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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia (Speaker of the House of Commons): Welcome, everyone, to this third meeting of the Board of Internal Economy.

I open this session by asking if you wish to adopt the minutes of the previous meeting.

(Motion adopted.)

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Do members have anything to add in relation to the business arising from previous meetings?

As there are no further items to add to the agenda, we can move on to the update from the Working Group on the Long Term Vision and Plan, and I give the floor to the chair of that working group, Mr. Tom Kmiec.

Tom Kmiec (Chair, Working Group on the LTVP and the Centre Block Rehabilitation, House of Commons): Mr. Chair, I understand that the notes I was going to use for my speech have been sent to all the members. Would you like me to read them now?

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Do as you wish. Make the presentation that you would like.

Tom Kmiec: In that case, I will read them for everyone.

[*English*]

As chair of the LTVP working group, I'm here to provide an update to the board on the Centre Block rehabilitation program and the working group's recent accomplishments.

Earlier this fall, representatives from the National Capital Commission attended a meeting of the working group to provide updates on the core area plan, Confederation Boulevard guidelines and the Gatineau-Ottawa tram project.

The working group has held regular meetings to review detailed information on several LTVP topics and is seeking the board's consideration and approval on some of these items today to maintain alignment with the project schedules.

Accordingly, the working group recommends that the board endorse the updated sustainability strategy for Centre Block, reflecting refinements to support a balanced, cost-effective approach; approve the permanent relocation of the Sir Robert Borden statue to the West Block forecourt; endorse option one for the Centre Block forecourt trees, maintaining the current configuration with no trees, consistent with security and operational guidance; endorse option one for the Confederation Building's swing space, supporting a sin-

gle-phase rehabilitation through shared use of block two east tower; and endorse the Centre Block optimization strategy, including option two to retain the courtyard infill.

[*Translation*]

Since the last update to the board, the Centre Block sustainability strategy was reviewed to confirm that all elements remain viable. PSPC presented proposed adjustments to the sustainability strategy, including the removal or modification of photovoltaic solar panels, battery storage, greywater and rainwater harvesting, and snowmelt systems.

At the Long Term Vision and Plan Working Group meeting on May 10, 2024, the working group endorsed these changes, recognizing them as a balanced approach to reduce design and constructability risks while maintaining strong environmental performance. As a result, the LEED target will shift from Platinum to Gold—still the highest certification for a heritage building in PSPC's portfolio. While the working group endorsed these changes in May 2024, the item has not yet advanced to the Board of Internal Economy for formal consideration due to the election period and subsequent full BOIE agendas. It is now being brought forward for the board's information and endorsement.

The working group collectively recommends relocating the Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden statue to the West Block forecourt, the area in front of the Visitor Welcome Centre (Phase 1). This public location balances visibility, accessibility and heritage context without competing with other monuments or parliamentary functions.

[*English*]

Now I'll move to the proposed swing space option for a single-phase Confederation Building rehabilitation. The working group received an update on swing space options to support the single-phase rehabilitation of the Confederation Building, as directed in November 2024. PSPC, the House of Commons administration and the Senate administration analyzed the swing space needs for 34 parliamentary office units. More detailed information is provided in the members' binders.

After a thorough review of several options, the working group endorsed option one, the shared use of block two east tower. The Senate and House of Commons share the block two east tower. Twenty POUs remain for Senate use, and 34 POUs are assigned to the House of Commons. The Senate retains 13 POUs at the Senate of Canada Building, and 21 POUs at 40 Elgin following the Centre Block reopening.

The working group unanimously recommends option one for board endorsement.

Moving on to the proposed option for forecourt trees, PSPC presented design options for adding trees to the Centre Block forecourt. The majority of members supported maintaining the current open configuration with no trees. Though consensus was not reached, the working group agreed to proceed with this approach in the Centre Block landscape package. Any future changes would require revised federal land use design and transaction approval, which must be submitted to the NCC prior to initiating tree procurement. Supplemental information on this subject is in your binders.

The working group therefore recommends option one, status quo, no trees, for the board's endorsement.

[*Translation*]

As for the proposed strategy for cost optimization of the Centre Block rehabilitation program, PSPC updated the working group on the Centre Block cost containment strategy. It adjusted budgetary pressures while preserving design integrity, heritage value and parliamentary functionality. Proposed adjustments focus on protecting heritage features, prioritizing parliamentary needs, maintaining construction momentum and sourcing materials within Canada where feasible.

A key proposal involved removing the Hall of Honour infill, previously approved by the Board of Internal Economy on November 23, 2023, to reduce cost and schedule pressures. The working group reviewed the updated design information and, while the majority favoured option 2, which consists in maintaining the central courtyard infill, consensus was not reached. Option 2 would provide approximately 636 square metres of new shared space on levels 4 to 6, including collaboration areas, seven additional meeting rooms and a dedicated informal meeting space for senators and members of Parliament. The working group approved option 2 by majority, maintaining the programming already approved by BOIE in November 2023. Therefore, the working group is recommending option 2 for endorsement.

● (1110)

[*English*]

The working group has been actively reviewing design options for chamber seating. All working group members were briefed on the current chamber seating design options during the meeting on February 27, 2025, following their visit to the physical mock-ups in December 2024.

At the February meeting, members examined detailed layouts, confirmed the designed principles and agreed that further refinements would continue through additional physical mock-up testing.

Further development with the physical mock-ups is under way, and the working group will engage the board in the new year, including through site visits. These site visits are intended to complement members' understanding of the design work under way, and will focus on the off-site mock-ups at PSPC's downtown Ottawa facility, where BOIE members will be invited to view and test the seating designs in person.

We're also scheduled to return to the board in the new year to provide updates and recommendations on other key projects, including block two.

The working group remains confident that parliamentary requirements continue to guide all decisions.

I'd be pleased to address any questions and provide further details on the items presented today.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: I will now open the discussion to questions and comments.

Mr. MacKinnon, you have the floor.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): First of all, I would like to thank the chair of the working group for his kindness and diligence. We work hard and often late into the evening.

My thanks also go to Ms. Garrett and Mr. Dicaire. We now know them well and have worked with them for several years. I also want to thank all the teams working on this essential project.

[*English*]

For our part, on the government side, the consensual approach of the LTVP is one of its strengths. However, sometimes that means there are differences we need to highlight. I obviously don't want to let go of all the good work that occurs, but I do want to point out some items we want to register here.

On the trees, we do not agree with the recommendation. The original design of Parliament—and, I would argue, the essence of Canada, frankly—requires, in our view, that trees be present in the new design and that they be worked on with security and other folks who have weighed in on this issue. We think the design will never be complete until we return to the original inspiration for Parliament, so we believe the trees are important.

On the block two and Confederation Building move, I think there is a strong consensus. However, I want to punctuate here that we can save millions of dollars by utilizing the space as it progresses through the construction phase, as opposed to procuring a new space or inconveniencing members unduly. The Senate has ample and comfortable temporary arrangements, much like many members of Parliament do. We believe that swinging members of Parliament from Confederation to block two while leaving the Senate in its current facilities is the way to go.

