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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

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• (1100)

[*English*]

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

In spite of the fact that our witnesses aren't here yet, welcome to the 150th meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Our first order of business is the main estimates for 2019-20. Today we'll be considering vote 1 under House of Commons and vote 1 under Parliamentary Protective Service.

We are pleased that we will shortly be joined by the Honourable Geoff Regan, Speaker of the House. He will be accompanied by the following officials from the House of Commons: Charles Robert, Clerk of the House of Commons; Michel Patrice, Deputy Clerk, administration, House of Commons; and Daniel Paquette, Chief Financial Officer.

Also here, from Parliamentary Protective Service, are Superintendent Marie-Claude Côté, Interim Director; and Mr. Robert Graham, Administration and Personnel Officer.

Before we start, I want to remind people that we have an official meeting at 7:00 p.m. tonight to hear from Australia. We have something very special for you, too, at the beginning of that meeting, which the clerk has organized. It's a 45-second video of each of the Australian and British Houses, of their second chambers. I think it will be very interesting to see that.

We've already introduced all our guests, and because the bells will be ringing in about 15 minutes, we want to get started.

Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Very briefly, because we will be having bells, can the witnesses stay a bit past 12:00 today?

The Chair: Can you stay?

Hon. Geoff Regan (Speaker of the House of Commons): Yes.

The Chair: When the bells start ringing, seeing that the chamber is right upstairs, is the committee okay to stay a bit longer, closer to the end of the bells?

Mr. John Nater: If it's okay with the witnesses.... I know they have to....

Hon. Geoff Regan: I have to be there, too, at a certain point.

The Chair: How about 10 minutes before the vote?

Okay.

Mr. Speaker, it's great to have you back. You're on.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. It's a pleasure to be here.

[*Translation*]

As Speaker of the House of Commons, I will be presenting the main estimates for fiscal year 2019-2020 for the House of Commons and the Parliamentary Protective Service. I am joined by officials from both organizations.

[*English*]

Representing the House of Commons administration we have Charles Robert, Clerk of the House of Commons; Michel Patrice, Deputy Clerk, Administration; and Daniel Paquette, Chief Financial Officer.

From the Parliamentary Protective Service, we are joined by Superintendent Marie-Claude Côté, the service's Acting Director; and Robert Graham, the service's Administration and Personnel Officer.

I'll begin, Mr. Chair, by presenting the key elements of the 2019-20 main estimates for the House. These estimates total \$503.4 million. This represents a net decrease of \$3.6 million compared with the 2018-19 main estimates.

I want to point out—I think members probably know—that the main estimates have been reviewed and approved by the Board of Internal Economy at a public meeting.

[*Translation*]

The main estimates will be presented along five major themes, corresponding to the handout that you received. The financial impact associated with these themes represents the year-over-year changes from the 2018-2019 Main Estimates.

[*English*]

The five themes are as follows: cost-of-living increases; major investments; conferences, associations and assemblies; MP retiring allowances and MP retirement compensation arrangements; and employee benefit plans.

I'll begin with the funding of \$4.9 million that is required for cost-of-living increases. This covers requirements for the House administration, as well as for members' office budgets and House officers' budgets. Ensuring that members and house officers have the necessary resources to meet their evolving needs is essential. The increase to members' office budgets, the House officers' budgets, and the travel status expense account provides members and House officers with the necessary resources to carry out their parliamentary functions on behalf of their constituents. These annual budgetary adjustments are based on the consumer price index.

• (1105)

[Translation]

Additionally, members' sessional allowance and additional salaries are statutory in nature and are adjusted every year, in accordance with the Parliament of Canada Act.

Cost-of-living increases are also essential to recruitment efforts for members, House officers and the House Administration as employers, and funding for these increases is accounted for in the estimates.

[English]

I'll now move on to the funding for major investments that the board approved, a net increase of \$600,000 in support of major House of Commons investments. In light of the renewal of many parliamentary spaces, investments are also needed to deliver support services to members. One notable example of this service delivery initiative has been the implementation of a standardized approach for computer and printing equipment in constituency offices across the country.

This initiative was launched as a pilot project this year and following the next general election will be implemented in all constituency offices. Its purpose is threefold: to ensure parity between the Hill and the constituencies' computing services, to enhance IT support and security, and to simplify purchasing and life cycling of equipment in constituency offices.

[Translation]

As part of the long-term vision and plan, the Parliamentary Precinct continues to undergo extensive restoration and modernization to support the efficient operations of Parliament and to preserve Canada's heritage buildings.

The recent West Block rehabilitation project and the construction of the new Visitor Welcome Centre were milestone achievements and, in many ways, will serve as models for the upcoming rehabilitation of Centre Block.

[English]

The lessons learned from this project's successes can help guide us in restoring our heritage buildings to their former glory while also incorporating the modern functionality required to support Parliament. For the Centre Block project, the House of Commons administration is committed to engaging members to ensure they're involved in discussions on the design and operational requirements for the building during every step of the project from its outset to its completion.

