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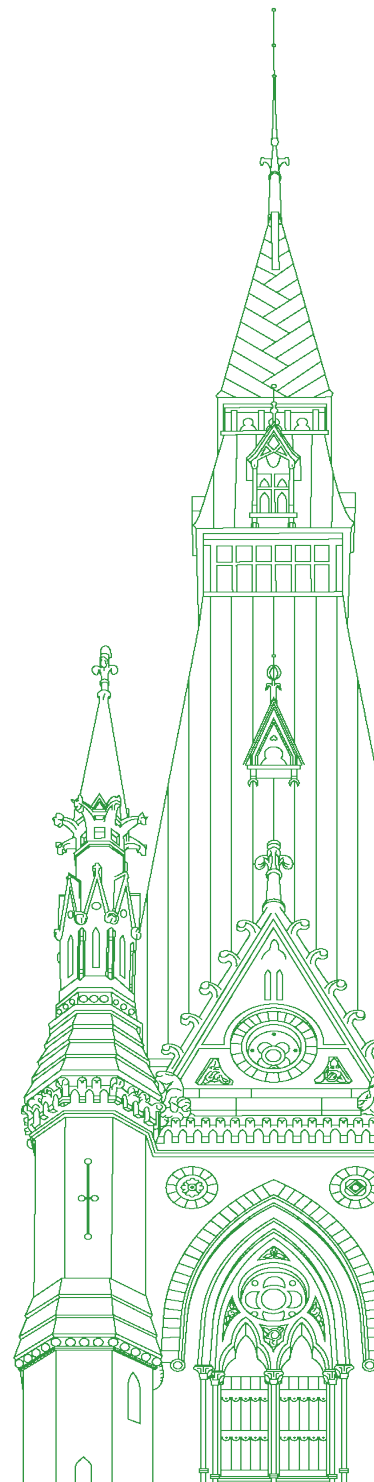
Board of Internal Economy

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Thursday, March 12, 2026



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• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia (Chair of the Board of Internal Economy): I call this meeting to order.

It's a little nicer outside than it was at this time yesterday. We can be very grateful.

We're starting with the adoption of the minutes from the previous meeting. Shall we adopt them?

Voices: Agreed.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: That doesn't seem controversial.

Next, we'll move on to the second item on the agenda, which is business arising from previous meetings. Are there any issues to raise regarding our previous meetings?

Voices: No.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Perfect.

Moving on, then, to the third item on the agenda, interpretation services. We have with us this morning the Honourable Joël Lightbound, Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and Quebec lieutenant. From Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement, we have Alex Benay, associate deputy minister, and from the translation bureau, we have Jean-François Lyburner, chief executive officer.

Minister, would you like to say a few words to start the discussion?

Hon. Joël Lightbound (Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and Quebec Lieutenant): Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much to all the members of the Board of Internal Economy for having me here today.

I heard that it was rather unusual for a minister to appear before the board, so I'm honoured to be here. It's a great pleasure. Thank you for having me here today to talk about a service that is absolutely fundamental to the functioning of our parliamentary democracy.

First, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the interpreters who are here today to support the board's work. I thank them. Through their expertise and rigour, they enable parliamentarians to debate and legislate in both official languages, but above all, they make our work accessible to all Canadians. Their role is essential to the vitality of our democracy and to public confidence in its institutions.

Parliamentary interpretation isn't just one service among many. It's a critical democratic infrastructure. Every year, thousands of hours of interpretation are required to support the work of the House of Commons, standing and special committees, the work of the Senate and related parliamentary caucuses and activities, which you are all familiar with.

Since 2020, demand has risen sharply, due in particular to the increase in the number of hybrid meetings, the rise in the number of committee meetings and the widespread adoption of digital platforms in parliamentary operations. This has been accompanied by an increase in the cost of interpretation services of approximately 70%. At the same time, the interpretation market in Canada is under pressure. The number of available accredited interpreters remains limited, while demand is rising across all public and private institutions. We therefore face a situation where competition for expertise is intense. In the face of this reality, our responsibility is twofold: to protect the quality and well-being of interpreters and to ensure the uninterrupted continuity of services to Parliament.

For these reasons, the translation bureau has made some fundamental decisions in recent years. First, with regard to health and safety, stricter technical requirements were imposed for hybrid meetings, particularly concerning the minimum audio quality standards. These measures have been adopted to reduce the risks of acoustic injuries that have been documented in Canada and abroad. In this regard, I note that the number of incidents has decreased by 75% in recent years. I would like to take this opportunity to remind all parliamentarians present here to always be careful about the guidelines on this matter, which you are, of course, familiar with.

Second, procurement processes have been modernized. Last October, a new standing offer was launched for official languages interpretation services for Parliament and major events. This reform puts an end to a rigid contracting model and now allows us to bring on new suppliers at regular intervals, gradually expand the pool of interpreters, and increase our operational flexibility during peak periods. In practical terms, thanks to this new approach and this standing offer, the translation bureau now has a pool of 41 accredited freelance interpreters, in addition to other contractual mechanisms that are already in place, and is able to meet the needs of Parliament. This may seem like a small number, but in a specialized market where it takes several years to train a conference interpreter, and where pass rates on the accreditation exam are historically quite low, every addition to the pool represents a strategic gain.

Third, we are investing in the next generation. Maintaining a sustainable workforce requires training, mentorship and long-term planning. Without a structured succession plan, it would be irresponsible to claim to be able to guarantee service stability five or 10 years from now. I also want to be very clear that Parliament is the translation bureau's top priority. When trade-offs have to be made, parliamentary needs take precedence. Resource planning is carried out in close collaboration with the House of Commons administration to anticipate periods of high demand, particularly during intensive committee work or extended sittings.

When it comes to accreditation, let me be very clear: Standards have not been lowered. The requirements remain high. Adding an independent external perspective is intended to strengthen the transparency and credibility of the process. Final decisions remain exclusively the prerogative of the translation bureau. The goal is not to make it easier to succeed, but to ensure the robustness of the process and confidence in the professional ecosystem.

We are faced with a clear choice: Either we maintain structures designed for a market from 20 years ago and risk service disruptions, or we modernize our tools while protecting the quality and professional standards on which parliamentarians—and, more broadly, Canadian democracy—depend.

We have chosen the path of responsibility by modernizing procurement, protecting the health and safety of interpreters, investing in the next generation and securing the long-term linguistic capacity of Parliament. On this point, our commitment is firm. We want to guarantee a stable, professional service that meets the demands of a bilingual and modern Parliament.

Thank you very much for your attention, Mr. Chair and members of the Board of Internal Economy.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you, Minister.

Let's move on to questions.

Mr. Perron, you have the floor.

Yves Perron (Whip of the Bloc Québécois): First of all, thank you very much, Minister, for being with us this morning. With all due respect, that sends a better message than the correspondence we've exchanged.

In the statement you provided to us, you talked about transparency. However, I've been following this issue for quite some time now. You'll recall that we discussed it last summer or last fall at any rate. I was surprised, because when we talk about transparency, our words need to match our actions.

We met with representatives from the translation bureau at the Board of Internal Economy, and I learned two or three weeks later that the accreditation exam had been changed. Now, I'm not saying that the accreditation exam isn't good. I'm not qualified to say that. However, there are some things that make me doubt it. I think we should have been informed of this at the time. We certainly didn't ask any questions about it, because we didn't expect the exam to be amended. That wasn't mentioned, unless I missed something in the statement. Mr. Lymburner can correct me if necessary. That's one example.