Finally, on the issue of the Hall of Honour infill spaces, again, these are important and critical co-working spaces for members of Parliament and senators. They would allow better communication between the chambers. Moreover, I think all parties have seen extensive use of the small, intimate working spaces that were installed, temporarily and very helpfully, around the chamber courtyard. That is the inspiration for this space, as well. I think we all know we are constrained in the parliamentary precinct with respect to receiving guests, visitors, delegations and other stakeholders from our ridings. That's what these spaces are designed to deliver. They are flexible. Obviously, the final configuration can be subject to further consultations among all of us, but I would not want us to lose this opportunity to complete the job. In the context of the overall program budget, the savings are negligible if we don't go forward with that, so we believe the Hall of Honour infill should be retained.

• (1115)

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (House Leader of the Official Opposition):

I understand that one of the rationales for endorsing the option without trees is a security concern about lines of sight. There would be additional costs if there are trees installed because of the need for, I'm assuming, cameras.

Could somebody speak to what the estimates might be in terms of additional security costs if trees are planted?

Benoit Dicaire (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons): Mr. Chair, we can come back with numbers. I don't have them readily available here. There are operational costs. It's not that it can't be done—true—our security partners were consulted. You're offsetting capital costs with operational costs, so that's kind of similar.

If we want more details and if there are specific questions on security, our security partners can be here to answer them.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I wouldn't mind doing that before I make a firm decision. If part of the consequence of installing trees is an ongoing extra operational cost in perpetuity, it would be very relevant to know what that is before we lock something in.

In the spirit of maintaining things in their original form, I thought we'd talk about moving the statue of Sir Robert Borden.

First of all, I'm looking at the diagram in the presentation. I apologize if this has been covered in previous meetings, but it looks like the residential schools national monument is being put where the existing parking lot is.

Is that locked in as a decision?

Benoit Dicaire: It's locked in, sir.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Will those parking spots be made up somewhere else in the precinct?

Jennifer Garrett (Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Services and Procurement Canada): Absolutely. Maybe to be more precise, the residential schools monument is not a project being led by either Parliament or PSPC. It's a PCH-supported initiative. We are in support of PCH. We did get endorsement to proceed with that site. We received federal land use approval from the National Capital Commission for the site situating the residential schools monument there.

The parking that's displaced will be accommodated, but it will be several years before that monument is actually built. This would have to be confirmed with PCH, but as far as I understand it, they haven't started the design process there.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Are there any ideas on where the parking spaces would be displaced to? Did your group choose the site?

Jennifer Garrett: Our group did not choose the site. Several locations were identified. This one was landed on at the end of the day.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Who landed on it? Was it the minister?

Jennifer Garrett: Our understanding is that ultimately, at the end of the day, the Prime Minister was responsible at the time for identifying that there would be a residential schools monument in support of reconciliation efforts. To that end, there was work done within the executive branch and with the parliamentary administration to identify sites.

I'm going back at least a couple of years in my memory, so I would have to pull that up to give you the details. I am going from memory. I cannot remember every site that was identified, but this was one of them. The pros and cons of each of those sites was established. In working through this becoming the preferred site by the steering committee of survivors and through coordination efforts with the National Capital Commission, we think we have been able to establish a site. We believe we have support for that site.

We're not impacting parliamentary operations. We've taken into consideration long-term security requirements there and the parking displacements more specifically. Some of those displacements, because of the people working up in the building, will actually be moving back to Centre Block. That 123-space parking lot will be a parking lot that comes online. Some of the spaces that are displaced by that monument will return to Centre Block.

In terms of the remainder, once we have a detailed design and the final impact on the parking there, we've been able to, from the design, move some of the spaces down below the monument onto the road surface below. For any residuals, we will work with the administrations to identify suitable locations for the people who will need those spaces in the building locations they will be working in. That West Block parking lot right now is temporary parking, largely to support the core parliamentary operations that are functioning out of West Block at present. That will change once Centre Block comes back online.

● (1120)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I have a couple more questions.

I don't assume that this is precisely to scale, but in terms of the box around the diagram here, it doesn't look like the original site for Sir Robert Borden interferes with that at all. It looks like it's quite separate. What's the need to move Sir Robert behind West Block? What problem is being solved by moving it? It looks like there's lots of space for both.

Jennifer Garrett: Right now, Borden is a bit down the hill. We're a little bit concerned that there would be a conflict in terms of impact during the construction site. Leaving him in place was one of the options that I think was discussed by the working group. We don't have the final design, but we do believe there's potential, when we actually get that site competition done, for conflict with Borden. Right now we have only a spot on his site. We're really taking the guidance of the survivor steering committee. There will be a competitive design process launched, as I understand it, to bring Canadian artists in support of that steering committee to do a design. I don't know whether there will be a green-space footprint associated with that design.

What we could offer is that once we have a design on the monument, we could do a check back in. If there's no conflict and Parliament would like to have Borden retained, we're happy to retain him there. Our working understanding is that there may be a conflict there, but until we get the competition done and the design, we won't know that for sure. We'd be happy to come back.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: In essence, could we defer this decision until we have more information about the impact the construction of the new monument would have?

Benoit Dicaire: That's a possibility, sir.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Perron, you have the floor.

Yves Perron (Whip of the Bloc Québécois): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank our three speakers for their presentations and congratulate them on their excellent work that was done conscientiously and quite effectively.

I have a few questions. I am generally satisfied with the proposals, including the one regarding the relocation of the statue. There is no problem.

With regard to the infill spaces, I agree with Mr. MacKinnon's comments on the importance of having additional spaces. I would

urge us, as an administration, not to take a short-term view, because this work will remain in place for a very long time. Even if we do not intend to be here for much longer, we have to think of the common good. I think it would be preferable, and important, to keep the plan with the three floors and the common areas.

When I saw the committee's reports, I was personally disappointed to note the absence of trees. I am a tree planter, a passion that dies hard. However, I understand that this is a security issue. I am prepared to go along with this option, but I would like more explanation about what is necessary and how it changes things in terms of security. I would like to know if all options have been considered. I saw in the document that there was an option not to plant trees on Wellington Street and to just plant them in the inner courtyard to ensure safety when there are large crowds on the Hill. As I said, I will ultimately support the option that does not mention planting trees, but my question is this: Have all options been explored, including the option of choosing smaller tree species, which would add greenery?

Those are my thoughts on the new premises and the lack of trees.

I would also like to talk about accessibility for people with reduced mobility. Our representative on the working group told me about the discussion that took place regarding the location of the facility. If I understood correctly, there was some concern that it would not be visible. I don't think we should hide it. Can someone tell me about the discussion that took place on this subject? I'm interested.

● (1125)

Benoit Dicaire: I will begin, Mr. Perron.

In summary, there were three meetings devoted to this topic. We explored several options, broke down the costs associated with each one, and studied the operational and infrastructure implications. The working group discussed each option at length and weighed the pros and cons.

I will now give the floor to my colleague Mitch Monette. He will be able to provide you with some details. However, since this is a matter of security, I think we need to be aware that we are in a public meeting and that we cannot discuss certain issues publicly.

Mitch Monette (Director, Parliamentary Protective Services): Mr. Perron, Mr. Dicaire mentioned that we cannot address certain aspects since this is a public meeting. Accordingly, I will stick to what I am allowed to discuss at this stage, such as certain security principles that are usually common knowledge.