As the heart of our parliamentary democracy, Centre Block of our Parliament Buildings has great symbolic importance to all Canadians. However, it's also a workplace for members and their staff or will be again once the House returns there. Therefore, their continuous involvement will be crucial to the success of this historic undertaking. Along with the board and its working group, this committee will serve as a forum to consult with members about their views, expectations and needs on a regular basis.

[Translation]

Let us now turn to parliamentary diplomacy. The sunset of the funds included in the 2018-2019 Main Estimates for conferences and assemblies resulted in a decrease of \$1.4 million in the 2019-2020 Main Estimates.

[English]

Whether welcoming visiting parliamentarians and dignitaries to the House of Commons or participating in delegations to foreign legislatures and international conferences, MPs play an active role in parliamentary diplomacy. Two important events will be hosted in 2020-21. The 29th annual session of the Parliamentary Assembly, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, will take place in Vancouver, British Columbia, in July 2020. The 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference will be held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in January 2021. May I say that's an excellent choice. I'd love to take credit for it; I had nothing to do with it, but it's still an excellent choice. Both of them are, of course.

[Translation]

I will now touch on the total funding reduction of \$9.3 million for the members of Parliament retiring allowances and members of Parliament retirement compensation arrangements accounts.

[English]

The MPs' pension plan serves more than 1,000 active and retired senators and members of the House of Commons. The plan was established in 1952 and is governed by the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act. In January 2017, the contribution rates for plan members increased to bring their share of the current service cost to 50%, thus reducing the cost that must be funded by the House of Commons.

• (1110)

[Translation]

The final item included in the House of Commons main estimates is a funding requirement of \$1.6 million for employee benefit plans.

In accordance with Treasury Board directives, this non-discretionary statutory expenditure covers costs to the employer for the public service superannuation plan, the Canada pension plan and the Quebec pension plan, death benefits, and the employment insurance account.

[English]

I would now like to present the 2019-20 main estimates for the Parliamentary Protective Service, or PPS. For the 2019-20 fiscal year, the budget request for the PPS totals \$90.9 million, a modest decrease from the last fiscal year. Within this total, \$9.1 million are attributed to statutory requirements, which comprise employee insurance, pension and benefits.

Since the amalgamation of the former parliamentary security services nearly four years ago, the PPS has made important investments and achieved considerable progress in strengthening security on Parliament Hill and within the parliamentary precinct.

Mr. Chair, before I speak about their specific funding requirements, I would like to say once again how grateful I am, and I know all members are, for the protection that PPS members provide to everyone who works here and who visits. These men and women strive to promote a safe and positive experience for more than a million visitors each year.

[Translation]

Before each financial cycle, and prior to requesting additional resources, the service conducts a comprehensive analysis of its operational and administrative requirements. In keeping with their strategic priority of sound stewardship, they take every measure to meet the operational needs of both houses of Parliament with existing resources. When additional resources are required, proposals undergo several levels of review and oversight before they are included in the estimates.

[English]

For fiscal year 2019-20, the key funding requirements include \$1.4 million for 15 full-time equivalents to cover additional posts in new Senate buildings; \$775,000 for the establishment of an asset management program to properly maintain security equipment and uniforms; \$650,000 to build on existing security investments at the vehicle screening facility, where the service processed an average of 300 vehicles a day last year; \$5.5 million in permanent and temporary funding for various payments as a result of labour negotiations; and \$600,000 in additional administrative staff in information technology, asset management and communications.

Approximately 92% of the overall annual budget of the service funds the salaries of over 500 uniformed operational members and more than 100 civilian positions. This is in addition to the members of the RCMP who are assigned to the service to provide front-line support.

As the operational lead, the RCMP also provides the service with the necessary operational training. This knowledge transfer from the RCMP to PPS is progressing well, with an increasing number of operational units, such as the mobile response team now being led by the service. For this reason, the service is requesting an additional 70 full-time equivalents through the cost-neutral strategy of reducing RCMP front-line support over the next two years. We'll see that shift happening.

This past year, the service screened nearly a million people, seized 23,000 prohibited or restricted items from visitors, managed hundreds of public demonstrations and events, and addressed

numerous security incidents involving acts of civil disobedience on Parliament Hill and within the parliamentary precinct. They also intervened as first responders for various incidents.

[Translation]

In preparation for the move to the interim accommodations, the service also redesigned its posture by maximizing the use of existing resources across all parliamentary buildings. They refocused operations on their protective mandate, which allowed them to redeploy resources more strategically and with greater flexibility.

● (1115)

[English]

Additionally, the service is prepared to meet the new operational challenges associated with the increasing number of visitors at the new visitor welcome centre, an expanded jurisdiction of the precinct consisting of new parliamentary buildings and the larger physical separation between both Houses of Parliament. As you know, Mr. Chairman, moving out of Centre Block to this and other locations has required us to be a bit more dispersed.