So we need to work together. I'll say it up front and set the stage at the outset of our discussion: I'm really here in a respectful and constructive spirit. We spoke about this informally a little earlier, but I wanted to say it again officially.

When you say that Parliament remains a top priority, that means that today, you can guarantee that there will be no reduction in service to Parliament, either in quantity or quality.

Try to keep your answers short, if you don't mind.

• (1140)

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Perron, allow me, first of all, to commend your interest and leadership on this matter. I know this is an issue close to your heart. You have mentioned it. We have discussed this matter and I think it is to your credit that you take such an interest in the quality of interpretation services in both official languages in Parliament. I commend you for that.

In response to your first question, there have been no changes to the accreditation examination. As you know, there are four interpreters from the translation bureau who assess the exam. The change that has been made is that we have now incorporated the perspectives of two external assessors. You know them: They are Matthew Ball and Louis Jolicoeur, who are leading experts in the field. They contribute their assessment and perspective on the exam, but the exam itself, for accrediting an interpreter, has not changed. I just want to reassure you on this point.

Yves Perron: I am quite willing to accept what you say regarding the content. However, I do have some reservations about the assertion you have just repeated that these are two independent experts. We could discuss this at length, but in my view, an administrator at the translation bureau is not an independent evaluator. They are a member of the translation bureau's administration. However, we are getting bogged down in details. I'll move on to the substance.

I had no intention of naming them, but you have just done so. Mr. Jolicoeur, who apparently enjoys a good reputation, and Mr. Ball, are not interpreters accredited by the House of Commons. According to the information I have, they would not be able to work in Parliament. Once again, I ask you, and the colleagues at your table: if I say anything that is not accurate, I am counting on you to correct me, because we are here to verify the facts. However, according to the information I have, they are not accredited. So, they are assessing people in an accreditation exam to do a job when they themselves do not have the qualifications to do that job.

Could we imagine an examination set by the order of engineers that was not assessed by an engineer, or an examination set by the order of nurses that was not assessed by a nurse? I could draw up a long list. It seems to me there is a major inconsistency here. As we are in a turbulent period—I'll call it that, and I didn't want to start with the examination, but since we've gone down this route, let's continue—there are other criteria. There is a loss of trust and a sense of unease.

Personally, I want to have confidence in you and the people at the translation bureau. That is all I want. I am here, once again, with the best of intentions. However, you tell me that two independent experts are being added. Firstly, I do not believe one of them is independent. Secondly, these people would not be able to do the work for which they are assessing others. It seems to me there is a problem.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Perron, with all due respect, you are right in the case of Mr. Jolicoeur. However, in the case of Mr. Ball, he is an accredited interpreter. In fact, he was a chief interpreter for Canada.

Yves Perron: All the better.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Just to give you an idea of his track record, in addition to having been a chief interpreter in his duties for Canada, he has interpreted at events such as the G7 in Charlevoix and federal leaders' debates. He even interpreted during the Pope's visit to Canada in 2022. I just want to point out that he is, after all, someone with a long track record and a long history of service, at the translation bureau, in fact.

As for Mr. Jolicoeur, we are talking about a professor emeritus who did post-doctoral studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. He also studied at Laval University. He, too, has a rather impressive track record. I think you are aware of this.

Now, let me reassure you. So far, in the results of the examinations carried out under this new system, there is no difference between the assessment made by the four interpreters presiding over this process and the two external evaluators. They are simply adding a perspective that may assist in the process.

Yves Perron: Allow me to come back to that.

Firstly, I am pleased to hear this information regarding Mr. Ball. That's excellent.

Secondly, the other point is this. You tell me that this is an external perspective, but one that accounts for 50% of the votes. So we are still significantly changing the weighting of the assessment. That is what I have been told, but please correct me if I am wrong.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: It is not 50% of the votes.

Yves Perron: The four interpreters who were traditionally present apparently have 50% of the votes and Mr. Jolicoeur has 50% of the votes. It is Mr. Ball who breaks the tie in the event of a deadlock. Is that correct or incorrect?

• (1145)

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I will let Mr. Lymburner comment.

Jean-François Lymburner (Chief Executive Officer, Translation Bureau): That is a very good question. As mentioned, four interpreters and employees of the translation bureau watch the video tapes and apply the same assessment. In other words, the assessment has not changed. Mr. Ball reviews the same video recordings independently, as does Mr. Jolicoeur. According to the mathematical calculation applied, four TR-04-level employees review the assessment, in addition to Mr. Ball, making a total of five people. Mr. Jolicoeur therefore has roughly one sixth of the input. However, it is still the translation bureau that will make the decision re-

garding the results, and it has the final say on accreditation, as it is a translation bureau accreditation.

Yves Perron: Mr. Lymburner, are you telling me that Mr. Jolicoeur does not have 50% of the votes for the evaluation?

Jean-François Lymburner: Exactly. I told you that the last time as well.

That is what we want. He carries out his duties independently and is not biased either, given that he does not work in Parliament. It was our aim to increase visibility and transparency.

Yves Perron: We want to cover a lot of topics, so I'll move on from that. In any case, that is not the information I had.

Once again, I am not accusing anyone. I am here in good faith. I am asking questions and I want answers.

I was told that Mr. Ball was also a member of the advisory committee of the Canadian Language Industry Association, which is the body representing the subcontractors who are currently securing the lion's share of contracts.

Firstly, is that true? Secondly, does that not create a sort of conflict of interest? I say this with all due caution. However, it does raise questions. When someone who works at the translation bureau is a member of an association that receives the lion's share of contracts, could there not be an issue? As for me, I'm not allowed to hire members of my family or do things like that.

I don't know who's going to answer.

Jean-François Lymburner: You are referring to the Canadian interpreters' association. Several groups offer services to interpreters in each province. It is somewhat similar to the Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec, which you mentioned earlier. There are provincial professional bodies. People can choose to register and be accredited by their provincial association. There is also the AIC, the International Association of Conference Interpreters. It is normal for Mr. Ball to have been a member of this association, just as an engineer might be a member of the Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec.

Yves Perron: In your view, there is no conflict of interest and everything is fine. I just wanted to make sure of that.

Jean-François Lymburner: Absolutely.

Yves Perron: There is an audit process currently, and we want to reassure people.

Now, I'm going to address the main part of the subject. I still have doubts as to why the exam assessment method was changed. The pass rate has risen from an average of 11% to almost 17%, which is still an increase in the pass rate. Even if you tell me that you haven't made the exam easier, it depends on the weighting applied.

I'm going to talk about standing orders. The government has a very clear policy whereby it favours the lowest bidder.

Minister, generally speaking, this is never good for departments and the government. We've seen this at various levels of government, whether in Quebec or at the federal level. When the lowest bidder is chosen for interpretation, it is not always the best offer, because one is not only choosing the lowest bidder, but also accepting a reduction in recognized hours, a reduction in the recognition of preparation time, and a reduction in the maximum time spent in hybrid mode.

So, there are a number of worrying factors for interpreters and for users of interpretation services, including ordinary citizens and myself, because it significantly reduces the number of freelance interpreters. In your presentation, you told us that there are 41 freelance interpreters. I'm pleased to see that the number has increased slightly. The figure I had was 37. However, there used to be as many as 84. Many people did not apply.