The addition of trees clearly introduces a level of risk that did not exist before. Our responsibility is therefore to ensure that this risk is mitigated. In this regard, improvements must be made in three main areas: technology, physical infrastructure and human resources. Each area has its own risk scale, which can vary from day to day. During events on the Hill, such as Canada Day, infrastructure that is not normally there is put in place, which increases the risk. Our concern stems from the fact that we are seeking to mitigate this increased risk. I agree with you: wanting trees on the Hill makes sense, and there is a historical factor. However, the current environment involves a different level of risk than it did 150 years ago. I could present you with data on the current risk, but it would be of little use because we do not know the environment or the potential for future threats. It would only be assumptions and estimates about what will happen in four or five years.

Without going into all the different technologies, I can tell you that adding technology will cost at least \$500,000. From a labour perspective, adding a number of agents 24 hours a day or for other events could easily increase the bill by \$2.5 million per year. In this case, the Board of Internal Economy may accept that this is part of the expense. For our part, honestly, we are indifferent to the costs. We just want the board to understand that anything it wants to add could raise a new threat and that addressing it will incur costs.

Yves Perron: Thank you for your answer, Mr. Monette. That's fine with me. From what I understand, other options were considered, such as shrubs. You've gone through them all.

Mr. Dicaire, my next question concerns accessibility measures for people with reduced mobility. Could you tell me about the discussions that have taken place and where they stand?

Benoit Dicaire: This is one of the key priorities in the design of the new Centre Block building. My colleague Ms. Garrett will be able to tell you more about this, as it is one of the guiding principles behind the renovation of this heritage building, which did not comply with certain accessibility standards. This issue has been brought to the forefront of our considerations in order to find a solution before the site opens. Accessibility standards are essential not only for the public, but also for the members of Parliament who work there. It is a workplace, so we want to ensure that the Centre Block building meets current and future accessibility standards as closely as possible. This principle has been adopted in all aspects of the construction project.

[English]

Jennifer Garrett: Maybe I could add to that, and we would happily provide a more detailed briefing on the accessibility strategy.

First and foremost, one of the design principles that's been applied to this project is a principle that identifies a dignified welcome for all. This means that, wherever possible, especially for core parliamentary functions, we are trying to make sure that able-bodied people and people with disabilities are able to have the same experience, especially when they come to Canada's Parliament, whether they be a visitor or whether they be somebody coming for business purposes.

To that end, there are accessibility challenges all across the precinct, and we have a very good understanding of what they are. For example, on the program, we have implemented the landscape

design such that from Wellington Street, someone in a wheelchair will be able to come up the centre path, through the new Parliament welcome centre and, for the first time ever, will be able to go to the public galleries of both the Senate and the House of Commons chambers to see their parliamentary democracy in action.

Committee rooms are being designed to make sure they can accommodate the improvements required for accessibility. That goes broader than just physical disabilities. The range of accessibilities is broad, and sometimes that does create challenges in terms of the design, because something that suits one disability challenge is something that's an irritant for another, so we're balancing the approach as we work through the design process.

I'm pleased to say that, I think, for all core parliamentary functional areas, we have a really good strategy as it pertains to addressing physical limitations and hearing limitations, as we go forward in the program.

I'll stop there for the sake of time, but I would happily provide more details.

• (1130)

[Translation]

Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: If there are no other interventions, can we proceed with the adoption of the recommendations?

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: On the trees, I'd like to defer that until we can get some information back on costing. I think it would be fair to make an informed decision on the impacts of that.

On the movement of the Sir Robert Borden statue, we're going to defer that until the design for the residential schools national monument is....

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: We'll carve out those two items, then, but approve the....

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: I'm just putting my hand up to get on the list.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I'm done. I would propose that we defer the decision on those two recommendations.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: I'm happy to support a deferral on the statue, as well.

I just want to be clear about what we're adopting.

On the trees, I'm happy to receive further information there, but on the swing space, the Confederation Building, we're agreeing on option one, I take it.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Well....

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Endorse option one. That's fine.

A voice: Where's that?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: It's under the one-phase Confederation Building rehab.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Option one was the one the subcommittee recommended, so that's....

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: We are maintaining the central courtyard infill. That's perfect.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Okay. That's the consensus around that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Perron, I see that you agree, that's great.

Can we move on to item 4? I see that everyone is in agreement.

I would therefore invite Jean-François Lymburner, chief executive officer of the translation bureau, to take the floor. He is accompanied by Annie Plouffe, vice-president, services to parliament and interpretation, from the translation bureau.

From the Department of Public Works and Government Services, we have Joelle Paquette, acting associate assistant deputy minister.

Jean-François Lymburner (Chief Executive Officer, Translation Bureau): Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee, thank you for your invitation.

I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

With me today are Joelle Paquette, acting associate assistant deputy minister and director general of procurement, and Annie Plouffe, vice-president, services to parliament and interpretation.

The translation bureau is proud to meet the language needs of the House of Commons. Last fiscal year, we translated over 44 million words, which is equal to nearly 150,000 pages. We also provided Parliament with 20,000 hours of interpretation, including 12,000 hours of interpretation in the House of Commons alone, supporting all regular meetings and major events, such as the G7 summit in Alberta in June 2025 and the ongoing G7 Ministers' Meeting on Energy and the Environment. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Ms. Plouffe, who did an excellent job in overseeing the operations.

• (1135)

[*English*]

I wish to reaffirm the translation bureau's long-standing commitment to quality and service excellence. As Canada's centre of linguistic expertise for over 90 years, we are dedicated to excellence, collaboration and the highest standards. Our rigorous accreditation process, which interpreters must pass, and ongoing oversight are key to maintaining the quality of interpretation services.

[*Translation*]

Our parliamentary interpreter team consists of about 60 public service employees. We use a pool of private sector suppliers to increase our service delivery capacity on an as-and-when-required basis. This arrangement allows us to manage peak periods efficiently and adjust our resources during less busy periods.

I want to take this opportunity today to thank Romina Cousineau, Carly Johnson and Angela Benoit, who are interpreting this meeting in the booth.

[*English*]

The health and safety of our employees and suppliers remains a top priority. We are currently preparing a study on interpreters' exposure to noise, and continue to educate and advocate to protect the interpreters. Thanks to your collaboration and that of your colleagues, the number of incidents has decreased by 60% compared to 2020. We will continue our efforts to improve protective measures.

The translation bureau continues its long and rich history exploring and developing new technologies. We are harnessing artificial intelligence in accordance with the AI strategy for the federal public service. The National Research Council Canada has provided us with an AI tool to support our parliamentary translators, and we recently launched GTranslate in six federal organizations. It is a tool developed and tested by the translation bureau that has enabled the translation of over 100 million words in the past five months. It complements the work of our qualified language professionals in their mission-critical work.

[*Translation*]

We are also investing in the next generation of interpreters. Through new interpretation programs at Université Laval and Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, in which the translation bureau has been involved, we have attracted more than 38 new students to these programs this year. We are also offering a \$1,000 scholarship, which was given to six students during their first year of study, as well as \$7,000 scholarships, which were given to 13 students who completed their program. We are therefore investing a total of \$97,000 in training new interpreters. The bureau is very pleased to be hiring five new graduates this fall.

Renewing our procurement tool for private sector interpreters is part of our efforts to renew and expand the pool of resources dedicated to meeting Parliamentary needs. This summer, we engaged in consultations with industry stakeholders, gathering valuable feedback that informed the development of the recently released request for standing offer. As a steward of public funds, I feel that this process also supports the broader objectives of procurement and financial stewardship.