They have also introduced additional measures to improve the management of health and well-being of the workforce. Over the last two years, involuntary overtime has significantly decreased. They have implemented a drug and alcohol policy in response to the legalization of cannabis, enhanced the training curriculum for protection officers and detection specialists, launched an employee engagement survey and improved the accommodations program to facilitate an early return to work.

These measures are aimed at not only promoting healthy living among its workforce, but also to help ensure that employees return home safely from work.

[Translation]

The service had the unique mandate of protecting the legislative process—and in doing so, must remain agile and responsive to any threat made against the Parliament of Canada across 40 locations. This means a continuous operation, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to be able to detect and respond rapidly to emerging global and domestic threats, and to adjust their security posture accordingly.

Last summer, uniformed members intercepted and arrested an individual who breached the security perimeter during the changing of the guard ceremony on Parliament Hill.

[English]

They also operate in a multi-jurisdictional environment, which requires a high degree of collaboration with law enforcement and intelligence partners. In the last year, they have strengthened communications with their partners and met with trusted international counterparts to share best practices and develop new ways forward in the field of protection.

[Translation]

This concludes my overview of the 2019-2020 Main Estimates for the House of Commons and the Parliamentary Protective Service. My officials and I would be pleased to answer questions. If members have any specific questions with respect to the security posture or labour negotiations, I would recommend that the committee go in camera for that discussion.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Before I begin, can I get clarity that we have permission for some of our colleagues to sit through the first few minutes of the bell?

The Chair: We already did that.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you, Speaker, for being here. It won't be much of a surprise to you that I want to focus on the PPS.

Hon. Geoff Regan: It's a huge shock.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: A huge shock.

First of all, I want to echo the Speaker's comments, and thank Madame Côté and the front-line officers for the tremendous work they do. They have our strongest support and appreciation.

As you know, there's a great deal of concern around here about the fact that the PPS's mandate requires it to have an RCMP officer in charge, which gives it lines of authority through the commissioner. This has always given us issues of privilege as a basis of concern. You'll notice I have a bill on today's Notice Paper that would address that. It has not been introduced, so I can't go into it more at the moment, but it is there.

I want to focus on your obligations regarding the PPS per the Parliament of Canada Act and the MOU that your predecessors signed some years ago. Subsection 79.52(2) of the Parliament of Canada Act reads:

The Speaker of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Commons are, as the custodians of the powers, privileges, rights and immunities of their respective Houses and of the members of those Houses, responsible for the Service.

Section 79.57 reads:

Before each fiscal year, the Speaker of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Commons shall cause to be prepared an estimate of the sums that will be required to pay the expenditures of the Service during the fiscal year and shall transmit the estimate to the President of the Treasury Board, who shall lay it before the House of Commons with the estimates of the government for the fiscal year.

I trust you're familiar with these sections. Madam Côté, how often do you personally, as the acting director, meet with the two Speakers?

Superintendent Marie-Claude Côté (Interim Director, Parliamentary Protective Service): I have communications with the offices of the Speakers every week. We are constantly in communication, so if there are any issues, I take action regarding those issues.

• (1120)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: My question was, how often do you, Madam Côté, meet Mr. Regan and Mr. Furey?

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: I meet through their staffs, and when there's a need to meet in person, I do so.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Did you meet with both Speakers in preparation for these estimates?

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: It was Madam MacLachy who was in that position at the time, so I would have to refer the question to her.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: She is not with us today.

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: No.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: You're familiar with the MOU that was signed in the spring of 2015.

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: Yes, I am.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Are you aware the MOU states that it can be cancelled at any time by any of the parties, but it's moot because, with the Parliament of Canada Act requiring the director of the PPS to be RCMP, it can't be cancelled because it's in law. Is that a fair interpretation?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Isn't this really a question for the House or Parliament to decide, Mr. Graham?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: The MOU says it can be cancelled, but the law says it can't, as I understand it. I'll get to my point here.

Paragraph 15 of the MOU reads:

Prior to each fiscal year, the Director will consult with any individuals or entities, including the RCMP, the House of Commons, the Senate, the Library of Parliament, to ascertain security requirements, including planned or anticipated events for the Parliamentary precinct and the grounds of Parliament Hill and will prepare a draft estimate, for the approval of both Speakers, of the sums that will be required to pay the charges and expenses relating to the Parliamentary Protective Service during the fiscal year.

An hon. member: Slow it down.

Hon. Geoff Regan: He talks as fast as I do.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I did learn from you, Mr. Speaker.

Paragraph 16 says:

The Speakers will jointly consider the draft estimate, establish an estimate and, upon their approval, transmit it to the President of the Treasury Board, who shall lay it before the House....