I'll let you in on a secret: Every time we discuss this here, these people write to me afterwards and share their experiences. I have excerpts from emails. I see the offers made and the circumstances of their refusal. I find that very worrying. I think that, when there is a shortage in a sector, we must not lower the standards, because we won't attract new people that way. You're talking to me about offering more training and new programs—which I welcome, because it's good to offer training at Laval University—but it's a micro-program or a postgraduate diploma, whereas previously, a master's degree was required to be an interpreter in Parliament.

So, I have a concern. Why do we choose the lowest bidder and make that the primary criterion? You cannot tell me that it is not the primary criterion, because I have email excerpts containing your calls for tenders and it is clear that this is your primary criterion. It is the first one, the one at the top of the list. That's worrying.

That's what I mentioned in the first letter I sent you, which was included in the letter from the Board of Internal Economy. I asked you to consider suspending the tender process so that we could look into it, adjust it and sit down with people in the sector. I still think that would be a good idea.

I'm not saying there's cause for panic, but I've given some examples. I don't want to speak too long so as to give you time to respond: Do you really think it's a good idea to choose the lowest bidder?

• (1150)

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I will respond to the issue of the lowest bidder, because it is an important concept, particularly for me, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement.

As for the exam pass rate, since October 2021, there have been seven accreditation exams. It is true that the average pass rate is 11%, and I will give you a few examples of this. In November 2022, so before the changes in question, the pass rate was 24%. In October 2021, it was 17%. So, it fluctuates. The pass rate for the last exam was 16%. However, as I told you, there was no difference between the assessments of the four interpreters and those of Mr. Ball and Mr. Jolicoeur. So, the rate was 16% in all cases. Just to reassure you on this point, it is true that the average is lower, but there are fluctuations.

As for choosing the lowest bidder, you said that is never a good idea. I do not agree that it is never a good idea. Competition does, after all, serve a purpose in procurement. The very nature of our system is to seek competition in order to get the best value for taxpayers. So, I disagree with what you were saying. Just because you are the lowest bidder does not mean you offer inferior quality. Quality, the accreditation process and accreditation remain the same, and this translation bureau accreditation is not easy to obtain, as can be seen from the results of the accreditation exam. It is difficult to obtain because we want to ensure we have the best quality here in Parliament.

Choosing the lowest bidder is still a question of cost. We have gone from a cost of \$800 for six hours of interpreting in 2019 to today's median, which is around \$1,400 for four hours of interpreting. Over the last five years, this represents, amongst other things, a 70% increase in interpretation costs in Parliament. I therefore believe it is legitimate to ensure that we manage rising costs responsibly, and we have the best procurement system to achieve this. For us, the standing offer was a way of maintaining quality and getting the best value, and, in terms of operations, of also having greater flexibility to ensure we meet Parliament's needs.

Yves Perron: I understand, but there is a context surrounding the 70% cost increase. Compare your grocery shopping today with five years ago; I'm sure we're not far off a 70% increase in costs. I'm sure we're not far off 70% for rents in Ottawa either.

We've had the whole period of the pandemic and Parliament's adjustment to allow for hybrid work. In fact, I am highlighting this issue, and I would like to point out that my political party is reaching out to work constructively with the government on this matter, namely to review hybrid work in Parliament, because I believe that enormous resources are being devoted to it, when they could be allocated elsewhere. Not only would this free up interpretation resources, but it would also free up financial resources for the government's other activities. I am simply talking about limiting these practices. I do not want to completely abolish hybrid work. We could retain voting, and we could retain the option of sitting remotely in the event of exceptional health conditions or family reasons. However, I believe that maintaining the option to sit remotely all day, for everyone and at all times, is a waste, since hardly anyone does so—I do not know if you recall hearing anyone speak in the House online last month—and it is a very rare occurrence.

We need to streamline things. This hybrid process increases the risk to interpreters and worsens their working conditions. Among these issues, I mentioned to you earlier a change that concerns me greatly, namely the increase in maximum exposure time for interpreters working in hybrid mode in Parliament.

That is my comment on your response. Inflation is a reality, but I believe we can streamline spending in many areas. Furthermore, the Official Languages Act is very clear: It requires that the two official languages, French and English, not merely coexist, but that they be equivalent and equal.

You assured me earlier that there would be no restrictions in Parliament. I am very pleased, but my job as an elected representative is not just to work for myself; it is above all to work for the people I represent, namely the people of Quebec and the country. I believe the public is entitled to high-quality interpretation.

The excerpt I quoted at the last meeting of the Board of Internal Economy, which concerned the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, was appalling. I know you are aware of this because an adjustment has been made. I do not know if you are aware of all the details, so I will pass them on to you. Again, please correct me if there are other versions. On February 12, I had a bit of a rant. I remained polite, but I did call a spade a spade. I cited an example that I personally heard, where you can hear five to eight sentences in English, but the interpreter stutters, so you get no content. I understand English, so I'm able to work out what I missed, but a unilingual French speaker wouldn't be able to. That's not acceptable. That same evening, at 10 p.m., emails were sent out by the translation bureau to hire people for the following day, February 13. I don't know if I'm telling you something new, but I'm telling you anyway. Incidentally, I'd like to thank the people at the translation bureau for making this adjustment. However, it's clear that when you hire someone at 10 p.m. or that very morning to interpret a conference as complex as the one on nuclear safety, you're hiring people who haven't had sufficient preparation. Traditionally, these sessions involved a day of preparation. We are currently cutting back on interpreters' preparation time, and I do not think that is a good idea. On February 13, there were several interruptions. A single accredited interpreter agreed to interpret alongside two non-accredited individuals. It was very difficult and there were many problems that day, but it was certainly better than the excerpt I quoted at the board meeting.

Mr. Lightbound, I have two questions for you.

Firstly, do you consider it normal for parliamentarians to receive better treatment in terms of interpretation than the departments that serve the general public and stakeholders? I believe they have just as much right as we do to understand what is going on, because they are citizens and will be asked to vote. I think that is important.

I won't actually ask my second question, but I don't think it's right that I had to intervene to rectify the situation regarding the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission. This is currently happening elsewhere, and I can give you examples.

● (1155)

In your own department, certain activities are contracted out to firms that aren't accredited. Also on my list are the Health Canada Science Forum; the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission; the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; and the Administrative Tribunals Support Service of Canada. A whole slew of activities for certain organizations are contracted out. As you can appreciate, with my busy schedule, I couldn't look into every single case, but I am ex-

tremely worried that the service may have been similar to the clips I referred to on February 12.

Are you prepared to reconsider the matter and review the situation? I think the answer is to do an overall assessment and examine the services that outside suppliers are prepared to provide. You have to try to get back the accredited interpreters who are not currently bidding on contracts because they won't accept lower working conditions. I'm not turning into a union representative. I'm simply a French-speaking MP concerned about the French language.

I'm listening, Minister.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Thank you, Mr. Perron. You raise some good points. I think working together is certainly warranted.

You mentioned a number of things.

First, you asked me whether parliamentarians should take priority over other people during other types of events. My answer is that the translation bureau's primary mission is to ensure continuity of quality service in both official languages for parliamentarians and Canada's Parliament. As far as I'm concerned, that is clear, and it won't change. That must be the translation bureau's primary mission.