[*English*]

The cost of these professional services has increased significantly over the last few years. Since 2019, the daily interpretation rates have increased by nearly 70%, and that's for shorter days. In this context, it is essential to maintain financial rigour while continuing to uphold quality and safeguard health and safety. This balance is critical in ensuring the long-term sustainability and efficiency of our services.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee, I hope this information will be useful in your study of this matter. My colleagues and I are ready to answer your questions.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you.

Mr. Perron, you have the floor.

Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. Lymburner. Thank you for being here, and I want to warn my colleagues that I'm going to have a lot of questions.

First, I must admit to you that I am disappointed. As you know, I've been involved with this file for quite some time. In fact, I took the trouble to meet with you to find out your point of view and get the most comprehensive picture of the situation possible. I even shared with you that I wanted the Board of Internal Economy to hold a meeting so that information could be provided and some light could be shed.

However, this morning, you gave us a speech of little substance, except when you said that services were 70% more expensive than before and that they shouldn't cost too much. With all honesty and respect, there is a part of your speech that I don't understand. Last night, when I read your speech at home, I was a bit surprised. I really expected you to reassure me regarding the quality index and the health, safety and availability of interpreters, and that you would provide some potential clarifications regarding the standing offer.

That's our main concern, and you were supposed to come and address our concerns. Do you have any comments on my observations so far?

• (1140)

Jean-François Lymburner: Thank you for your questions. You raise excellent points, but I would remind you that my opening remarks were limited to five minutes.

As for the quality index, as I mentioned, the translation bureau's accreditation process is recognized around the world and is a guarantee of quality.

Secondly, with respect to the standing offer that you referred to, it was released last week and is still ongoing. I will therefore refrain from discussing this contract in particular, but we can give you general information. I am accompanied by Ms. Paquette, who can tell you about some of the fairly standard clauses in this type of contract.

We haven't received a bid yet, so I can't really speak to the increased costs. However, it is clear that the 70% increase in costs since the start of a hybrid Parliament and for reduced days has had an impact on our interpretation capacity. For a day like today, for example, the allocation of resources is a balancing act. When meetings are cancelled or extended, we have to change teams and make sure we have resources available. We work tirelessly to ensure we have this capacity.

In addition, as I previously mentioned, we have a great team of public service employees who support our work, as well as professional service providers from the private sector. We met with industry stakeholders over the summer to identify their needs and they provided some feedback.

When I met with you, in the context of an information request, we also discussed the possibility of adopting an hourly rate. You may have read this in the newspapers, but in the standing offer that was released last Friday, we announced a return to a daily rate. What pains me is that the hourly rate, which is used in the industry for the most part, could give us more flexibility when there are needs or topics that are a little more specific. However, we have been listening. That's just one of the clauses in the contract, but there are many others.

In terms of safety, the clauses are pretty much the same as in the old contract. Of course, we are assessing the effectiveness of the latest tools.

Ms. Plouffe's team manages over 1,000 contracts and agreements for various services, such as sign language interpretation, among others. The one you're interested in is interpretation in both official languages. There are concerns about costs. Like everyone else, I read that priority would be given to the lowest bidder. However, I repeat: if you want to work for the translation bureau and you provide a rate, I will first ask you if you have obtained your accreditation, because that's what we're interested in, not the cost. Then we will check whether you have the necessary security clearance, based on our needs, as well as the region of the country where you live. Lastly, of course, as managers, we will look at costs and the quality index to provide the best value to Parliament.

In short, we are confident that our accreditation process gives applicants a quality gateway to support your work. In fact, we will soon be holding an exam on November 7, and there are already a lot of registrations.

I'll leave it at that. It was a long answer, but your question touched on all of those concerns, and I'm sure you have others.

Yves Perron: I welcome your response, which is why I stopped—there comes a time when you have to. Perhaps our exchanges will be shorter.

The answer you provided covers several points. I just want to provide some context. As a Quebec MP, with several members of our caucus who are not perfectly bilingual, I want to make it clear how important interpreters are to us and how much we care about these people. We need their services to effectively represent our constituents.

If, during a committee meeting, the interpreter loses track of the discussion and I miss technical details, it will result in a representation problem and affect the quality of my own work. When we're told that quality oversight will be eliminated because accreditation is required, it raises serious concerns for us. The security clearance is fundamental—that is a minimum requirement, and we all agree on that, since this is Parliament, the seat of government. However, I am concerned about doing away with the old process, in which you regularly evaluated interpreters and could lower or raise a rating and follow up. I am not the only one who worries, because we're all concerned about quality. You mentioned artificial intelligence in your opening remarks. We consider it to be complementary, but it will never replace humans. We need humans who see us, pick up on our body language and understand our expressions. In fact, that is generally well described in the requests for standing offers, and these requirements are fundamental and very important. I agree with the need for accreditation and security clearances, of course, but I think it would be in our best interest to maintain ongoing quality oversight. If the services we receive are not evaluated on a regular basis, we could see a drop in quality. That worries me.

I have a great deal to say as well. I'll try to be brief.

We're talking about awarding contracts to the lowest bidder. Obviously, budgets have to be factored in, but the Canadian government is a huge machine. I can think of several areas where cuts could be made elsewhere than in this essential service, which ensures compliance with official-language requirements. In Canada, unfortunately, we often focus on appearances and we talk a good game, but when it comes down to it, we decide to make cuts because we have to reduce spending.

As I said, I have nothing against you—please understand that. I may seem angry, but it's not directed at you. I am quite concerned that in five years, or even in two years, in one year, or in six months, we will regret making these changes and my fellow members will no longer be able to do their work.

Here are some examples from this week, and I'm not making this up. The All-Party Maritime Caucus met with no interpretation services. We didn't reprimand anyone, we know there are limited resources, but five Bloc Québécois members had to work without interpretation. I don't think that's acceptable in a democracy.

You mentioned noise abatement. Last Thursday, I personally had to interrupt the meeting of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food because there was construction work happening on the floor below us and we could hear irregular beeping. I was having trouble following the interpreter and was concerned for her health. That lasted throughout the first part of the meeting, and I was the only one who raised my hand to mention it. We're always the ones who have to do this, and we are getting a little tired of it. We fear that the quality of our work will suffer. I am not saying that I have joined the union and want to defend all points; I am simply saying that we are concerned.

This morning, I would have liked you to reassure us by providing information on which I could have asked specific questions. Depending on what you said on a specific point, I could have suggested considering this or that improvement. Unfortunately, that is not

what we are getting, and I have to lay out the entire argument for you this morning.

I'll stop there. I'll let you respond to that part.

• (1145)

Jean-François Lyburner: Those are very good questions, Mr. Perron.

I want to strongly emphasize that quality is the translation bureau's stock-in-trade and that it is always a priority. Let me briefly explain the grid you are referring to.

The translation bureau has a quality management program that applies to all of our work: sign language, translation and interpretation, which includes debates. There are two key elements to a quality management program.

First, there is quality assurance, which begins at the outset to ensure that top-quality service is being provided. The point we want to make today is that we administer a very difficult accreditation exam that is recognized worldwide. That exam allows us to ensure the quality of our services. Ms. Plouffe can tell you more about that.

