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• (1105)

[*English*]

The Honourable Anthony Rota (Speaker of the House of Commons): I'll call the meeting to order.

We'll start off with the minutes of the previous meeting.

[*Translation*]

Do you have any comments or questions?

As there are none, the minutes of the previous meeting are adopted.

If you don't mind, we'll go straight to item 3 on the agenda. Mr. Stanton and his team are here, and they have some very important things to do at noon. So I would not want them to be delayed in case we need more time to deal with agenda item 2. Is everybody in agreement? No one is against the change. It's perfect.

[*English*]

We'll go to the LTVP working group recommendations, and to Mr. Stanton, the chair of that working group.

Please proceed, Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Chair, Working Group on the LTVP and the Centre Block Rehabilitation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good morning, colleagues.

As you know, I'm reporting here today as the chair of the long-term vision plan working group. I'm joined here again by officials who are on this project on a daily basis. We have Susan Kulba, with digital services and real property section here in Parliament; and Rob Wright and Jennifer Garrett from PSPC.

To update you on essentially two main points that arose out of our meeting on February 5, the first is to share some costing information that has been shared with the working group from PSPC, and, secondly, to put in front of you our recommendation for a concept design option for the main entry to the Parliament welcome centre.

Before we go to those, I want to give you a few little photos of a presentation on the progress of construction, which continues to move along well and remains on track with respect to all of the project plans.

On the first item, PSPC presented their approach to establishing a full costing for the Centre Block project. They outlined the key project decisions that have been made so far that have impacted the

overall costs, including preserving the existing size or footprint of the House of Commons, for example, the size of the Parliament welcome centre, and things like the proposed use of the existing light courts and light wells.

To build on this, they went on to itemize some of the remaining decisions that will further add to the accuracy and overall costing of the project.

To give you an idea of where the project is currently, in terms of expenditures relative to budget, the initial allocation for Centre Block was \$655 million. This was for the five-year period, fiscal 2017-18 through until fiscal 2021-22. To date, \$150 million of that \$655 million has been spent, and that has been used to enable the design and construction activities, including interior demolition work and the abatement of hazardous materials.

With regard to the second part of that budget relating to the Parliament welcome centre, an initial budget of \$106 million was allocated, again for the same five-year period, 2017-18 through to 2021-22, the next fiscal year. To date, out of that \$106 million, \$35 million has been spent, and that's been used to essentially complete all of the design elements as well as to begin the excavation activities.

As a final note on the cost side of this equation, decisions have been taken that have helped to put some precision around these costs. I point to a decision, first of all early on, when, as an example, the House of Commons chamber was established with a decision not to make it any bigger than it currently is—to keep the existing footprint. That essentially avoided a cost of an extra \$100 million, had we chosen to expand it.

Secondly, on the Parliament welcome centre, you will recall that we opted for the medium-size approach to the welcome centre, and that was \$120 million less than had we gone for the larger welcome centre.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC, will stay in touch with its parliamentary partners to make the other important decisions this spring. Turner & Townsend will complete the construction cost estimates and benchmarking reports, after which we will have more information for you.

We also received an update from Centrus, the architectural firm responsible for the Centre Block, on its work since the fall to refine the access strategy for the Parliament welcome centre.

Indeed, you may recall that we have used an independent design review panel, or IDRP, to provide advice during the development of this important part of the project. This committee is comprised of reputable professionals in the design community who have experience with issues related to the project.

It was created last fall by PSPC, with the support of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, to provide an independent assessment of the main entry project. This entry and its location are extremely sensitive from a heritage perspective and given their potential impact on the front lawn of Parliament.

After considering the review panel's concerns and suggestions, Centrus officials presented us with various options for the central entry, and then indicated which one they preferred and which received unanimous consent from the panel members. They liked the simplicity and elegance of this option and the way it mitigates the impact on the heritage elements surrounding it.

[English]

The preferred option locates an entrance on either side of the central stair. You'll see before you on slide 4 a plan view of what we mean, with an added pathway on each side departing from the central walkway as you approach the central stairs, each leading directly to each new entrance.

The geometry of the paths themselves is drawn from the existing geometry. You'll see that the pathways, the symmetry or the geometry, if you will, of the paths on either side of the walkway very much mirror the approach taken by the Pearson-designed entrances under the Peace Tower.