Second, departments are not required to use the translation bureau for the provision of interpretation services. They do contract out work. However, the translation bureau could play a larger role in ensuring that departments follow best practices so they can find high-calibre interpreters. Canada has about 200 conference interpreters, which is obviously a small pool given the demand. I think the translation bureau could certainly do more to help departments meet their needs while respecting the highest standards of quality. I agree with you on that.

As for the example you referred to, unless I'm mistaken, that wasn't a translation bureau interpreter. Perhaps Mr. Lyburner has more to say. I'd like to turn the floor over to him, if I may.

● (1200)

Jean-François Lyburner: Thank you, Minister.

The translation bureau's rules do indeed state that our priority is to support parliamentarians. As soon as the situation was brought to our attention, we sent people to help. The circumstances of each event differ. We adjust the service depending on the participants and the manner in which the event is being carried out. The client agreed to our proposal and was very satisfied with our help.

Approximately \$28 million is spent on a range of interpretation services outside Parliament, but they aren't all equal. In some cases, the work involves a foreign language, and in other cases, it involves an indigenous language or official languages. What's more, departments can purchase captioning services only, if they wish. That's one of the interpretation services that is required.

In terms of what's been said, I agree that we can help establish rules and share the best practices used for Parliament. In my view, nowhere in the world has the calibre of facilities that Parliament does. Of course, departments can't replicate that every single time they need interpretation. We have best practices, we are in contact with them, and we help them as much as we can.

Yves Perron: Thank you both for your answers.

Mr. Lymburner, I realize that. Some things are acceptable, but we can agree that the clip I shared made no sense. You all received it. I believe we sent you clips from the School of Public Service. The interpretation of your own words doesn't quite match what you said. The subtleties and finer points matter when you're trying to understand a message.

I, too, would like to take this opportunity to commend the interpreters in the booth and all the interpreters. I also want to thank those who wrote to me and provided me with information, because being well-informed is important when you want to deal with an issue properly.

Yes, I do realize that differences in interpretation are possible, but there still has to be equivalency with what's being said in the other language, and that's not always the case.

Minister, when you say that departments are not required to use the translation bureau's services, I fully realize that. I realize that the translation bureau's priority is Parliament, but departments still have a duty to respect the Official Languages Act. The clips and texts I sent out do not respect the Official Languages Act, because the messages in the two languages are not equivalent.

We could talk at length about the new working conditions in the request for proposals. We could get into value judgments, but personally, given what I've read and what I know about interpreters' working conditions, I think we've dropped the ball when it comes to skilled people.

You said there were just 200 conference interpreters, so why exactly did you give up on the 41 or 43 interpreters who didn't bid? Why don't you go after them? Currently, you seek out their help from time to time, when you're stuck, sending an email at 10 o'clock the night before or calling them. It's also random, because some people you don't call. I won't get into all that, because as I said, I'm not trying to be a union representative. Nevertheless, they are people who work for us. It is fundamentally important that they be treated properly if we want them to stay.

I wonder how to get this right. In my riding office, I try to pay my staff as much as our budget allows, because I ask a lot of them and I want them to stick around.

I mentioned hybrid work earlier. I felt it was important to mention. Events like the one involving the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission tarnish the translation bureau's reputation and Parlia-

ment's. They make everyone look bad, so they mustn't happen again.

Mr. Lightbound, I'm very pleased to hear you say that you're open to working together. I won't ask you to make a formal statement this morning. I'll let you process everything. I think we can have a more detailed discussion at a later time.

There are things that can be done, including in relation to the streamlining of operations. I don't think the translation service should have to make money at all costs. Right now, I think that's the problem. It may be a good idea to challenge things up to this point. The argument is that it's too expensive and cuts have to be made, but this is an essential service. Are paramedics told that? Possibly, but that's not a good idea either. Essential services should be secure.

The government is about to spend 5% of our budget on defence, so I think we can ensure the survival of our official languages if we are mindful of our people and our resources, if we treat them properly. That's what I wanted to say. The bureau is trying to cut costs by taking the lowest bidder. I know you don't agree with that premise and that you'll tell me you consider other factors. Sometimes the person who is qualified costs 10% more. It could be a legal expert to interpret for the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. I think it's worth paying 10% more, because it means the person doing the interpreting knows the jargon and the mindset of those in the field; that will be conveyed to the people listening to the interpretation. There's a reason people in certain fields go to university. Mr. Lymburner can correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm sure not just anyone is assigned to interpret for the Supreme Court. The subject matter is highly technical.

It is therefore important that the person providing the service isn't chosen solely because they had the lowest bid. Cost-cutting means that freelancers have to engage in harmful competition. They will lower their prices. They'll charge less for their services, but consequently, they will spend less time preparing. As a result, the quality of the service we receive is worse.

I'd like you to respond to that, Minister.

● (1205)

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I just wanted to say one thing on the number of interpreters. The interpreters that serve Parliament fall into two categories, if you will: freelance interpreters, who are largely providing the interpretation for this meeting; and staff interpreters, or bureau employees. I wanted to point out that in 2025, we increased the number of translation bureau interpreters by five. That's good news for services to Parliament.

Now I'll turn to costs and the standing offers and supply arrangements application, the new system for contracts. When you look at the median payment, it's about the same as it was under the previous system, but the new system provides greater operational flexibility, if you like, in meeting Parliament's needs. I just wanted to mention that.

As for the rest, I think you raised some very important points. We agree, in that my mission as minister—obviously with the help of Mr. Lymburner and Mr. Benay—is to make sure that, for all of Parliament's needs, the interpretation services available to parliamentarians and the Canadian public consistently meet the highest standard of quality.

I am confident that the accreditation process is as rigorous as it should be. The numbers we talked about earlier are proof of that, as is the training required of interpreters, which is the key to quality service. If the slightest incident occurs or the quality isn't up to standard, any time a formal complaint is made, the situation is fully investigated and corrective measures are taken if necessary. Interpreting is a complex task. It's done in real time. During question period, parliamentarians like myself can talk as fast as rappers. I often think I wouldn't want to be in their shoes. Interpreting in real time is definitely not easy.

This was said at the beginning of the meeting, but I want to commend all the interpreters for the work they do, whether they are freelancers or staff interpreters.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: If I understand correctly, Minister, in cases like the ones Mr. Perron referred to, you look into what happened to make sure that it doesn't happen again. Is that right? Did I understand you correctly?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Are you talking about the situation involving the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission?

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Yes, but if other incidents occur, you take corrective measures. Is that right?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Yes, the translation bureau does a proper examination of all complaints and takes the appropriate measures, as needed.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: If other such situations arise, people can contact your department and you will follow up. Is that right?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Yes, exactly.

Yves Perron: Thank you for your help, Mr. Chair, but I can't spend all my time listening to clips to identify deficiencies, while bringing them to the Board of Internal Economy's attention. I appreciate that Mr. Lymburner took corrective action, but I can't spend all my time on this. Departments, too, have a responsibility to make sure the interpretation makes sense. Someone needs to be paying attention to that and reading it.

