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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. The Speaker's time is very valuable, and we don't want to miss the opportunity to ask questions, so we'll try to start on time.

Welcome to the 53rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The meeting is being televised. Today the committee is studying the supplementary estimates (C) for 2016-17 and vote 1c under Parliamentary Protective Service.

We are pleased to have with us today the Honourable Geoff Regan, Speaker of the House of Commons. He is accompanied by officials from the Parliamentary Protective Service: Superintendent Mike O'Beirne, acting director, and Robert Graham, administration and personnel officer.

Just so that committee members know, the main estimates have also been tabled. We can do those at some time soon.

Mr. Speaker, the floor is yours. I know you're a very busy man. We're delighted you're here today. Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Speaker of the House of Commons): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm delighted to be back at the procedure and House affairs committee, where I spent some quality time while I was the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader between 2001 and 2003. It's nice to be back again, this time of course answering questions, or trying to, instead of asking them.

I'm pleased to be here with Superintendent Mike O'Beirne, the acting director of the Parliamentary Protective Service, and Mr. Robert Graham, the acting corporate services officer for the protective service. We're also joined by other members of the PPS management team: Superintendent Alain Laniel, the officer in charge of operational support; Inspector Marie-Claude Côté, the officer in charge of operations; and, Melissa Rusk, executive officer and senior adviser to the director.

Since its creation on June 23, 2015, the PPS has made significant progress in unifying the Parliament Hill physical security mandate and in establishing itself as a single and independent parliamentary entity. Over the course of fiscal year 2016-17, its first full financial cycle, the PPS has implemented a series of new operational and organizational initiatives while addressing the complexities of the evolving external security environment.

[*Translation*]

In September 2016, a supplementary budget request of \$7 million was approved to support ongoing costs for Parliament Hill security,

one-time initial costs for the launch of resources optimization initiatives, and the requirements stemming from organizational structure developments.

In support of PPS' determination to build on the progress to date, which includes further strengthening its capacity to support an autonomous security service throughout the Parliamentary Precinct and the grounds of Parliament Hill, I am here to present PPS' supplementary estimates (C) and main estimates requests.

[*English*]

I'll begin by providing an overview of the PPS supplementary estimates (C) request, which totals \$2.39 million, including a total voted budgetary requirement of \$2.3 million and a statutory budgetary component of \$90,000 to fund the employee benefit plan.

The total voted budgetary requirement is related to funding for an operational contingency fund and additional administrative requirements.

The PPS is seeking an operational contingency fund in the amount of \$2.1 million dollars, which will be used for operational requirements not anticipated earlier in the year, including security for the Canada 150 celebrations on December 31, 2016, and for future requirements that may occur prior to the fiscal year-end.

•(1105)

[*Translation*]

In addition to the operational contingency fund, we are requesting a sum of \$200,000 to fund administrative requirements. This includes funding for payroll, language training, and Employee Assistance Program services that the House of Commons Administration is providing to PPS on a cost-recovery basis throughout the 2016-2017 fiscal year.

Due to external labour relations factors, including delays associated with the negotiations surrounding the future collective bargaining units, PPS is requesting funds to cover the anticipated additional external legal services.

[English]

I hope I'm not going too fast for the interpreters, who I know do a fabulous job, but it can be challenging with someone who speaks as quickly as I do.

Let us now turn our attention to the PPS's main estimates request for 2017-18, which totals \$68.2 million. This includes a voted budget component of \$62.1 million and a \$6.1-million statutory budget requirement for the employee benefits plan.

This 2017-18 main estimates request represents a \$6.1-million increase over the PPS's 2016-17 main estimates submission. In addition to its permanent voted budget of \$56.3 million, which was approved in the 2016-17 main estimates and established as a result of Bill C-59, the PPS is seeking an additional \$6.1 million in permanent funding to support the ongoing implementation of security enhancements and to further stabilize its organizational structure.

Several reviews were conducted following the events of October 22, 2014, resulting in 161 recommendations for the improvement of security on Parliament Hill. The PPS received temporary funding approval in September 2016 to launch its mobile response team, or MRT, initiative. The implementation of this initiative will address a significant number of these 161 recommendations and enhance the PPS's overall response capacity. PPS is requesting permanent funding in the amount of \$1.2 million to further implement and sustain the needs of this initiative.

To support the continuation of the Senate's previously approved security enhancement initiatives, additional funding in the amount of \$787,000 will be transferred to the PPS on April 1, 2017, given the direct alignment with the PPS's mandate.

[Translation]

PPS is also seeking permanent funding in the amount of \$3 million to stabilize the protective posture in the newly reopened Wellington Building, and to uphold pre-existing third party security agreements throughout the Precinct.

Given the anticipated increase in the number of visitors to the Precinct and grounds of Parliament Hill throughout Canada's 150th anniversary celebrations, a total of \$400,000 in temporary funding is required to support the costs of the baggage screening facility at 90 Wellington through 2017-2018. This renewed temporary funding request will not only enhance the visitor experience but will enable PPS to evaluate this facility's effectiveness, feasibility and long-term sustainability.

This results in a cumulative request of \$5.3 million for previously approved and new security enhancement initiatives throughout the Parliamentary Precinct and the grounds of Parliament Hill.