Second, we monitor quality. That is how a quality management program works. As participants in debates, your comments are very important. We receive complaints, and that is fine. Complaints can be made in several areas. We review complaints, and are fortunate to have our work filmed and recorded. We have teams that watch the debates.

In addition, our contracts have very clear provisions if quality requirements are not met. You talked about unions, and I read the article on that in the paper last week. However, we're talking about a contract offered for professional services. That's a whole other area. In the case of professional services, certain provisions allow us to intervene if quality issues pertain to an accredited interpreter who is providing you with the service.

Having discussed this with you, I know that some of you are concerned about remote interpreting. Interpretation, like translation, is constantly evolving. It is evolving even more rapidly with advances in artificial intelligence, which you are all familiar with on your phones. However, we are not there yet when it comes to conference interpreting. I meet regularly with all of our language partners in Canada. Companies are increasingly offering remote services, and there are two schools of thought. Some find that remote interpreting is better because interpreters are equipped and, with the help of cameras, they can see you speaking instead of being behind you. Some schools offer remote interpreting courses. It is therefore important for the bureau to use this technology. Remote interpreting is used for a very small part of the work you do. We have other less risky cases. We want to keep up to date and be ready when the technology evolves in that direction.

I will let Ms. Paquette address the issue of quality in contracts.

• (1150)

Joëlle Paquette (Acting Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Under the terms of the standing offer, once bidders submit their applications, they will obtain accreditation. Daily rates will apply under the standing offer. In addition, the standing offer includes several provisions or terms and conditions, including quality. Bidders must maintain a fairly stringent quality standard. If quality is not up to par, performance-related measures may be taken, or the standing offer may be terminated. The same applies to health and safety, as the standing offer includes a provision or terms and conditions on this subject. If there is a subsequent standing order, and if the technology has changed, we will add the health and safety information on the same day the interpreters report for work.

Jean-François Lymburner: The last point that was raised is quite important.

I'm making the most of your presence here, because you're really helping us a lot. When we enter the room, we immediately see the instructions we need to follow. Today, I noticed that committee members were careful not to place their earpieces near the microphone when speaking. The sound system is a team effort, and we work with our colleagues in the House of Commons. I've visited several parliaments, and people from the bureau have looked at standards that are applied elsewhere. I can tell you that Canada's standards are among the highest in the world and are the envy of all parliaments. Interpretation booths are equipped with sound limiters and better ISO-certified consoles, and the microphones are also very well rated. We make sure the environment is safe.

You mentioned the noise you heard from the construction work going on below. The people who were here before me talked about noise disrupting meetings. I imagine these situations happen from time to time. There are several reasons why an interpreter might not be able to interpret. We are familiar with problems related to remote interpreting. However, sometimes the interpreter cannot hear people because they are in their cars or do not have good microphones, for example. In such situations, interpreters experience more difficulty interpreting and will interrupt the service. These are just a few of the many reasons. Often, the computer system does not work or a technical problem arises, which means that they cannot hear the speaker properly. The source of the problem is not always related to the interpretation.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Are you done, Mr. Perron?

Yves Perron: I will speak briefly and then cede the floor to the next speaker, Mr. Chair. I don't want to take up all the time, but I'll have more questions later.

Mr. Lymburner and Ms. Paquette, thank you for your answers. When you talk about quality standards, I noticed that they are not necessarily set out in writing. This was also pointed out to me. People need to know what they are bidding on. I had access to a survey of freelancers—I imagine you had access to it as well—and about half of the respondents said they might not bid. This situation is worrisome, as there is already a shortage.

Quality is important. As I said, it is also important for democracy, for the value of each MP, who has the right to have all the information and a good understanding. Sometimes it is important for

witnesses, too. Our member who sits on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, where we hear testimony from people who've suffered significant trauma and who talk about very emotional situations, mentioned just this morning that one person tried to speak English because they felt they weren't being properly understood. This is a common reflex, and I'd like to avoid such situations. Of course, part of the responsibility lies with English-speaking members who do not wear their earpieces. They may think that no one notices, but we can see it. I have had members respond to me in the House without having listened to my question, which is rather peculiar. I will close this parenthesis and return to what I was saying: Emotions can run high and many things are essential to hear.

Perhaps more details on quality should be added to the requests for standing offers. In fact, I don't understand why we gave up on "green", "yellow" and "red" ratings. I don't think it costs that much, and you're telling me you'll ensure it anyway. Generally, when you want to sign a contract, you ask for things in writing to inspire confidence.

I will give the floor to Ms. Kayabaga and continue later.

• (1155)

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Ms. Kayabaga, you have the floor.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga (Deputy House Leader of the Government, House of Commons): Mr. Lymburner, thank you for all the work you do to support all kinds of people—not only the members of the Bloc Québécois, but also our francophone members who are as yet unable to express themselves in English.

My question is about the current hybrid nature of Parliament. If we lost this hybrid environment—I'm not saying we're going to, but I wonder what would happen if we did—what impact would that have on interpretation?

Jean-François Lymburner: That's a very good question. When we last appeared before the board last spring, that was the last question we were asked.

During the pandemic, we were not as well equipped as we are today in terms of computers and all the systems at our disposal. We decided to reduce interpreters' time in the booth to four hours because most members of Parliament were working remotely and using different tools to connect. That last question was whether we were prepared to return to six hours in the booth, as was the case originally.

I note that for all committee meetings, such as this one, no members or witnesses are participating remotely. Most parliaments recognize that the requirements are different when interpreting the words of someone participating remotely: more sustained attention is required, the sound quality is poorer, and the task is more difficult. It is important to remember that interpreters are listening, watching and translating all at once. Sound quality is decidedly important.

It is clear that, as a result of hybrid meetings, all parliaments have modernized and are now able to report on the number of minutes in a day that an interpreter has spent interpreting the words of people participating remotely. Obviously, this is the path we should be taking, but we are seeing more and more in-person meetings. We also provide interpretation services to the Senate, where meetings are also mostly held in person. Some witnesses connect remotely depending on their location, but this feature existed before the pandemic—and I am very happy that it does, as it allows witnesses who would otherwise be unable to do so to appear before Parliament.

As I said earlier, costs have increased by 70% and working hours have been reduced. That's one of the challenges we have in terms of capacity. Obviously, the more people participate in person and not remotely—as is the case for oral question period—the more we can return to the number of hours we had before the pandemic.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Until what time is the interpretation service available?

Jean-François Lyburner: Ms. Plouffe, who manages the daily schedule, is the best person to talk to you about the provision of services. I don't know how she manages to move everything around when meetings get cancelled or moved.

Interpreters are available during the parliamentary session. Some work takes place during the summer, but most of it takes place during the session. In addition, translators translate the debates overnight so that they're available the next morning in both official languages. It's a very short turnaround time. I'd say that, on sitting days, the translation bureau operates almost 24 hours a day, seven days a week in some cases. Interpreters are also used to working long hours. We ensure that freelancers' contracts include provisions stipulating that, after a certain number of hours, they'll get overtime.

Annie Plouffe (Vice-President, Services to Parliament and Interpretation, Translation Bureau): With regard to working hours and interpreter availability, our employees are there for as long as the House needs our services. Sometimes, we receive notice that the House will sit until midnight. In such cases, the interpreters will be on site until midnight. The House has already sat an entire night, and our employees were there the entire time, because we're here to support you and meet your needs. So we don't have normal working hours.