Minister, you told me about technical problems and formal complaints. Complaints aren't always made, but I have here a pretty lengthy table. I can send it to you, if you like. I would ask all members to be hypervigilant when it comes to the interpretation of committee discussions and to raise any issues. Sometimes the sound cuts out. Other times, the interpretation isn't accurate. I have all kinds of examples of things that happen. I have a lot. I'm not saying

there should never be any issues. That's not the point I'm trying to make this morning. It's already so complex, as you pointed out. The vast majority of members of the House of Commons aren't able to speak both languages, because speaking another language is hard.

Interpreters have the ability to listen to what we are saying and to render it in the other official language with the same emotion and intensity. They aren't translating; they are interpreting, so they don't necessarily use the same words. It takes a tremendous amount of concentration. That's why I'm worried. You can tell me not to worry because Parliament takes priority, but when I see the quality of interpretation at departments declining, I'm concerned that, five years down the road, the quality of interpretation at Parliament will decline if we let things slide. It's important to ensure that the necessary resources are available.

In short, I've reached out to you, and I think you get it. I think we understand one another. This isn't about making money. Important issues need to be dealt with, particularly when it comes to hybrid mode. Those with the skills to do the work need to be looked after. There aren't many of them. You distinguished between freelance interpreters and staff interpreters. I'm speaking for both, obviously. When they're interpreting, I don't ask them whether they're employees or freelancers. However, some freelancers are not submitting standing offers right now, because they think the working conditions have been cut back too much. I don't know whether it's possible to sit down with them, but this worries me.

For example, I wasn't happy when my fellow party members told me they had asked to have interpreters at the all-party maritime caucus meeting but didn't get any. There weren't enough interpreters to go around, since standing parliamentary committees take priority. Consequently, the French-speaking members of my party did not attend, because they wouldn't have understood anything. My point is that people experience these things all the time, but they don't file a formal complaint every time.

I don't know whether you heard what I said the other day, so I'll repeat it for you. During the question portion of committee meetings, I sometimes lose speaking time because of a poor Internet connection with a witness, or an interpreter working remotely, and the chair does nothing, despite seeing what happened. Not all your fellow members are as nice as Mr. Scarpaleggia and give us extra time when that happens. Some are stricter, so I can end up losing 20 to 25 seconds of my two and a half minutes. When a French speaker who is fully bilingual sees that happen, they ask their questions in English the next time, because these are important discussions and they want to make sure that the witness understands what they're asking. I'm not judging anyone. It's a vicious cycle, so it's something that requires a great deal of vigilance.

• (1210)

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Thank you, Mr. Perron.

No parliamentarian should feel uncomfortable speaking in the official language of their choice. That is the foundation of how our Parliament and our democracy work. I completely agree with you.

Let me go back to something you mentioned about health and safety, as it's very important. There is some good news, particularly when it comes to the number of acoustic incidents, which has dropped by 75% over the past four or five years. Now, incidents do still occur, as you know. It's a team effort. The House of Commons technical team has done an exceptional job of ensuring that the best equipment is used. I think that has contributed significantly to the decrease in incidents, but reminders must also be issued.

As we emerged from the pandemic and returned to work, there was a strong emphasis on the importance of using our earpiece and microphone properly. Sometimes, people can become complacent. So that may also be a message for the bureau and for the chair. It's worth reminding everyone from time to time that they have a role to play in the health and safety of interpreters.

• (1215)

Yves Perron: You saw where I put my earpiece, right? It's on the small circle.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: There you go. You're a good student.

Yves Perron: Personally, I'm very careful about that. That said, we also have to wear the earpiece.

I'm taking this opportunity to speak publicly about what we are experiencing. Sometimes, when we speak in French, unilingual anglophone colleagues in the same room are doing something else and aren't wearing their earpiece. This happens to me quite often. No interpreter can fix this. If those colleagues aren't wearing their earpiece, they can't understand what I'm saying. After giving a speech in the House, I've even had a member, who had just sat down and had not listened to my question at all, rise and answer my question. These are special moments.

There are a lot of things we can't control. In my opinion, we can achieve something by working together.

Minister, I'm appealing to you. We really need to review what's happening right now and be vigilant, as I think things are getting out of hand.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: I don't see any other hands raised or anyone else who wants to ask a question or make a comment.

Minister, we thank you very much for coming to meet with us this morning and for giving us detailed answers, in good faith, I must say. We know that you care about the quality of the French language.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

In closing, I would like to add something. Mr. Perron raised a good point when he said that we don't always have time to make a formal complaint or check everything.

We can explore the possibility of a more formal feedback system. It wouldn't necessarily be about a specific complaint. This would enable the translation bureau and my department to have real-time feedback. We'll look into that.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: In a way, you're calling for greater vigilance because, to protect a language and ensure its vitality, we have to be vigilant. That is the crux of the matter.

Mr. Lightbound, Mr. Benay and Mr. Lymburner, thank you very much for being here today.

We will now move on to item 4 on the agenda concerning the update of the working group on the long-term vision and plan for the parliamentary precinct. I would like to invite Mr. Kmiec, chair of the working group, Benoit Dicaire, chief information officer, House of Commons, and Jennifer Garrett, assistant deputy minister, Public Services and Procurement Canada, to take the floor.

[*English*]

Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a series of speaking notes I need to use, so I'll just read through them, although they're all in your packages.

As chair of the LTVP working group, I'm here to provide an update to the board on the progress of the Centre Block rehabilitation program and other long-term vision and plan projects. The working group is seeking the board's endorsement on several items to maintain project momentum as work advances towards the construction phase of the Centre Block rehabilitation program, the final schematic design of block 2 and the advancement of related major capital projects.

Accordingly, the working group recommends that the board endorse the final design for Centre Block and the Parliament welcome centre; endorse the integrated design approach for the Centre Block heritage rooms; endorse the proposal to refocus the material handling and pedestrian underground tunnels in the reconfigured space; endorse the block 2 House of Commons functional program, exterior design concept and conceptual floor plan layouts; endorse the return of the Queen Elizabeth II monument to Parliament Hill; and endorse participation in governance bodies for the Indian residential schools national monument.

[*Translation*]

With respect to the final design of the Centre Block and the Visitor Welcome Centre, the completion of design development represents a major milestone for both of these parliamentary structures. It marks the transition from the design phase to the construction phase.

Thanks to close collaboration with parliamentarians, the design reflects a shared stewardship between Parliament and Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC. It supports both the work of Parliament and significant public access.

Here are the key elements: the restoration and preservation of heritage features, including ceremonial spaces, special rooms, masonry, stained glass and woodwork; modernized parliamentary workspaces through technology integration and enhanced security and accessibility; a new Parliament Welcome Centre that provides visitors with a secure, accessible and welcoming entrance, as well as an increased capacity and dedicated public spaces; significant infrastructure improvements, including seismic resilience, building systems modernization and improved connectivity in the parliamentary precinct; and finally, improved sustainability and natural light through the restoration of lightwells, glass-covered courtyards and energy-efficient systems.

The working group has approved the final design and recommends that the project move to the next phase. Updates will be provided should any significant design changes be made.

- (1220)

[English]

Now we'll go to the integrated design of the Centre Block heritage rooms.

The working group received detailed presentations on the conservation strategy for Centre Block's most significant heritage spaces, including monumental and ceremonial Gothic spaces and special rooms as originally designed. The approach balances preservation with modernization, while adhering to principles of accessibility, by protecting architecturally significant spaces and heritage materials, by integrating modern building systems' accessibility improvements and security requirements and, finally, by restoring symbolic and ceremonial elements while ensuring functionality for contemporary parliamentary use. This work ensures that the defining character of Centre Block is preserved while enabling the building to serve Parliament for years to come.