Some advantages of these entrances are the fact that they're visible. Each of them will be visible from the central walkway, so it's an intuitive and easily understood pathway for visitors who have never been to the Hill before. It's a gentle slope towards the new entrances, so these will be ramps that help improve accessibility and will not require handrails. Thirdly, the entrance design is simple and is accomplished with as little intervention into the heritage features and materials as possible. There's minimal impact on the use of the lawn that is enjoyed by so many for activities throughout the year.

We as a working group had the opportunity to ask questions and have a discussion with the IDRP to understand and explore the design that they had presented, and we are satisfied and believe that the proposed option responds to any concerns as to how the entrance might interfere with or encroach upon the front lawn and that it meets the operational requirements of the Parliament welcome centre.

Based on the merits of the proposed option, the working group recommends that your board endorse this design option for the central entry to the welcome centre.

I'll welcome any questions or suggestions the board may have on those concept options.

• (1115)

[Translation]

Our next steps will be to review the key elements of the decisions advocated by PSPC in order to establish the basic costing. After reviewing each of these key elements, we will make recommendations and seek your advice.

We will also be meeting with our Senate colleagues in the coming weeks to discuss the proposal to fill the skylights in the Centre and East Blocks, and we will inform you of the outcome of our discussions.

[English]

I thank you for your attention, and I'm happy to take any questions that you may have.

[Translation]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any questions or comments for Mr. Stanton?

[English]

Not seeing any, I want to thank Mr. Stanton and your team for coming today and filling us in on where we're at.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: That's great. Thank you very much.

Hon. Anthony Rota: It looks very good. Thank you for all of your hard work.

Do we have the agreement of everyone to proceed?

Very good.

[Translation]

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Thank you.

[Translation]

We will now turn to item 2: Business arising from previous meeting.

Are there any questions or comments?

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Whip of the Bloc québécois): Mr. Speaker, I misheard: are we at item 2 or item 1?

Hon. Anthony Rota: We are at item 2.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: We are at item 2, so we are now talking about the business arising from the previous meeting.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Exactly.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: I have a few comments and a few requests to make to the members of the Board of Internal Economy, or the board for short.

So far, we have done a good job, and there may be a few things left to address in relation to all the means used to allow for better interpretation and participation of members of Parliament in both official languages. I had the privilege of attending the last meeting of the Liaison Committee, where we discussed the report on parliamentary committee expenses that was tabled in the House of Commons today.

I asked a few questions that I am submitting to you to see if the board would agree to formally make this request to the clerks and the Liaison Committee. I was curious to know how many headsets had been purchased, which was not mentioned in the report. However, it is an indicator that would tell us how many headsets we manage to send to witnesses so that they are able to testify and have their comments interpreted into both languages. I would like to pay tribute to all the work the clerks do. They have made a dashboard to ensure that witnesses are called and that the connection and the equipment is tested before they appear.

It would be interesting to draw up a follow-up dashboard. Indeed, since new practices are being introduced to improve witness participation in both official languages, we should ensure that their testimony is properly interpreted and that they have a good connection and functioning equipment. However, in order to be able to evaluate these measures, records must be kept on each committee and each witness so that the board can then determine whether the continuous improvement process has been successful or whether more resources or other means are required to further improve it.

I would like to propose today that the members of the board compile the number of headsets that have been purchased in the latest report that was tabled in the House today. In addition, can the clerks create a dashboard to track new measures to assess their effectiveness as they are introduced and to continuously improve them? They would report to the board in the next quarter so that together we can be proud of the efforts we have all made to ensure that all members and witnesses are able to work in either official language and are assured that their interventions are properly interpreted.

I submit this request to you under item 2, Mr. Speaker, but I do not know if my colleagues agree with me.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Do we all agree with these requests?

Everyone is in agreement.

Mr. Janse, would you like to say a few words on this? I know it's within your purview.

• (1120)

Mr. Eric Janse (Clerk Assistant, Committees and Legislative Services Directorate, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Following the discussion at the Liaison Committee meeting earlier this week, I have already begun discussions with my team and with our colleague, Mr. Stéphan Aubé. Yes, we will be able to provide statistics to the Liaison Committee and the board on the number of headsets. We will also be able to provide, as you have suggested, a dashboard to record the number of incidents. We hope that

the statistics will show a decrease in incidents as a result of the new process we will have put in place.