In your view, both Mr. Speaker and Madam Côté, are these procedures properly followed?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Yes.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I've heard that the PPS is setting up an intelligence unit. Is this true?

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: Yes, we have an intelligence unit.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Will intelligence be collected on members and staff, and will that information be shared with the RCMP?

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: Since the creation of PPS, we have had an intelligence unit. This intelligence unit is currently comprised of RCMP members as well as protection officers. It is currently led by PPS employees.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: My question is: Is the data collected pertaining to the PPS shared with the RCMP?

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: It's not so much the data that we collect, it's really information sharing in case there's any incident. I would like to answer that question in camera, if it's possible.

Hon. Geoff Regan: That makes sense.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: My only concern on this is the privilege aspect of any information collected. It's not the details of what is collected. I just want assurances that privilege is respected in the collection of any intelligence on the Hill.

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: It is.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you.

Were the estimates as we have them today agreed to completely by both Speakers?

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: Sorry, I didn't hear you.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Were the estimates that are before us today agreed to completely by both Speakers?

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: Yes, they were presented to both Speakers and agreed to by them.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Is it possible to have a more detailed breakdown, even in camera, of the spending than what we have here?

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: Of course.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: How would we go about getting that?

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: I'll ask Mr. Graham.

Mr. Robert Graham (Administration and Personnel Officer, Parliamentary Protective Service): We can provide that. Maybe we could better understand what level of detail you're looking for, if there's an opportunity to get that through the Speaker's office, perhaps.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: A minute and a half.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I don't want to go in camera and disrupt the number of people who are here, but perhaps at the end I could come back for a minute and a half of in camera. Is that permissible?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Mr. Chair, I appreciate that.

I think I would probably have a question for in camera as well, following up on the intelligence unit as well if there is time at the end to put some of that together.

The Chair: Okay, we'll go in camera at the end.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and witnesses this morning.

I'm probably going to jump around a little bit in my questions, as I often do, to try to touch on a few different things.

In your opening comments, you commented on the Centre Block rehabilitation project. I think that's something this committee is fairly interested in. As you know, it has had a number of conversations on this. You had mentioned in your opening comments that parliamentarians would be consulted and involved in discussions every step along the way.

We understand from the Board of Internal Economy that there is going to be a working group. I would appreciate a little more clarity on that and how that's going to play out on the ground. How will parliamentarians be consulted? What formal jurisdiction will you, as Speaker, and our House, through you, have over this project?

• (1125)

Hon. Geoff Regan: It's a very good question, because I don't know that the jurisdiction is formal; I think it's more informal. This is in development, the committee that we've talked about, but as I've expressed before, I think it's up to us as members of Parliament to continue, on an ongoing basis, to insist on being integrally involved in this process and the development plan.

I know Michel Patrice, the Deputy Clerk, Administration, would like to add a bit of information.

I mean, he may not like to, but I'm going to ask him to.

Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration): I think at the end of the day what is important is, as we discussed at the last meeting.... The chart will be coming in terms of the many players involved. At the end of the day, what is important and what the administration position is, as supported by the board and this committee, is that the requirements are defined by members. This is your workplace, so your needs and your requirements are the essence of the role and the importance of the House of Commons.

In terms of the execution of the contracts, giving out the contracts, public tendering and all of that, the requirement in terms of the heritage fabric, this rests elsewhere than the House.

Mr. John Nater: I think from this committee's and parliamentarians' perspective, it's very much the functional aspect we envision. There are multiple tenants, whether it's the House, the Senate or PCO. Of course, the Library and PPS have an actual jurisdiction as well. Going forward, I think this committee will be very active, and recognize that we have seven weeks before this session ends. I'm hoping that in the new Parliament, those of us who, hopefully, will be here again will continue to have a significant role to play in defining that functionality.

I did want to follow up on one specific aspect. A few weeks ago, we had witnesses here talking about the elm tree. It does seem a little silly, but I think it was an important issue, because it underlines where Parliament's role ends and where it begins. At that time, witnesses talked about the second phase of the visitor welcome centre, which is going to be blasting into the bedrock on the front lawn of Parliament. It is a very significant undertaking.

I'm curious to know whether that project has been formally approved by someone or some entity. Has the Board of Internal Economy approved phase two of the visitor welcome centre for the front lawn of Parliament?

Hon. Geoff Regan: I can say that it's certainly been part of the plans, if I recall correctly, that the board has seen over time, but perhaps Michel can tell us about the approval part of that.

Mr. Michel Patrice: The concept of the visitor welcome centre has been approved by the board. The space it will occupy, the design of it, is still in the works. There are many options on the drawing board, but the final design or proposal, in terms of square footage and all of that, has not been finalized.

Mr. John Nater: When was the last time the board formally approved the concept?

Mr. Michel Patrice: I would have to get you the dates. It's many years ago.