As for freelancers, the contract currently stipulates that their services end between 8:00 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. These are the time slots we offer them. We've issued a new standing offer to give us greater flexibility and to give employees some relief, because we must be able to use freelancers when working hours are extended, when

things continue beyond 9 p.m., 10 p.m., midnight, or even overnight.

• (1200)

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: What are your policies on activities that don't necessarily fall under parliamentary committees?

Some of our Quebec colleagues don't speak any English. If we don't have interpretation when we want to do capacity-building activities outside of committee-related ones, it's very difficult to carry out this type of training. Are you also available for this type of thing, or do committees always take priority?

Annie Plouffe: Our priority is to support the House. Parliamentary committees are therefore a priority. Next, we talk with our colleagues in the House Administration to determine which committees or activities we could support. An agreement is reached. Some groups don't necessarily have a clear mandate. In such cases, we do what we can, but the goal is to support as many activities as possible to assist the members here.

Joëlle Paquette: The current standing offer on the market doesn't include other less visible meetings. Instead, it focuses on Parliament and more important meetings. That's why we ask for translation bureau accreditation.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you. I have no more questions.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Perron, you have the floor.

Yves Perron: I'll start over again. Let me know when you've had enough.

Mr. Lyburner, I want to come back to things that weren't clear in the wording of the standing offer.

I've been told there's a minimum number of hours, but no maximum. This could encourage people to work long hours. You just mentioned the House extending the sitting into the night. I assume you want interpreters to work in shifts, because we don't want to exhaust them and we want to protect their health and safety. However, to do that, you need to have a pool of interpreters. I'll be a good sport here and congratulate you on your efforts with the new interpretation programs at Laval University and the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. Well done, that's a positive step.

That said, it's good to create a larger pool; however, in any private industry where there's a labour shortage, wages and working conditions tend to improve because there's strong competition among employers. However, in our case, we're told there's a shortage of interpreters, that interpretation costs have increased by 70% due to the hybrid model, and that, as a result, we're going to increase the number of graduates and treat them less well. That's my understanding, especially since your presentation focuses almost exclusively on the budget.

This is worrying for MPs. I invite you to make representations to your department. I may be naive at times—that's part of my charm—but to ensure the quality of the interpretation service, I think we could reduce spending in areas other than the interpretation service to the House of Commons.

Introducing a system based on the lowest bidder rule may seem like sound management practice. However, we've seen in various levels of government, in Quebec and elsewhere, that systematically choosing the lowest bidder can lead to unpleasant surprises five years down the road. In fact, we sometimes find that there has been a significant decline in quality. I don't want that to happen to us. In my analysis, the lowest bidder rule will cause freelance interpreters to compete against each other, which will encourage them to work for lower prices.

Furthermore, if I were an entrepreneur and was told that I had to lower my prices, I would probably streamline my services. What will be streamlined here? As an MP, I currently have no guarantee in this regard. Will interpreters prepare less in order to charge less? Will they read the documents at the last minute because they're paid little and have to do other things to pay their rent? I don't know. It's unknown.

In short, I think that wanting the lowest bidder can lead us down an extremely slippery slope. I'm not saying we should hire the highest bidder either, but I think we need to base our decision on other criteria, such as expertise and competence in a given field.

As I mentioned earlier, committee discussions can become extremely technical. There may be a particular way of thinking and specific terminology. For example, for an interpreter assigned to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, legal training would be very relevant. If their services cost \$2 more per hour, it may be worth it because the interpretation will be clearer. Members often speak quickly. Others are less articulate. Some witnesses read their presentations extremely quickly to stay within their five-minute time limit. It's difficult for interpreters. It's therefore important that they be knowledgeable in the field of expertise of the committee at which they're assigned to work.

There's also another uncertainty regarding the number of interpreters per team. When sessions run long and there are lengthy speeches, we often notice that at a certain point, there is a change of interpreter. This is normal, because interpreters run out of steam or are tired. Another interpreter then takes over for the next ten minutes, and so on. However, I've been told that there was no specific time limit in the standing offer. As for the practice of pairing an experienced interpreter with a novice interpreter, so that there's a kind of mentoring relationship, I hope you will continue with this. However, there's nothing in writing about this either.

• (1205)

Jean-François Lymburner: Your question has two parts. I'll address the part about students, and Ms. Plouffe can address the other part about supervision and how we work with our interpreters.

First, I'd like to say that the translation bureau is a driving force behind language services in this country. When I took office, only two universities offered interpretation programs: the University of Ottawa and York University's Glendon campus. In Quebec, no uni-

versity offered this program. The bureau therefore began discussions with two other universities with a view to doubling the number of programs offered. Now, Laval University offers a graduate microprogram in interpreting, and the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières offers a specialized graduate diploma in conference interpreting.

I agree with the committee members that students enrolled in these programs will increase the pool of interpreters in a few years. However, it's not always certain that an interpreter will be able to come and work on the Hill in short order. There are tens of thousands of interpreters in the country, some of whom work in legal services or the hospital sector, for example, and in many other areas of the economy that attract interpreters at the beginning of their careers.

When it comes to quality and interpretation, the bureau's exam is really difficult to pass. The exams are carefully vetted to ensure that only the best students come to work on the Hill. I'd therefore like to point out that the interpretation services you are being provided are of high quality.

In my opinion, we have a collective responsibility when it comes to hiring interpreters. If universities are having difficulty recruiting new students and Parliament Hill is portrayed as an unsafe workplace—based on what I've heard—this isn't reassuring for a young student or a 16 or 17-year-old who wants to pursue a career in interpretation.

Therefore, it's a priority for me to explain the interpreting profession and talk about it. Employees from the bureau visit book fairs and schools and post videos about interpreting work on the Internet. They explain that it's a fascinating profession where you feel you're making a contribution. It's important not to scare young people away. You may have young teenagers who are ready to choose a university. Young people are often hesitant to choose translation or interpreting because they hear things about artificial intelligence, which is why it's important for us to explain what the profession entails.

Unfortunately, the number of students in this field is declining. We have made efforts to revitalize the interpreting profession, but it'll take some time before you see the direct impact of these efforts on your work. However, I agree with you that there's always room for improvement.

Annie Plouffe: I'll try to explain the link between occupational health and safety and the quality of services provided by interpreters. One important thing to note in this regard is that health and safety form a continuum. All stakeholders work together, specifically with the House administration, to ensure that everything runs smoothly for meeting participants. It's undeniable that if we hadn't taken all the measures we've taken in this area over the past several years, our resources would be even more affected.

We've included a clause in our contract to clarify our commitment to health and safety. We make this commitment to our employees, our freelancers and all of you here. All measures, whether it be consistent messaging, providing stickers for the earbuds, or ensuring that the headsets worn by remote participants comply with ISO standards, therefore apply to everyone.

My team juggles approximately 70 interpreters per day to provide the services that the bureau offers you here in Parliament, not to mention those it offers to the entire government. The measures taken are no less favourable for freelancers; they're the same for everyone, and that's a commitment the bureau has made to its employees. That won't change. On the contrary, it continues to increase.

