the Hill.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

While you are all excused, I was wondering if the rest of the committee could stay behind for one minute.

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, thanks for being so agreeable.

In the subcommittee, we decided that the first business that the committee would undertake would be the conflict of interest review that's done every five years. I wanted to confirm that I'm giving permission to the clerk to write to the commissioner to appear before this committee, perhaps on the 24th of March.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Before that we were going to do—

The Chair: Before that we would be doing supplementary estimates and perhaps an interim report.

We will discuss that when we get back Tuesday. We're hoping that on the 10th we will do the supplementary estimates, and then

on the 12th the analysts will have a draft report for us to take a look at and to add our recommendations to at that point. It seems from the presentation today that there's going to be an ongoing process, so we'll decide at that point what we want to put in our initial recommendation. I would think it would be some kind of mechanism so that we can continue working with them.

Also, for the study, we have to pass a budget. This budget, I have been told, has a lot of leeway. It doesn't look like we'll be spending anything close to the amount that's in here because it's just food costs, really, at this point. We haven't flown anyone in or anything like that, but we have to approve it in order to move forward.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'll move it as presented.

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen has moved for the budget to be accepted.

Mr. John Brassard: There's no recorded vote this time.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you. The committee is adjourned.

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