Hon. Anthony Rota: All right.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Thank you for your intervention.

Are there any other questions or comments? Does everyone agree on item 2?

Since everyone is in agreement, we now move on to item 4.

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards (Chief Opposition Whip): Mr. Chair.

Hon. Anthony Rota: I'm sorry, Mr. Richards. Please go ahead.

Mr. Blake Richards: While we're on the topic of interpretation, it might be a good time to discuss the point that I want to raise as well. As you know, Chair—and I'm sure others are aware—I had raised a question of privilege in the House about this issue. You didn't find a *prima facie* case for it, but it doesn't mean that it isn't an issue and one that maybe we should discuss. It centres around the resources that are available for committees.

We're finding that committees are being prevented from continuing their meetings or finishing items of business they're needing to finish, particularly when there ends up being a filibuster or something like that. We even had it go so far that one day when there was only the one meeting, there we still not resources available apparently.

I think we do need to have a discussion about this and how we might find ways to ensure that those resources can be made available. Maybe it's a question for some of our folks in administration. Are there ways that we can find to address these things so that they don't occur?

Whether it was considered a breach of privilege or not, it certainly is problematic to the workings of Parliament when a committee is prevented from continuing its work based on a lack of interpretation available or rooms, or things like that. Is there something we could do to be looking at ways to focus the resources or to bring in new resources to help address these challenges?

I'm not sure if there's someone here who is able to address those points, but I think it's something that we do need to have a conversation about.

Hon. Anthony Rota: I believe Mr. Patrice and Mr. Gagnon have some comments on that, but if it's okay, we'll go to Mr. Julian first. He may have some points, and then they can answer all the questions at once.

Mr. Julian.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (House Leader of the New Democratic Party): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I agree with Mrs. DeBellefeuille and Mr. Richards. It is problematic.

Our country advocates the equality of the two official languages. This means that in committees and in Parliament, we must have access to interpretation services at all times. Interpreters are extremely dedicated and they work hard. However, there is a significant lack of resources, which has already been recognized, but is now critical.

Unfortunately, in all likelihood, there will be a third wave of the pandemic. This means that resources will have to be in place for parliamentarians to continue their work in virtual mode.

The issue that has just been raised is crucial. It is important that we respond by putting the necessary resources in place to ensure that employees are treated well and that their health and safety are not jeopardized.

In addition, committee members must be able to meet while having the resources to work.

For all these reasons, I stress the importance of responding to this urgent need, as my colleagues have done.

• (1125)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Gagnon, can you answer the questions that have been asked?

Mr. André Gagnon (Deputy Clerk, Procedure, House of Commons): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Richards.

[*English*]

Thank you as well, Mr. Julian.

Following the Speaker's ruling on the events in the health committee that led to the question of privilege raised by Mr. Richards, there was a protocol that was shared with all of the parties that would essentially guide the administration with respect to requests from committees either to pursue—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The interpreter tells me that Mr. Gagnon's microphone is not near his mouth and that this makes interpretation difficult.

Hon. Anthony Rota: All right. If I may, I would like to point out that when Skype is running in the background, it causes problems. This is what I have found with my own computer. When Skype, Teams and Zoom are running, there is interference between them.

You can check on your computer whether Skype is working.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: This is not the case for me.

Hon. Anthony Rota: On our side, it is more when we talk. I just wanted to share this information with you.

I give the floor back to Mr. Gagnon.

Mr. André Gagnon: I am sorry for all this.

I was, I believe, on the issue of protocols issued to the parties to manage requests arising from extensions, extensions of [*Technical difficulty*].

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Gagnon, we can't hear you at all because of technical problems.

We will therefore give the floor to Mr. Patrice, who is here.

Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I am not going to presume to know what Mr. Gagnon was going to talk about. He can continue along the same lines later on.

Indeed, the question of resources is of great concern to us in the administration. We are in further discussions with our partners to try to assess and determine the extent to which we could add slots for committee activities, particularly when the House is sitting. As you are aware, committee resources and activities have increased significantly, particularly since November.