Mr. John Nater: I think that's a concern for this committee and parliamentarians. Something that was approved even a year ago, let alone possibly a decade ago....

Hon. Geoff Regan: If I may, I think the thing to understand is that the board has had updates on the long-term vision and plan, including various elements as they've been developed. It may not have formally approved it, nor has it said, "Hold on a second, this is a major problem we have with *a*, *b* or *c*." If concerns have arisen, they've been taken into account, as far as I've seen.

Mr. John Nater: One of the symptoms we saw when we were discussing the tree.... The argument was that the tree had to be removed for phase two of the visitor welcome centre. Phase two of the visitor welcome centre doesn't seem to be very far along in the process, so we're making decisions based on a concept and approvals that, in some cases, are somewhat outdated and quite unclear, in terms of the process. I think that's a concern for members and for this committee in particular.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Some members have visited other parliaments. I'm thinking, for example, of the Parliament at Westminster in the United Kingdom, which has an interesting set-up for visitors, and particularly for classes and school students. There's a room where they watch an interesting audiovisual presentation, a virtual presentation about Parliament. They get an introduction so that when they go into the building, they have a better understanding of what it's all about. That's among the things I foresee being included in that space.

● (1130)

Mr. John Nater: I think the U.K. is far ahead of us, in terms of that interaction.

I have about 30 seconds left, and you may not have time to answer this in full, but I want to talk about cybersecurity. In the lead-up to the upcoming election, the concept of foreign influence is top of mind for a lot of Canadians. There is a lot of personal data, confidential data and extremely important data kept on computers and servers here within the parliamentary precinct. I'm curious to know what steps have been undertaken by the House, and perhaps by PPS, to ensure that this data is safe, and is not going to be seen as a problem going into the election, and more generally for Canadians on a day-to-day basis.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Before I turn it over, I want to point out the importance, in terms of members of Parliament and our staff, of course, of looking out for phishing emails. Be suspicious of emails that have a strange heading, even if the emails come from someone

you know. Sometimes opening emails, especially in terms of opening links, could be a problem and could allow someone to access the information on your phone, computer or tablet. Those are all things to be very aware of, as we've heard before. It bears repeating.

The Chair: Be quick, please.

Mr. Soufiane Ben Moussa (Chief Technology Officer, Information Services, House of Commons): Thank you for the question. I don't think I will be able to do it in 30 seconds, but to comfort the honourable member, the House of Commons has invested quite a bit in cybersecurity. We do have a strong program in the House that is composed of many aspects. Awareness is one of the main aspects that we think gives us the biggest value, but also we have a good relationship with national and international partners. We also work with many parliaments similar to ours, the U.K., U.S., Australia and others, to exchange threat vectors and to react to them. We have a service that is now expanding to 24-7.

I don't say that we are 100% safe. I don't think anybody is 100% safe, but we are doing everything possible, everything in our power to protect the institution of Parliament.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Speaker, it's good to see you again for the last go-around. It's the last go-around, guaranteed, at least between you and me. With any luck you'll be here many times again, Speaker, and I wish you well on that, but this is our last go.

I know you'd be extremely disappointed if I didn't raise the issue, along with my good friend Mr. Graham, of PPS, but I will take your advice. Your comment at the end was that, if it's due to labour relations, we should do it in camera. It sounds as if we're going in camera anyway, and I will have a couple of questions and will ask for an update.

We'll do that maybe in camera, Chair.

I'll limit my remarks to some financial questions.

In your presentation, a couple of pages in, you said that there's a \$650,000 allocation to build on existing security investments at the vehicle screening facility, which we, of course, lovingly refer to as the car wash. Here's my question. The thing was designed, studied, built. By my recollection, there was at least one major upgrade. There may have been even more, but there was at least one major upgrade since then.

Now we're looking at another \$650,000, so my question is this. When is the darned thing going to be done, and why weren't the issues that are being addressed now not addressed in the beginning when the planning was done?

Hon. Geoff Regan: This question sounds familiar to me because I asked the question, and Madam Côté will be able to respond.

[Translation]

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: Thank you for the question.

The increase of expenditures for the vehicle screening facility concerns surveillance videos we now must add or improve. That is the portion for which we are requesting funding.

• (1135)

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson: Fair enough, but my question was why this wasn't identified at the beginning when, I'm assuming, millions were spent to build it. Now we're having to come back a few years later and add \$650,000 for video cameras, which sounds like sort of an obvious kind of thing if you're dealing with security.

Again, help me to understand why we're having to spend this money now as opposed to it not being built into the original planning.

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: When it comes to any security system, the technology changes very quickly and you need to adapt to those requirements. This is one of the reasons that right now we have some of the increased expenses in that sense. To stay in line with the requirement of the new technology we have to make some adjustments.

Mr. David Christopherson: If I can, Speaker, I'll go to you.