We're in constant discussions with the House administration and our counterparts abroad to adopt best practices. Limiting ourselves in terms of contract clauses and standards to follow would hinder the progress and continuous improvement to which we are collectively committed.

With this in mind, interpreters in the booth decide the turns amongst themselves. The industry recommends alternating turns every 20 minutes. In some cases, such as when more serious topics are discussed in meetings—I'm thinking of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, where witnesses are sometimes emotional—interpreters must deliver the message in the same tone. They may therefore sometimes decide together to alternate every 10 minutes. That's why we trust their professional judgment to determine what happens in the booth. When they prepare, they see the nature of the meetings and therefore make a group decision.

In the same vein, we're relying more on the professional judgment of interpreters so that each freelancer—who, we hope, will be as numerous as possible—can choose the number of hours of interpretation they're willing to offer. That's why we have set a minimum number of hours, because some are very comfortable working six, eight, or ten hours a day, but under the current circumstances, we're really limited to four hours. So each professional will be able to make their own decision, and we will offer them shifts accordingly.

This could mean that some people will work eight hours a day and that their pay will be adjusted accordingly, precisely to recognize this fact. For example, at the G7 conferences, which Mr. Lymburner referred to, interpreters work 12 hours, three to a booth, and sometimes even longer, depending on the requirements. They accepted these conditions, which we will therefore also offer to our freelancers.

When it comes to quality assurance, the accreditation we require is one of the most difficult to obtain. That's why the success rate is still quite low. At the moment, I'm proud to say that, according to the figures I have, we have 54 candidates for the accreditation exam, which is still a substantial number. We have about 20 new candidates, meaning people who have never taken the exam before. So we're hopeful that it'll go well, but again, the standard exists because everything you noted—being able to accurately convey your words, clarity, idiomatic expressions, the message to be conveyed—corresponds to our expectations of interpreters, and that's what we check during the certification exams.

• (1210)

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Does that more or less answer your questions, Mr. Perron?

Yves Perron: Yes, but I have one last question to ask.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: You have the floor, Mr. Perron.

Yves Perron: Thank you for your answers, Ms. Plouffe. Some things reassure me, others less so.

I have a brief question, to which I would also like a brief answer. You say that interpreters work six, eight or ten hours a day and that, in the context of G7 conferences, they work 12 hours. An interpreter might tell you that they work ten hours a day, but they may have to take sick leave in two years because their ears are damaged and they are exhausted. We need to be mindful of that, too. I know people who have overly demanding work schedules, and I am one of them.

Are there any health and safety assessments or recommendations regarding desirable working hours?

Annie Plouffe: Yes, there are. According to the standards of the International Association of Conference Interpreters, a working day should not exceed two periods of three hours each.

The G7 meeting is an exceptional event. Working 12 hours a day in Parliament is certainly not a practice we would encourage. However, everyone decides their own limits based on their professional judgment.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. MacKinnon, do you have anything else to say on the subject?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: First, let's let Mr. Perron finish his series of questions.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Please continue, Mr. Perron.

Yves Perron: All right.

Mr. Lymburner, you said that we must be careful not to portray interpreting as a terrible profession. I want to reassure you that this is not my intention this morning. I believe that the concerns I have raised are justified from the perspective of an elected official who has been using interpretation services on a daily basis for six years. I want to emphasize that we have exceptional, high-quality interpretation and translation services, but they are not perfect. Members of my party often share their comments with me about difficulties with interpretation.

Within my party, we want to preserve this service. We want interpreters to have working conditions that will allow them to work here for more than six months, a year or two years. If they stay for a long time, they will adapt to parliamentary language and become excellent. However, to do that, we need to keep them. But the most excellent and experienced interpreters will inevitably send you a quote that is slightly higher. We want their experience to be taken into account and not just the lowest bidder rule. I know that the idea has been considered and then abandoned in the past. In short, I do not think that the direction taken is the right one.

In saying this, I am not portraying the profession as being terrible. I want to make that clear. It is up to the administration to issue clear and complete calls for tenders. However, I have been told that this is not the case and that information is missing. That is the problem.

There has been a lot of talk about the hybrid mode, and Ms. Kayabaga mentioned it earlier. We are all aware that the increase in interpretation costs is largely attributable to the pandemic. We had to react, adapt and train people. At the time, we were not concerned about costs, because democracy had to continue. However, that was some time ago. We could review the contexts in which we really need to be in hybrid mode. For example, we could keep hybrid mode for votes and exceptional circumstances, but return to in-person mode whenever possible to avoid exhausting our interpreters. I am very aware that interpreting video conference proceedings is more difficult. Several reasons have already been mentioned. There is the quality of the Internet connection, which is variable, even in a G7 country in 2025. That's the way it is, and we have to deal with it. There is also the question of the platform used. There may be more efficient ones. I believe some are currently under development. I hope your service is considering new options to preserve the long-term hearing health of interpreters.

We have all received a letter from the Canadian Association of Professional Employees, which represents permanent interpreters in Parliament, requesting additional funding because several interpreters are on the verge of burnout. The chair replied to the association that its request did not fall within the purview of the Board of Internal Economy, but rather that of the minister's office, and recommended that it contact the minister. I agree with that. However, this letter and the discussions we are having today make me think that we should perhaps also talk to the minister at some point. I am raising the issue with my colleagues because, ultimately, it is the minister who will make the decisions on budget cuts.

I would like to remind the people who have kindly come here this morning that none of my remarks should be interpreted as a personal attack on them. I am concerned about maintaining the quality of interpretation services and protecting one of our two official languages. We are supposed to treat our two official languages equally. Unfortunately, the reality is quite different.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1215)

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you, Mr. Perron.

Mr. MacKinnon, you have the floor.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome the members of the translation bureau team. I have had the honour and pleasure of working with some of them. I know how seriously they take their work. As we know, the translation bureau is one of the oldest institutions in the federal government and has a long tradition. It is often overlooked that Canada is a leader in language services. When you think about it, there are international bodies in Geneva, New York and elsewhere where simultaneous interpretation is common practice, but this is very rare elsewhere in the world.

Canada is legitimately a leader, and it must remain so, since we live in a country with two founding languages, both of which are of equal value. Each must be treated with respect and consideration. Interpreters are, in a sense, the front line for the respect and use of official languages in federal institutions and in Parliament. The fact that these two languages are interchangeable and that this is an everyday, accepted and perhaps even commonplace occurrence is one of Canada's great achievements, and the translation bureau is key to this.

Mr. Lymburner, I know that you are very dedicated to this cause. Ms. Plouffe, I know that you face a major challenge in terms of organization and logistics. We recognize that this is important and we are well aware of it, I want to emphasize that. Of course, we also appreciate the interpreters. We may not say it often, but we thank you for their work. Personally, I rarely use interpretation and translation services, since I am bilingual. However, we have many colleagues in all parties who are unilingual in French or English. They use earpieces every day, and we thank you on their behalf as well.

That said, we are the Board of Internal Economy and we have a management duty. Mr. Lymburner, you indicated that costs had increased by 70%. A few reasons were mentioned, such as hybrid operations, and so on. Do you think this increase in costs is sustainable, or will you have to take measures to slow it down? Not many budgets increase by 70% these days. I am asking you this question.

• (1220)

Jean-François Lymburner: I mentioned a 70% increase, but I also added that it was for fewer hours. So, in the end, it's actually more. Obviously, we can see the improvement. There are also other needs in terms of preparation, the tools we're talking about. It's clear that support is taking up an increasingly large portion of our budget.