The working group supports the proposed approach and recommends board endorsement of the integrated design for the Centre Block heritage rooms.

The working group reviewed an update on the parliamentary precinct tunnels. This approach reduces construction risks and costs while allowing design engineering work to advance in coordination with other major capital projects across the parliamentary precinct. The working group supports this approach and recommends that the board endorse the proposal.

[Translation]

Here is an update on the design and functional program of Block 2.

The working group reviewed the Block 2 updated design and House of Commons functional program.

The proposed development project provides for the creation of 94 parliamentary office units, as well as related spaces, such as meeting rooms, to meet the needs of members. It will also include security areas and operational areas to support parliamentary functions, including printing services, postal services and a shared loading dock.

Parliamentarians and their staff will also have access to a cafeteria. The loading dock, which the Senate will also use, will have two bays to meet the building's operational needs.

The design takes into account parliamentary requirements, meets the needs of modern workplaces and contributes to the creation of an integrated parliamentary precinct.

The working group has approved the functional program, the exterior design concept and the conceptual floor plan layouts, and recommends that the board endorse these elements as the design process continues.

[English]

The working group reviewed updates on two national monuments within the parliamentary precinct landscape strategy: the Queen Elizabeth II equestrian monument and the indigenous residential schools national monument.

During the discussion on the Queen Elizabeth II equestrian monument, the working group was reminded that the House of Commons adopted a motion that specifically directed that the Queen Elizabeth II equestrian statue be erected on Parliament Hill. The originator of the motion was MP Bill Tupper for the former riding of Nepean—Carleton, and it passed in March 1988. The decision was adopted by the entire House and therefore should not be overturned by a decision of the working group, the Board of Internal Economy or a minister through an order in council. I want to personally thank Assistant Deputy Speaker John Nater, the MP for Perth-Wellington, for bringing these facts to the working group and for making an impassioned plea that this historical legacy be respected.

Members also noted that Parliament Hill provides a more appropriate and accessible location for the monument than its current temporary location and placement near the main gate of Rideau Hall, where it is largely visible only from passing vehicles and not easily viewed by the public on foot. The working group reiterated that the monument was temporarily relocated to Rideau Hall in 2019 to allow for the excavation and construction associated with the Centre Block rehabilitation and the Parliament welcome centre, and it recommends that it be returned to Parliament Hill as part of the completed landscape strategy.

The working group also supports the participation of members and House administration representatives on an expert panel and technical committee related to the Indian residential schools national monument.

[Translation]

Let's move on to the conclusion and the next steps.

As the Centre Block project enters its construction phase, design packages are being issued to maintain construction momentum. At the same time, the working group will continue to closely monitor progress and review key decisions.

In late March, the working group will participate in a session focused on chamber seating to help finalize the design.

In mid-April, sessions will be held for all members of Parliament so that they can see the physical mock-ups and provide feedback through their working group representatives. These comments will inform the working group's recommendation to the board.

Before board approval is sought in June, board members will also be invited to review the mock-ups.

I will be pleased to answer your questions. Thank you.

• (1225)

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Scheer, the floor is yours.

[English]

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

I have a few points to raise here regarding various orders.

The first one is on the block 2 exterior design. It seems to me that when the Soviet Union collapsed, we must have gotten all their architects, because we haven't been able to build a beautiful building in quite a long time. I think about what a shame this is. We have the wonderful facade and exterior of Langevin Block, the old U.S. embassy building and Victoria Building down the street, but across the street from these amazing historical and heritage buildings, we're going to build something that makes the Château Laurier parking garage structure look pretty good.

Is it too late to go back to the drawing board on the exterior and ask the design team to come up with something that tourists would appreciate having their picture taken in front of and that would blend in, or are we destined to go another generation before we can build beautiful buildings again?

Tom Kmiec: Having been born in a Warsaw Pact country, I think I'm the wrong person to be asking. I think you should ask PSPC.

Jennifer Garrett (Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Services and Procurement Canada): Thank you very much for the question.

I would start by saying that we do have a world-renowned architect, David Chipperfield, who is leading the design and is respecting a series of principles.

What I can say is that the image you see in front of you has evolved quite dramatically, and we're happy to bring that imagery back to see if it might meet more of the needs and interests of the Board of Internal Economy. We just want to make sure that we are sharing the same conceptual designs as the design was at the time the working group saw it. The facade is something that we have been working quite hard on, and it has evolved, and we would happily bring that back for consideration.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Basically, you're saying that this box is just a placeholder.

Chris Warkentin (Chief Opposition Whip): There are two boxes here.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Where is the other box?

Okay, these two boxes are placeholders. Is that what I should understand? They're not the final design.

Jennifer Garrett: To answer your question, there are two towers being built on either side of 100 Wellington, and you see both of those structures in the rendering.

This is an early rendering resulting from the schematic design process. We had specific feedback on the facade and needed to advance that, so we had engagements with the architect. There have been advancements that, to the best of my understanding, are meeting more of the House's and the Senate's requirements.

Again, we would happily show those renderings to see if they are still hitting the mark. We're entering design development, so the earlier the intervention, the better. Now is the time to influence those facades.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: To confirm, we can isolate this and bring it back and then have some input on what it would eventually look like.

Jennifer Garrett: Absolutely.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Just because someone is world-renowned, it doesn't mean it's going to be a good product. There are many people who have painted and sculpted things that—

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: It depends on the instructions they're given. They could be the best in the world, but if they're not given good instructions—

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Yes, that is also a fair point.

I'm glad to hear that we can maybe go through this, bring this back if we can get a commitment to do that and maybe insist on having something that looks nice.

I'm happy to defer now to other people. I have more points but I don't want to....

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

Chris Warkentin: On that, I'm looking at a picture of the actual design that won the design competition. I may have some concerns with regard to that, but that is actually a far more attractive building than what's being proposed now. This looks like any condo building that would be built in Toronto or downtown Ottawa. It's far less attractive than anything else on the street, and certainly it's nothing that would leave a legacy. It's certainly off-putting in comparison to the surrounding heritage buildings.

I hope you will hear from this body that we don't want that, full stop, so let's revisit that.

In terms of the Centre Block front stairs, I see there is a proposal to rip out the stone stairs that exist right now and to replace them with something that would accommodate an elevator lift down the centre of those ceremonial front stairs. I have significant reservations.

I understand the desire for a dignified, accessible entrance, but I think what's being proposed is not that. I think sticking an elevator dead centre in a beautiful heritage staircase and having the possibility of... If you're going to resurrect an elevator from time to time because somebody is a visiting dignitary and have everyone watch them go up in this lift, I don't know that it is more dignified than going to an elevator that's maybe in a more discreet location rather than what looks to be a ridiculous destruction of the current architecture.

I think that needs to be revisited. I think that is an unfortunate destruction of what exists there now.

Is there any comment on that?

• (1230)

Jennifer Garrett: In terms of the ceremonial entry to Parliament, it's a very important feature of the building, and we are doing our very best to protect it. In fact, we believe we're leaving it pretty much status quo from its condition before closure, except that it will be modernized in terms of modern lighting and things like that.