You raise these questions, but nobody is saying there was any kind of deficiency in the plan, the very question that I asked. There is no evidence of that. This is just new technology and an opportunity to up the game, and this is the cost of that. Is that correct?

Nobody anywhere in the system—because brown envelopes exist—said there was a screw-up at the beginning and now we're having to fix it. This is for legitimate add-on security features as a result of new, evolving technology. Is that correct?

Hon. Geoff Regan: That is my understanding, but it reminds me a bit of the issue we had with some of the equipment to raise the bars and so forth and the bollards when they had to be replaced, and I thought it didn't seem that long since they were built and I was assured that the life expectancy of these was much shorter than I would have thought for this sort of equipment.

This is a different case because it's new technology that's required, but these are concerns that I certainly have front of mind as we have these discussions.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay. I'm satisfied.

I'll move along. I don't know if this is in the documents we had here, but it must be available because the researchers provided us with a chart. Now it's main estimates to main estimates, as opposed to actuals to main estimates, let alone actuals to actuals. There are some big number differences and I'd like to ask some questions.

In terms of rentals, the main estimates for 2018-19 were \$75,000. I'm assuming this is thousands of dollars, I think. In the same category for 2019-20, it jumps to \$500,000. Purchased repair and maintenance goes from \$50,000 to \$600,000. In professional and

special services, it actually decreased, so that's a good thing. I want to be fair-minded.

I'm asking you about these two huge increases. For that matter, I'm just noticing that transportation and communication jumped from \$100,000 to \$350,000.

We have some huge increases in these three areas. Can you give me a little more detail as to why, please?

Hon. Geoff Regan: You're referring to PPS, I think.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes.

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: I'll ask Mr. Graham to answer this question since he's in charge of the budget.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay.

Mr. Robert Graham: Unfortunately, I don't have the details. I'd be happy to get back to you off-line.

Mr. David Christopherson: Pardon?

Mr. Robert Graham: Sorry, I don't have the specifics of the rentals that you're requesting.

What's happening here is an increase in personnel costs and a decline in professional and special services. Mr. Christopherson, that is the transformation.... It's the evolution or reduction in RCMP services, because they're essentially a subcontract to the Parliamentary Protective Service, and an increase in PPS salaries.

As the number of PPS employees increases, there's a reduction of RCMP constables on the Hill. That's why you're seeing that increase in salary and the decrease in professional services.

Mr. David Christopherson: I really didn't ask.... Well, I asked about services. I understand that. You're good at explaining why it went down. I want to know why some went up from \$75,000 to \$500,000 and from \$50,000 to \$600,000. These are big numbers and you're telling me you don't have any idea at this meeting about these numbers?

Mr. Robert Graham: One of the things is purchased repair and maintenance. That also reflects an increase in the PPS vehicle fleet. We've acquired some vehicles, which you see outside. They weren't part of our fleet in 2018-19. Those vehicles are part of the purchased repair and maintenance.

I just have to check my figures for the rentals, but I believe that is related to some Canada Day equipment rentals. I don't have those details right here.

• (1140)

Mr. David Christopherson: That would suggest we're doing something hugely different for a Canada Day than we have in the past; otherwise, it would have been built into your base, as such, for that line item.

I'll accept that you don't have the exact details here, although I'm surprised you weren't prepared to answer questions like this, given that it's kind of obvious. Chair, I would ask that this supplementary information be provided to the committee as soon as possible.

The Chair: Yes, I was going to ask you to provide reasons for those two big increases to the committee later on, through the clerk.

Mr. Robert Graham: Absolutely.

Mr. David Christopherson: Chair, in fairness, the rest of my time on the labour relations would best be done in camera.

I thank you, and I thank the Speaker.

The Chair: Okay, that's fine. You've actually gone 30 seconds over time.

We'll have two minutes for Mr. Simms and then we will break for the vote.

Can you come back after the vote?

Okay.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): How long do I have?

The Chair: Two minutes.

Now it's a minute and 50 seconds. You'd better start.

Mr. Scott Simms: Can we just wait until we come back? I don't want two minutes.

The Chair: Okay. We'll come back after.

I'd just like to remind committee about the meeting tonight at 7:00 in this room.

There's a small budget to be adopted to pay for witness expenses for parallel debating chambers. It's a total of \$2,950.

Do I have committee approval?

Thank you.

I have a quick question about indigenous languages. As we asked at the last meeting, it will be translated into Dene, Plains Cree, East Cree and Mohawk around the end of May. Would you like hard copies or can we just send it out by video?

My thought is that because some of the constituents we're dealing with may not be totally conversant electronically, it might be nice to have hard copies in those languages available for those indigenous groups, especially for those who speak those languages as a first language or as their only language.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: We will also need a copy for the archives.