At this point, it's too early to talk about the new standing offer. The old standing offer had a randomized aspect, which could result in various rates. We expect there to be a range of rates again.

That's why we really need to make sure we can manage the situation well, because at these levels, we won't be able to offer you all the services in a shorter time frame. There are several types of meetings. We really want to increase the number of hours we can offer you to support your work.

As managers, my colleagues in procurement and I also want to promote healthy competition among people. As I have said in other appearances, these are often one-person businesses. We understand this particular situation. Some of these people are former employees of the bureau who may no longer have wanted to be employees. These people also have their grievances. We therefore have to manage this balance. It is in this spirit that we believe we have published a tool that will meet our needs while maintaining our quality and the health and safety of interpreters.

In your statement, you mentioned that Canada was in a unique position. You talked about earpieces and microphones. There are also two official languages to consider. This is important, and I have not seen this elsewhere, whether at the UN or the European Parliament, where there are 37 languages. There, almost everyone has headphones and there are no loudspeakers. Here, on the other hand, members can stand up without any equipment and speak. So the sound has to be amplified, which means that my colleagues in the House of Commons have to prevent sound feedback. That, too, is very unique to Canada, and I am very proud of it. I get a lot of questions about how we do things.

Of course, we can improve, and there is still room for improvement in this area. We are examining all the technical possibilities to reduce incidents. Even though there is no such thing as zero risk, we are on the right track.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Are there any other interventions?

You may continue, Mr. MacKinnon.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Lymburner, Mr. Scheer, Mr. Perron's predecessor in the bureau, my colleagues and I have spent countless hours reviewing voluminous reports on, among other things, the health and safety of interpreters and sound quality assessments.

Are you convinced that we have reached the point where the risk is minimal? Let's be clear, the health and safety of interpreters must be the priority. Are you comfortable with where we are now and the fact that we have the best that is available in the world, whether in terms of equipment or standard practices, in particular?

• (1225)

Jean-François Lymburner: Canadian standards are among the most stringent for the factors I mentioned earlier.

For those who remember, last year, following some unfortunate events related to sound feedback, the Department of Labour conducted an investigation and issued a directive to us. The department met with all my colleagues in the House of Commons and the Senate and conducted a thorough inspection of Parliament to ensure that it was once again a safe place.

I am pleased to confirm that the matter is now closed, although we will certainly remain in contact with our colleagues at the Department of Labour. This situation has resulted in raising the bar to the highest level in terms of our standards. Everyone worked together. The interpretation and technical aspects made it possible to close the file on this instruction from the Department of Labour.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: I want to come back to the costs. You said there was a 70% increase in costs for fewer hours of interpretation. What is the actual rate of increase in these costs? Are we talking about 100%, 120%?

Jean-François Lymburner: It goes beyond 100%, because the 70% rate represents the median cost. In this case, we are talking about freelancers, for whom the median cost has increased by 70%.

Under current conditions, this increase in costs is accompanied by fewer interpretation hours. However, things could change if there is less and less use of the hybrid mode. The more meetings held in person, the more interpretation hours we can offer, which

will reduce the increase, which is currently over 100%. That is what the team is saying. That is in relation to the median rate. If we compare the daily allowance for 2020 with today's allowance, we see that it is 70% higher.

This growth is not seen in other areas related to interpretation. This situation is truly unique to Parliament. There is another unique phenomenon: in certain circumstances, we are reducing interpretation hours, which puts pressure on the capacity of parliamentary work.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: As there appear to be no further questions, I would like to thank the witnesses for enlightening us on several aspects of this essential service on which we all depend in one way or another.

[English]

Number five is the annual report on committee activities.

You have before you a letter from Ms. Sgro, chair of the liaison committee, informing the board that the committee recently adopted its latest annual report on activities and expenditures for the 2024-25 fiscal year. It was tabled in the House on Tuesday, September 23, 2025.

Ms. Sgro has also indicated her availability to appear at a future meeting should the board require any additional information.

Standing Order 121(4) requires the board to table an annual report on committees. In recent years, this has been done by having the Speaker table the liaison committee report in the House.

Are there any questions or comments?

I don't see any, so we can go to item number six, a request for exception related to office relocation due to electoral district redistribution and boundaries readjustment.

I would invite Mr. Paul St George, chief financial officer, and Robin Kells, senior director for corporate procurement and asset services, to the table.

Go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Paul St George (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The administration is seeking the board's guidance on a request for an exception from a member. The member wishes to have the costs of moving his constituency office charged to the administration's central budget. The member, whose constituency was affected by the redistribution of geographical boundaries, made arrangements to move to a new office within the prescribed 180-day period.

• (1230)

[English]

However, due to renovation delays beyond their control, the member had to temporarily relocate to another space, with the final move occurring after the 180-day period.

Given that these delays are caused by circumstances outside their control, the member is asking the board to consider approving an exception to allow the costs related to a second move, estimated at approximately \$4,000, to be charged to the administration's central budget.

The board may also wish to extend the authority of the clerk to make temporary exceptions from the current six months to 12 months from the date of a general election, provided that these costs are reasonable and do not result in additional funding.

This concludes my presentation. I welcome any questions you may have.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen (Chief Government Whip): Are you aware of any other individuals who might be making similar requests?

Paul St George: Mr. Chair, we believe there are another three or four members who may be applying for additional funding similar to this request.

Hon. Mark Gerretsen: In my opinion, Mr. Chair, in that case, the proper authorization should extend from six months to 12 months, given the caveats that were indicated and outlined by Mr. St George.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: We can now move on to the seventh item on the agenda, which is updates to the rules of procedure of the Board of Internal Economy. I invite the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, Mr. Michel Bédard, to take the floor.

Michel Bédard (Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

At the last meeting of the Board of Internal Economy, we proposed amendments to the Governance and Administration By-Law, as well as to the rules of procedure of the Board of Internal Economy. The proposed amendments to the Governance and Administration By-Law were approved, including those concerning the composition of the administration and the clerk's management group.

With regard to walkarounds, the proposals concerned the fact that a signature was required in all cases. We proposed that members' consent could be expressed in ways other than by signature and that this approach could be used to approve any type of decision, not just the adoption of regulations as the rules currently provide. There appeared to be support for these proposals, but there was no consensus on the threshold required to make a decision by walkaround.

[*English*]

The proposal that was before the board at the last meeting was that the walk-around could be approved by a majority of members. There was an attempt to try to qualify the consensus principle.

I understand that since that last meeting, there have been some discussions, and there is another option that would be formulated in the rules that the walk-around would require unanimous consensus from all members. This option is presented to the BOIE as option B.

The administration has no preference with regard to option A or option B.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Perron, you have the floor.

Yves Perron: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Bédard.

Indeed, you are right. I have consulted with my colleagues and I believe we could agree to adopt option B based on the argument made last time, namely that the walkaround would facilitate administrative fluidity. If there were an issue for which there was no consensus on the solution, we would need to be able to discuss it, and if it were urgent, this meeting could also be held online.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Does everyone agree?

I see that everyone is nodding their heads.

Thank you, Mr. Bédard.

We must now take a short break in order to go in camera to deal with the last two items on the agenda.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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