Chris Warkentin: I'm looking at the renderings—

Jennifer Garrett: I'm coming there.

What you will see day to day will essentially look the same as it did before. The—

Chris Warkentin: You're removing the current stairs in order to do that. They're being hollowed out.

Jennifer Garrett: I'm trying to answer your question, if you'll just give me 30 seconds to get there.

What is actually being introduced there is something called an invisible lift. Day to day, you would not see anything. It would look like the traditional staircase and it would even be covered with stone, like the original staircase. When there is a need, the stairs essentially disappear and the lift comes out, but for the purposes of operating Parliament day to day, unless it is needed, the intent is to provide that capability while having the stairway look exactly as it did pre-closure.

We're actually testing that as a pilot, because it's a new capability to Canada. It's used in Europe, but it is not presently in our code. We're actually doing a smaller version of it to test its viability at the East Block, as we speak. That will inform whether or not we have the technical capabilities to put it into play.

I'll close by saying that for this whole design, one of the guiding principles that was approved by the parliamentary administrations and that we're trying to achieve here in terms of accessibility is for people with disabilities and people who are able-bodied to have a similar experience. We're trying to respect that, which is why we were pursuing that capability, but if there is a direction from Parli-

ament that you don't want to proceed with it and you're willing to have your ceremonial visitors enter from another area, we can remove it from the program. It's up to Parliament.

Chris Warkentin: The stairs would have to be removed in order to have a collapsible stair there.

Jennifer Garrett: Well, we would be removing them, but putting them back in, in the same way that we're removing heritage features and putting them back in across the building.

Chris Warkentin: I'm seeing how it happens. The current stone would not be able to be used. I'm seeing heads nod.

I think that would be one area that we would be very concerned about. Given the very rare circumstances when this would be utilized, I'm wondering if there wouldn't be a possibility of a less expensive temporary alternative, such as a ramp that could be located for that purpose.

Tom Kmiec: Can I just jump in? This was not a unanimous decision of the working group—

Chris Warkentin: I can see why.

Tom Kmiec:—and there was extensive debate around it.

At multiple different parts of the design, there's this tension between returning the building exactly to what it was before and the modernization component. The two sometimes conflict. When the working group extensively debated this on that evening, it could not come to an agreement on it. We did talk about other entrances to the building that would be equally universally accessible to a person needing them, but this is the recommendation that a majority of the working group brought forward. However, there were the same discussions.

• (1235)

Chris Warkentin: What's the cost of this element?

Jennifer Garrett: I'm going to have to come back to you. I don't have the exact cost for that particular element with me today.

Chris Warkentin: Do you have an approximation?

Jennifer Garrett: It's new to Canada, so I don't know. I have to work with the company to understand. We're actually in the process of updating our cost estimates, so I can happily provide that information back to the committee.

The other thing I would say is that a ramp with that rise—just to answer that question, so it's clear in your mind—will not be possible as a temporary measure. You'll need to look for an alternative strategy for entering.

Chris Warkentin: How often have we had a visiting dignitary who required this type of an option?

Benoit Dicaire (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons): It's not often, sir.

What Jennifer said was the principle that was set at the outset of the design of the building, which was how we can make it better for Canadians. This is a ceremonial entrance and is rarely used for other purposes.

Of course, there are alternatives, as Mr. Kmiec said. They were debated extensively. If the board's wishes are to accommodate with a separate entrance, that was also put on the table.

Chris Warkentin: That would be a good one. I just really... Those stairs are architecturally significant to the building.

[*Translation*]

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

Yves Perron: I'd like to comment on that. With all due respect, regarding the accessibility of the facilities, they're being renovated for the long term, and I don't think that's a luxury. It sounds like a good idea, but I understand the argument that it's desirable to keep the original materials. So I'm a bit torn. Perhaps we could explore alternative solutions. We hear a lot about costs when we ask questions about this. The following issue wasn't covered earlier: If you make a new facade proposal, it would also be good to know the cost. Earlier, we asked for a new facade. For some things, the cost isn't an issue, whereas for others, we're always talking about money. I'd just like to point that out.

Otherwise, I think that, overall, the work is quite exceptional. I really appreciated having this complete file because I wasn't the whip when the work began. I was given a nice review, a retrospective of the state of affairs. I think you're doing a good job, Mr. Kmiec. It looks very promising.

My question is not so much about today's document. When do you think you'll be able to submit the final parking plan for the new developments on the Hill? I have a great deal of respect for the position Mr. Warkentin took regarding parking spaces. He asked to see the final plan and the final number of parking spaces before making any further decisions that may limit that space. I think that, if you were able to provide us with that, it could help move future decisions forward more easily.

Benoit Dicaire: Mr. Perron, that's an excellent question. I think we've taken note of the concerns raised by Mr. Warkentin and Mr. Scheer during previous meetings. We are working closely with our partners at Public Services and Procurement Canada to provide the necessary details regarding the transition. As you know, the long-term vision and plan span a number of years and involve a number of stages.

The principle has been well understood. We don't want to lose any parking spaces, whether they are members' parking spaces or parking spaces on Parliament Hill. This is important to us. Ms. Garrett and I, and our teams in particular, are working closely together to develop a plan where, at every stage that would have an impact, there would be a strategy to replenish parking spaces to ensure that the impact on parliamentarians and administration employees is minimized.

We are working closely together. We hope this will be presented before the end of the parliamentary session.

Yves Perron: It will be before the end of June.

Benoit Dicaire: Exactly.

Yves Perron: Thank you.

● (1240)

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): I want to go back to Block 2. I remember participating in that from a distance. I remember Bruce Stanton, who was in the chair that Mr. Kmiec now occupies and who sat on a very large jury to choose the design for that block.

I must have missed the meeting of the long-term vision and plan working group where they talked about the changes. I remember one article—I think it was in *The Globe and Mail*. It said that Canada had finally seen the light when it came to architectural design competitions and, subsequently, the selection of a beautiful project. I agree with Mr. Scheer that this is not what is being presented to us.

I therefore also urge those in charge to present us with something that more closely resembles what we selected during the international design competition. That project had absolute integrity, was sponsored by an international firm and had a great deal of credibility in the architectural community. I hope we can return to the integrity of that process and uphold that integrity.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Are there any comments or questions?

[*English*]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I'm not sure if we have the same numbering in our books, but on page 12—I think it's two slides over—I am wondering if the location for the residential schools monument has been locked in, or if we are being asked to endorse that as well.

Benoit Dicaire: The location right now is determined to be in the West Block courtyard.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: What's that? I'm sorry.

Benoit Dicaire: In the West Block parking lot there, for the residential....

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Is that a previous decision?

Benoit Dicaire: That was the decision that was taken.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Is this to scale?

Benoit Dicaire: It's a big monument, but I don't think it's to scale, sir. It has a significant impact on parking.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Yes. How many spots are going to be affected by that?

Jennifer Garrett: I'm happy to take the question.

The location actually has been locked in. We are losing a net 33 spots potentially, but I will clarify Mr. Dicaire's comments.

The design is not actually even started yet. One of our colleague departments.... This is not an initiative led by PSPC. We're supporting it, as our minister has custody of the buildings and lands of Parliament Hill, but the location was previously decided upon.