According to the figures and statistics, which I will be happy to provide to the board members, the rate of time slot usage is much higher than in previous years. The House Administration and its partners are doing their utmost to meet the needs of members and provide them with the time slots they require.

As for the weeks when the House is not sitting, I want to report, with respect to resource issues,

[*English*]

the unfortunate incident at the Friday meeting when there was only one committee meeting, when we could and should have supported that committee. It was a miscommunication that occurred. We own that mistake. The protocol will no doubt avoid a situation like that recurring.

In the non-sitting weeks, there's definitely more availability of sitting time, whether it's for committees or associations, because the utilization rate of those weeks is not as high as during sitting weeks.

• (1130)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any other questions or comments?

[*Translation*]

Are we ready to move on to the next step or the next item?

I see that we are.

[*English*]

We'll go on to item number four, which is the extension of certain temporary COVID-19 measures to the fiscal year 2021-22.

We'll go to Monsieur Paquette, chief financial officer.

Monsieur Paquette.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paquette (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

This presentation follows up on the analysis with respect to temporary measures in effect due to COVID-19 that was presented to the board last December. At that meeting, the House administration advised the board that we would continue to monitor the use of those various policies, the expenses that members were incurring and how they were to evolve. We would then return here to the board for any recommendations, if any were needed.

I must note that these temporary measures are all set to expire on March 31, 2021.

[Translation]

We have observed that the use of these temporary measures has continued since the last analysis I presented to you in December. Despite the pandemic, members of Parliament continue to provide services to their fellow citizens. As a result of our consultations, we understand the need to maintain these measures for an extended period of time.

[English]

The House administration recommends that the board, as part of the measures taken to address and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic, approve extending the temporary measures through March 31, 2022. These temporary measures include the purchase of consumable items to ensure that COVID-19 preventive measures are in place in constituency offices, and an increase to the advertising limit to communicate with constituents.

Mr. Speaker, this concludes my presentation. I'm open to any questions the members may have.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Do we have any questions or comments?

Mr. Julian and then Mr. Richards.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank Mr. Paquette and the House administration.

I certainly support the extension of these measures. In our case, in downtown New Westminster where my constituency office is, those measures have allowed us to put up plexiglass panels to protect our employees. We're in a very high-traffic area in the downtown area. Even though our office is largely functioning virtually, when constituents do need to come in, my staff are protected.

I think that these measures have been sensible, and they've been effective, allowing members of Parliament to make the important adjustments that come with this pandemic.

The new variants of COVID-19 are worrisome, as we all know, and many people are predicting a third wave coming this spring. It makes sense, then, I believe, for us to extend the measures so that members of Parliament and their employees can be protected and can continue to serve their constituents in a way that protects everybody.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very good.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I agree. There's been some usage or take-up of these measures. I would certainly agree with extending them.

I guess where I would have an issue is this. We're talking about an extension to March 31, 2022, and we're hearing from the government that by the end of September we will have all Canadians vaccinated who want to be vaccinated. One would assume, then, that at that point we'd be able to make some kind of a shift in terms of Parliament's moving back towards more normal sitting scenarios, or certainly something closer to that. Obviously, some of these measures, then, would no longer be needed as well.

If the government does fail to meet that target, we can always look at extending it beyond September—that is, if the government isn't able to live up to the promise it's made. If it does, then we should be able to see some change in these things in September.

Perhaps what we should do right now is to set the renewal date as September, and we can always look at it again, if needed, in September.

[Translation]

Hon. Anthony Rota: I now give the floor to Mrs. DeBellefeuille. Mr. Deltell and Mr. LeBlanc will follow.

You have the floor, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do not agree with what my Conservative colleague just said. In fact, I rather agree with the proposal before us that it be extended until March 31, 2022, that is, the end of the fiscal year.

It is important for members to be in a position, as of April 1, to set their budget, to include the amounts in their budget planning. I think it makes sense to allow the extension until March 31, 2022. I would find it strange if we told members to be careful with their budget because the measures are in effect until September 30. Some of the measures relate to advertising costs and may be part of community support planning. As we know, the pandemic does not affect all provinces the same way.

I think the proposal to extend is logical in light of what we have experienced this year. According to the statistics and the results, the cost won't be higher for the House Administration if we save on certain budget items to be able to finance these measures.