The Chair: How many copies are needed? We need to tell the clerk how many copies to make of each.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: What does it cost? Is there a cost per copy?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Lauzon): There will be a cost for the printed copies. I'll be able to give you a better estimate once I know how many copies the committee would like to have published in each of the....

Mr. David Christopherson: What's a normal...? Can you give us a ballpark figure?

The Clerk: It's hard to say. Nowadays we pretty much do not print out paper copies of reports. We put them online and we send—

Mr. David Christopherson: We need a number.

Chair, we need a number.

The Chair: Why don't we start with 100 in each language?

Mr. David Christopherson: That sounds good.

The Chair: Is that okay with the committee?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Are they for the Hill or are we sending them out? A hundred copies is great if it's going to the communities. A hundred copies in these different languages, I'm willing to—

Mr. David Christopherson: They'll get out—or somebody is not doing their job and somebody here next time will make sure they get them.

The Chair: The last thing I'll mention is that on the parallel chambers, we have some good research. We asked how many people normally show up. It is kind of fascinating because when we started this, we thought, "Well, there are two houses and we'll have two houses of commons that sit 338 people, so it's great to discuss this, whether we need two." It turns out that the two chambers in Australia and Britain normally have between five and 20 people. You can look at that paper but it shows it's a totally different concept from what we were originally thinking of.

Also, in the British papers they talk about a committee of standards. I wanted to know what that was, so the researchers have also sent you something on how the committee of standards works in the British Westminster system.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I'd like clarification on something in relation to Mr. Christopherson.

He was referencing the VSS, which is not the vehicle screening facility. It's the video security system. It's important to note the distinction. I hadn't caught that beforehand.

Mr. David Christopherson: Oh, that does make a big difference.

The Chair: There is one other thing that I will raise quickly. Next Thursday, when the minister is coming, the House is able to televise two committees, and four committees have asked. We can discuss that later.

We'll suspend until after the vote.

● (1140) _____ (Pause) _____

● (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, everyone, for coming back.

We'll start out by having PPS answer Mr. Christopherson's question.

Supt Marie-Claude Côté: Thank you.

I guess you had the question regarding the rentals and the utilities.

Mr. Graham will provide specifics on this question.

Mr. David Christopherson: Great, thank you.

Mr. Robert Graham: On the three specific items, transportation and communication have increased from \$100,000 to \$350,000. Over the last little while we've increased the number of full-time equivalent employees. From a transportation perspective, there are a few more taxis going around. That's a minimal expense.

On the communication side, that's where we've recently launched a new website. That reflects the cost of developing that website which launched earlier this month.

For the rentals, that rental is an increase in the equipment related to major events like tents, fences and cinder blocks. It's not a new expense but an adjustment to reflect the reality now that we have some internal historical data. You'll notice, for instance, that there's a decrease in the acquisition of machinery and equipment by several million dollars. Some of that is simply being recoded to rentals.

Finally, for repair and maintenance, over the last year or two we've transferred a number of assets from the House of Commons to PPS, in particular, scanning equipment and that sort of thing. The costs of the maintenance of those pieces of security equipment have gone up because they are now our assets.

Mr. David Christopherson: I appreciate that. Thank you for doing that so quickly.

I have one follow-up. I don't know a lot about these things, but that seems to be an awful lot of money to develop a website.

Mr. Robert Graham: I don't have the exact breakdown of how much was used to develop the website versus an increase in transportation costs, but we can provide that.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, I think I would like to have a little further detail, if you would, just because the jump is so significant. I really didn't hear a fulsome enough answer to satisfy my curiosity. If you could do some more follow-up on detail, I would appreciate that.

Mr. Robert Graham: We'll dig into that.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, again, for getting it so quickly.

Thank you very much, Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simms, go ahead for seven minutes.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you very much.

●(1215)

[*English*]

I'm going to start with what transpired a while ago in an appearance by Mr. Robert. I'm going to get to that in a minute.

Mr. Speaker, I would love for you to weigh in on this as well, as you weren't present at the time, but I'm sure you're aware of this exercise regarding cleaning up the language in the Standing Orders, which, as I said—and I was quoted by the whip of the Conservatives—I thought it was a fabulous exercise. I think it's fantastic. I thought it was great for the simple reason that it clears up a lot of the language. It makes it more accessible for people who are not familiar, who are not jurilinguists. It makes it far easier to read and

understand. It's an exercise, not in changing the Standing Orders, but certainly in making them far more accessible.

It appears, from what I understand, that the exercise has stopped.

Is that correct, Mr. Robert?

Mr. Charles Robert (Clerk of the House of Commons): When I appeared before the committee on April 9, I indicated that it was an initiative that I undertook in good faith to try to provide a better product for the members. At the same time, I indicated and acknowledged that I would not continue if there was any level of discomfort in proceeding further with it. I received communication indicating that there was some preference that the project be stopped, and it is now suspended.

Mr. Scott Simms: May I ask what the contention was with this?