There'll be a net 33 loss of parking spots, which we have the ability to mitigate already. We have the mitigation parking in our inventory. The plan will be that we have that parking at Place de Ville. We will work with the House administration when construction of that monument is starting to move those parking spots, and to make sure that we're privileging parliamentarians' parking on the Hill.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: When I hear words like “it was decided”, I always think of the magical entity behind the “it”. Who decided that?

Jennifer Garrett: My understanding.... We'd have to pull out the remit on this, but it was brought to this committee and the Board of Internal Economy did approve the location.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: We did agree to it. Okay.

You say the design hasn't started, but you already know you're going to lose 33, so the size must be known.

Jennifer Garrett: No, no. We don't know. We plan for the worst and hope for the best that those always result in the best-laid plans. We've done some analysis to make sure we can mitigate some of the parking around the monument site. There is the site and we've limited the monument design, but they're still in the process of actually standing up their steering committees and launching the design process.

I understand that they have engaged the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada to help them with a design competitive process for that, which we will follow closely and provide technical support to, but we're far away from putting shovels in ground, and we'll be back here well before that to brief you on the design and give you the further details on the impacts associated with it.

• (1245)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Okay. It doesn't seem like there's much more discussion.

Are we all in agreement on the exterior of block 2 and coming back with the opportunity for some direction and input? Okay.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Are there any more questions?

Yes, Ms. Kayabaga.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): I'd like to go back to the Peace Tower entrance. You're proposing I think just two images. I'm no longer part of the LTVP, so I don't really know what the discussion was.

I'm okay with this, because I think it's accessible and it plans for people. If you look at the median age in politics, a lot of people are aging and anyone could need it. We could potentially have in the future even a governor general who has a disability. This, to me, is not a big problem, but there are two images that you've proposed here now. Which one are you wanting us to make the decision on?

Benoit Dicaire: To answer your question, Ms. Kayabaga, it's the same stairs. One is collapsed and one is in its....

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: What else are you proposing outside of this?

Benoit Dicaire: This was a proposal that was endorsed by the working group. If the board decides to change the direction—

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: What would you do if there were a governor general who was disabled? Would they have to go in the back? What's the proposal that you're making other than these?

Benoit Dicaire: We would have to choose another entrance to accommodate them if those stairwells....

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: You're offering an option where they could come through this entrance. I'm totally fine with this proposal where there is an accessibility component to it, because it's planning for anyone who may have a disability.

Making a decision on whether we can think of other leaders who may or may not have a disability when we know that a lot of people are aging and could potentially have a disability is not the right decision, in my opinion. I think the right decision should be that if we can accommodate accessibility, we should. That's my thought on that.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Did I understand there was a desire to have the LTVP come back on this particular item? There wasn't an agreement on this.

Chris Warkentin: There's been a commitment to trying this out at a different building. At that time, we'll better know the cost, if it worked or not, and if it would impact the actual architecture of the existing stairs.

If that's what they're committing, then why don't we just hear back from them once they get the determination as to whether or not that worked?

Jennifer Garrett: Again, we are happy to come back to inform you about the pilot and on the costing.

Just to be clear on what's in your package, from the image that you showed me, Madam Kayabaga, those are the same stairs. One shows the stairs as they would look day to day. Do you see that middle part? That's where the lift is and that's trying to demonstrate the lift in operation.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: If there was a need for it, you would do it ahead of time.

Jennifer Garrett: Day to day, the stairs would go straight across and then when you needed it, that centre piece would drop and come up.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Just to understand, because I think there was a question around the dignity of the person who may have to use it, would this be set up way before the person arrived? They wouldn't have to see what it looked like before you've dropped it down. Is that correct?

Jennifer Garrett: I would leave the procedure to ceremonial, but presumably that would be a very good idea, so you don't have to see it in action.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: It's just to protect the dignity of the person.

Okay, I'm fine with it.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: We're going to get some more input on that particular aspect. Other than that, we endorse the Centre Block and the Parliament welcome centre design.

We endorse the Centre Block approach for the integrated design of the heritage rooms. Is that correct?

We endorse the proposal for the parliamentary campus tunnels project to refocus the underground tunnel design on pedestrian movement.

Chris Warkentin: On that, I was a little bit surprised to find out.... I remember the day when tunnels were necessary for materiel management, and then I recall there was a push to add "pedestrian" to the materiel management tunnels. I understand that we're not even utilizing these tunnels for materiel management now. It's simply for pedestrians. Is that correct?

• (1250)

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: I think it's a cost issue. It's a question of how wide the tunnel would be. I think I got a figure somewhere that it's \$150 million more to make the tunnel wide enough for materiel management. Is that correct?

Benoit Dicaire: Quite a few months ago, PSPC came to see us and wanted to look at opportunities for cost savings. We looked at everything within the portfolio that was available. One of them, which the administration was asked to support, was shifting from materiel handling and pedestrian to pedestrian only—from six metres to three metres.

Tunnels are an important component of Parliament. As seen around the world, they are an important contributor to security. The administration was inclined to try to help find savings. It was in a significant order of millions of dollars in savings.

We feel that the north-south scenario can be managed for materiel handling. East-west is still very efficient with the new materiel handling facility that will be built in the coming years.

Chris Warkentin: That was my question. There must have been a reason as to why it was initially planned for materiel management. I don't know what all gets moved on a regular basis. There's probably a reason for that.

Benoit Dicaire: The original intent was to have a central materiel handling facility that would handle all materiel for the campus—north and south, and east and west. By looking at some of the designs where you saw loading docks in block 2 now, that removes the need for having wider tunnels because we've kept some shipping and loading capabilities within those new buildings.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: In the same vein, I don't have strong views necessarily, but was there ever an evaluation done on what costs could be saved with the tunnels? I'm assuming that with tunnels, you would require fewer short trips with trucks loading and unloading at facilities. You kind of partially answered it with what

you just said about block 2. Was that ever evaluated, to potentially offset the cost of the tunnels? Would there ever have been savings realized with the reduction of the need for things like trucks?

Benoit Dicaire: Multiple options were considered with Public Works. One of them was utilizing the facilities, such as block 2, as a tunnel entryway instead of actually building a tunnel in front of the building. That's one of the cost savings that contributed significantly.

Other connection points were also reduced to ensure that we were delivering some cost savings in the tunnel design itself. With the width of the tunnel and the fact we are streamlining materiel movement now east to west, making it more concentrated that way, and not necessarily concentrating on the north-south axis, really contributed to those savings. This is hundreds of millions of dollars in savings.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: On the block 2 exterior design, is it agreed that those are placeholders and we're going to see something as it evolves?

Correct me if I'm wrong.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: For greater certainty, we would basically be endorsing the conceptual floor plan layouts, the functional program, but not the exterior design. We're not endorsing that today.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Yes, that's correct.

The last point is the monuments. Where are we with the monuments?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Do you mean the Queen's monument?

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Yes, the Queen's monument and the Indian residential schools national monument.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: On the residential schools monument, in my mind, that decision has been made.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Yes, I understand, but it talks about an expert panel and all of that. Are we agreeing to have members of the Senate and members of Parliament be on an expert panel?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Sure.

Regarding the Queen's monument, as Mr. Kmiec set out, Mr. Nater was extremely convincing, and we're happy to endorse his very firm view.

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Okay, so the Queen is coming back.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Okay.

Is that it?

We have a few minutes left. We're going in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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