Personally, this makes sense to me and is respectful of the members who want to plan their budget for next year. I think it makes sense that decisions of a parliamentary nature should be in effect at the end of September.

I second Mr. Julian, who also agrees with the proposal. In addition, I encourage the members of the Board of Internal Economy to join us.

• (1135)

Hon. Anthony Rota: We will now go to Mr. Deltell, followed by Mr. LeBlanc and Mrs. Petitpas Taylor.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (House Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think it's also important to understand that—and we've all done this in our ridings—most of the significant spending on internal infrastructure has already been committed, which is normal, by the way. All of us may have some adjustments to make, but a lot of the spending has been done. I think being able to adjust that for September is very consistent, as well, with what we decide in the House. Our measures are in place until September because we operate on a semi-annual basis. Normally, we adjust our spending very well when we see that the need is still there.

I believe that we do not deprive ourselves of anything. It's worth considering this option, given that we've already spent a significant part of our budgets in this regard and that we're also consistent with our work in the House six months at a time. If, by any chance, we find in September that people who have not been vaccinated want to be vaccinated and the third wave of the virus hits hard—no one is safe—we can reverse the decision and extend these measures without any difficulty.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. LeBlanc, you have the floor.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I also agree with Mrs. DeBellefeuille and Mr. Julian.

[*English*]

I accept Mr. Paquette's recommendation.

I get Blake's comments if the government fails to vaccinate people by the end of September, etc. I get all of that. That should maybe be reserved for question period.

I think we have to be careful. The idea that certain public health requirements, as Mr. Julian said, to protect the staff who work for us or protect constituents who may visit constituency offices... Some of those decisions, as advised by public health officers, may be separate and apart from the vaccination schedule.

I wouldn't suggest that this committee has views on appropriate public health measures. I would suggest that those decisions that MPs need to make to protect the people who work with us and constituents who visit us would coherently be subsumed in a financial year. That's why I accept the recommendation put forward by Monsieur Paquette and endorsed by Mr. Julian and Madame DeBellefeuille.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Anthony Rota: We will now give the floor to Mrs. Petitpas Taylor and then to Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Mrs. Petitpas Taylor, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Deputy Government Whip): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I will be very brief.

I'm just wondering if we know how many offices have required a deep cleaning as a result of COVID exposure within their offices. In asking that question, I'm also wondering if we have a workplace health and safety protocol in place in the event of workplace COVID exposure.

• (1140)

Hon. Anthony Rota: On the first question, we'll go to Monsieur Paquette.

Mr. Daniel Paquette: I'll transfer that to our CHRO. She's the one responsible for the health and safety programs.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michelle Laframboise (Chief Human Resources Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Paquette.

[*English*]

Yes, we do have that information. I don't have it at hand right now, but I absolutely will follow up and make sure that the members of the board get the information requested.

Hon. Anthony Rota: I believe Monsieur Patrice has an answer for part of that question.

Mr. Michel Patrice: Up to this time there have been no expenditures submitted for the deep cleaning of an office.

For the protocol, we'll provide that information to the board.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We all know that, traditionally, we try to get along with each other. So, if the position of our Conservative colleagues does not change, given my little training as a mediator, I propose a compromise. The document before us contains seven recommendations. What I understand from what my colleagues said is that recommendations 1, 2 and 3 seem to be of particular concern to them, being directly related to contamination, decontamination and equipment purchase. In contrast, recommendations 4, 5, 6 and 7 are more related to the efforts of members in their ridings to support organizations that provide essential services, advertize their work, and promote their services. One recommendation even allows members to solicit donations for food banks or United Way agencies.

Here is my counter-proposal. If we could agree at least on recommendations 4, 5, 6 and 7, which I think are appropriate for the whole of next year, we could maintain them. If you are concerned about recommendations 1, 2 and 3, perhaps we could look at them together and see if we can remove them from the proposal. That way, together we could come to a compromise and accept some of the recommendations we have before us.

Hon. Anthony Rota: All right, thank you.

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards: That seems reasonable, frankly. My concern was that we're talking about putting in place measures related to COVID, but if we expect the entire population to be vaccinated by September, those measures would no longer be needed.