Mr. Charles Robert: I think the notion really is that any initiative that deals with the Standing Orders really belongs to the members. It was regarded as perhaps presumptuous on my part to become involved by initiating a project on my own initiative.

Mr. Scott Simms: This is not something you can answer, but I find that to be disingenuous at best for a reason as to why this should be done.

Mr. Speaker, do you care to comment?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you, Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms: It's what we do.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I will say that the administration from time to time brings forward to the Board of Internal Economy, for example, suggestions about improvements that could be made to things happening in terms of administration for its consideration. I think that's what was being worked on here.

However, it's very clear, and I know that the Clerk understands this, that the House and its members are the proprietors, so to speak, of the Standing Orders. Clearly, members know that they cannot be changed without the House's decision. If it isn't the wish of members that this sort of review be conducted, then it ought to be halted. That, I think, is the context that I could give to it, as best I can.

Mr. Scott Simms: I'm going back to Mr. Robert again.

It seems to me, though, you had no intention whatsoever of changing any of the Standing Orders or the fundamental characteristics of anything pertaining to the House business. Is that correct?

Mr. Charles Robert: That was the objective that drove the project, yes.

Mr. Scott Simms: Has this exercise been done throughout other Westminster parliaments?

Mr. Charles Robert: I'd have to do a survey to understand what has been done in other parliaments. The movement really began about 30 or 40 years ago in law. In England it was under Lord Rankin, who was a strong proponent of plain language simply because since everyone is subject to the law, they should at least be able to understand it. That movement has spread to other jurisdictions. We in Canada, I think, have made an effort—I'll defer to lawyers who know better than I—when we draft laws now in English and in French, it's done in parallel. It's no longer done as a translation of one to the other.

As a result of that, I think the French version of laws at the federal level are clearer than they might have been otherwise if they were worked out as a translation of the English.

Mr. Scott Simms: Can you estimate how much time you've put into this thus far?

Mr. Charles Robert: Personally, probably very little. This is an initiative that I'm able to direct. I think there was maybe one full time and then two others on the procedural side who were probably part time. Then I think the jurilinguists were brought in as the project advanced to a fairly substantial level, so they could participate in clearing up the French technical terminology.

Mr. Scott Simms: For me, personally—and you don't have to weigh in on this; this is my own thought—I think this is coming. I think we should endeavour to do a project of this nature, and not just for that, maybe, but for other reasons as well, especially for this type of job that we do. Not everybody who comes into the position of member of Parliament is from a legal background, me included. I was a TV weatherman, for God's sake. I don't know what that says, but—

An hon. member: A good one.

● (1220)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: It never rained on his watch.

Mr. Scott Simms: Yes, that's right.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Simms: It appears we've devolved.

I want to congratulate you for doing that. I'm very sad that it is, and I hope that this committee will endeavour in the future to take it upon themselves to give the direction that we do this once again.

Mr. Charles Robert: I will point out that I was asked to take on another project, which I have happily done, to deal with the annotated Standing Orders. I think what we can do in that regard is to make it an evergreen document; that is to say, we would keep it up in a more active way so that when members want to know where a rule came from and why we are doing it this way, particularly when we have nuance—like, 69.1 dealing with second and third reading of omnibus bills—we can provide information that might be useful to the members in a more timely fashion.

If we're successful in implementing that approach, I think this will be of value to the members.

Mr. Scott Simms: What do these annotated Standing Orders look like?

Mr. Charles Robert: The second edition, I think, came out some years ago. I was still in the House when the first edition came out in the mid-1980s. It's the standing order, an explanation of what we think it means, and a history of the standing order going back to 1867, if that's appropriate.

Mr. Scott Simms: You're undertaking that exercise right now. Is that correct?

Mr. Charles Robert: I've agreed to do it, yes, because that was the proposal. It seems to me it's the first cousin of the revised Standing Orders, so why not do it? It's a perfectly good project.

Mr. Scott Simms: The other part—the cousin of that—you've ceased doing and you've told others to stop doing that.

Mr. Charles Robert: Yes.

Mr. Scott Simms: That's unfortunate.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to suspend briefly to go in camera, because we have three people who had questions for you in camera, which we'll finish with.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

● (1220)

(Pause)

● (1255)

[Public proceedings resume]

The Chair: We are now in public.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$349,812,484

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

PARLIAMENTARY PROTECTIVE SERVICE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$81,786,647

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Thank you to all of you for staying extra time. It's much more than normal, but I think it's good this committee has access to you. We really appreciate being able to ask those questions.

You're dismissed, if you like.

We only have three minutes left. Is there anything urgent the committee wants to spend time on in those three minutes?

Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: No, and I don't think we have time to deal with anything, but perhaps at a future meeting, we have Ms. Kusie's motion—

The Chair: —and there are a few others, Mr. Reid's motion, etc.

Mr. John Nater: Scott is not here today, so...

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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