I think what we're talking about here, Claude, is some of the advertising and things like that. That was where your concerns were, that people be able to plan ahead for things like that. I think that's actually a sensible compromise and one that would satisfy me that we're not putting measures in place that will no longer be needed beyond September.

Hon. Anthony Rota: I believe Mr. Julian has a comment as well.

Mr. Julian.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank Mrs. DeBellefeuille for proposing this compromise.

Health specialists are saying very clearly that we probably won't be out of the woods for another year. So I don't think that vaccination dates should be part of our decisions today.

We should decide to put all possible measures in place to protect the public and our employees and to continue our work as parliamentarians. It is for this reason that I fully support the recommendations of Mr. Paquette and the House Administration. However, as Mrs. DeBellefeuille said, I understand that we are an entity that advocates unanimity and consensus, so I am prepared to support her proposal.

I am not ready to say that we will be out of the woods in September. I hope so, but I don't think so. If we rely on projections, especially if we take into account the new variants of the virus, we may unfortunately have to wait at least a year before we can say that we are out of this pandemic.

• (1145)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, allow me to summarize my proposal.

I propose that items 1, 2 and 3 be extended to September 30 and that items 4, 5, 6 and 7 be extended to March 31, 2022. The Board of Internal Economy could reconvene around August to determine whether items 1, 2 and 3 should be extended beyond September 30.

It is not because I am proposing this compromise that I feel that it is not necessary, but given the way we operate, I think it is an acceptable compromise, as long as we give ourselves the means to re-evaluate recommendations 1, 2 and 3 around the month of August or before the start of the fall session in September.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Is everyone in agreement?

Voices: Agreed.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Therefore, items 1, 2 and 3 will end on September 30, subject to revision, and the following items will re-

main in effect for the remainder of the fiscal year, until March 31, 2022.

We will now move on to the fifth item on the agenda.

[English]

On the financial report for the third quarter of 2020-21, again we have Monsieur Paquette making the presentation.

Monsieur Paquette.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Paquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am going to present the quarterly financial report for the third quarter of 2020-2021.

Quarterly financial reports compare year-to-date financial information for the current fiscal year to the same quarter the previous year. As with the first quarter and second quarter reports presented earlier this year, we are once again comparing two atypical years.

This year, the pandemic is affecting our spending trends, while the previous year was marked by a general election. As a result, our comparisons will be influenced by the atypical spending patterns that you may have already noted in our reports.

Let us now turn to the report. As of December 31, the approved authorities for fiscal year 2020-2021 were \$539 million. There have been no changes to our approved authorities since my second quarterly report to you in December.

Expenses to December 31 totalled \$344.2 million, a decrease of \$6.2 million, or 1.8%, from the previous year.

[English]

The most significant decreases in expenditures relate to the continuing decrease in travel as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Decreases have also been seen in the areas of training and hospitality across the whole organization, as well as the reduction of temporary help services for members and House officers—also all as a result of COVID-19.

The temporary closure of some of the food services facilities and the printing facilities earlier in the year has led to reduced costs for materials and supplies, which have been partially offset by the purchase of consumable items such as face masks and hand sanitizers that are used across the House of Commons.

Expenditures for computers, office equipment, furniture and fixtures have also decreased, primarily due to changes in the timing of some of our life-cycle activities. This decrease was partially offset by costs incurred for purchases to support virtual House proceedings and committees, and costs incurred for equipment that enabled House administration employees to work remotely during this COVID pandemic.

On the other hand, expenditures for salaries and benefits have increased, mainly due to additional spending on members' employee salaries and the cost of living increases for members and House administration staff. These increases have been partially offset by the reduction in the number of employees for members and House officers, delays in some of the staffing and a reduction in part-time costs and overtime as a result of the pandemic.

Finally, the report does provide a comparison of the utilization of our authorities, which shows a decrease of 3.4%, which is not unexpected given the current situation. Also, given this current situation

surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, we are closely monitoring and considering any potential savings, as well as any financial impact that may have on our funding decisions due to this truly exceptional year.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes my presentation.

● (1150)

[*Translation*]

I am ready to answer questions from members of the committee.

[*English*]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Do we have any questions or comments?

[*Translation*]

If everyone agrees, we will take a two-minute break and then we will continue in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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