• (1110)

[English]

In addition to the aforementioned funding request for operational enhancement initiatives, the PPS is seeking a permanent increase of \$886,000 to fund a series of corporate service requirements. This includes funding for full-time communications resources to support the PPS's internal and external messaging, along with the funding that is necessary to fulfill its existing service-level agreements with

the House administration for the provision of human resources, as well as information and technical services.

In closing, the PPS remains steadfast in its commitment to operational excellence through the provision of professional physical security services throughout the parliamentary precinct and the grounds of Parliament Hill, something that I think is very important. It's certainly important to me for the security of everyone who works here and all those who visit us here.

To further enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of its service delivery model, the PPS will focus on the ongoing implementation of existing and new resource optimization initiatives, the identification of opportunities to leverage innovation, and a strengthened commitment to collaboration with its various parliamentary partners.

This concludes my overview of the PPS's supplementary estimates (C) and 2017-18 main estimates request, Mr. Chair. I look forward, and we look forward, to the questions that are to come.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You were informative, as always. You did make some comments on the main estimates, which was great as background, but today the committee has been prepared for only the supplementary estimates of the PPS, which I hope will be our topic of questioning. Hopefully, we'll have you back soon for the main estimates.

Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be here, after having worked for you.

I want to understand a bit more about PPS. I was here before the merger, as were you, and I would like to understand, administratively, what were the changes. When PPS was created, it was no longer part of the House of Commons directly.

What is the administrative structure for pay and benefits, and all these things now? Is there a completely separate organization for that from the House of Commons? Has that all been recreated for the PPS?

Hon. Geoff Regan: I was speaking earlier about some of the things whereby funding will be provided to the House of Commons administration to pay for the services it provides the PPS, like human resources, for example. There are a variety of things wherein the House of Commons has existing setups and administration that deals with this kind of stuff. Rather than creating a whole new set for the PPS, it's obviously more efficient to share that.

I'll let Superintendent O'Beirne continue, and fill you in further, and be more accurate, I'm sure.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: We're all about details at procedure and House affairs.

Superintendent Mike O'Beirne (Acting Director, Parliamentary Protective Service): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, the coming together of all three entities to form the PPS was of the operational resources, predominantly. That meant having to turn ourselves to look at optimizing how best to create the behind-the-scenes operational support services and/or administrative or corporate services.

As mentioned in the Speaker's opening remarks, there are some service-level agreements that are currently under way with the House of Commons to provide HR services and IT support functions. As mentioned, that's to avoid duplication and to ensure that existing services are optimized and maximized.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Is there anywhere in PPS where there are now officers serving where civilians had been in those positions prior to the merger?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Where civilians had been previously?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Yes, administratively or anywhere in the structure of PPS that had been run by civilians before the merger of PPS, is there anything that is now run by uniformed officers.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: We have personnel operating in operational units. For example, we have training units and planning units. These personnel are made up of our operational folks who came together from all three previously separate entities, but they are not in administrative roles per se. They are in operational functions, which means they are the ones who are at the range on a daily basis. They are the ones who are deploying the actual kinetic training exercises.

From a planning perspective, the integrated planning unit is also made up of our operational personnel. They are the ones who attend all of the operational meetings, the planning mechanisms, with internal and external partners. They operationalize the plan on the day of an event. They're on the ground with our operational folks and commanders.

As far as other positions are concerned, let's say you're referring to purely administrative functions like corporate functions and things like that, perhaps I'll turn it over to Mr. Graham. We don't have personnel actively involved in those administrative-only positions.

• (1115)

Mr. Robert Graham (Administration and Personnel Officer, Parliamentary Protective Service): If we're talking about finance and HR, I can't think of any instance where a constable is working in an administrative capacity right now.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Do we have enough PPS officers on the floor right now? Are we fully staffed?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: The PPS will always continue to use all its existing resources, and distribute them throughout our area of operation to maximize them in accordance with our established priorities, to continue ensuring an open and accessible Parliament, and combining that with a very real need for security.

That said, we have to be very nimble in our approach to future demands. We're in constant consultations with internal and external partners to determine exactly that resource level. That continues every day.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I think it's invaluable to understand that it takes time. If there's a decision to add some people, for example, in view of certain circumstances, that takes time. In fact, it takes as much as 10 months from the time you start saying, okay, we have to prepare for this, to the process whereby you select people, train them, get them equipped, etc. That's a long period. The PPS is constantly adjusting as a result of that and dealing with changes. If someone gets sick or gets another job, there are changes. It's a situation of constant adjustment. Sometimes that leads to overtime, for instance, but the objective really is to try to make sure that the staff is there if necessary so you don't have to have people doing much overtime.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Do you have a sense of how many people are doing overtime these days?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: Well, if you are looking for an absolute numerical value, I don't have that information with me today. I could provide that at a later time.

Mr. Robert Graham: Sorry, could you repeat the question?

A voice: How many people are doing overtime basically?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: On a daily basis.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: Yes, we can provide that information to you in a follow-up document. But on a daily basis, we have to be responsive to the events that are occurring every single day on Parliament Hill and in various areas around the precinct. That, combined with external factors like the global threat environment, always positions us to have to be very responsive. If I can take a step back, certainly after the events of October 22, there was a posture change on Parliament Hill. We're looking at ensuring that we continue to resource those changes effectively and optimize every resource as best as possible.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Is there any—

The Chair: Sorry, David, your time is up.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you. I may have time to continue later.

The Chair: Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, all, for joining us here today.

Going over your report, I see that in the contingency fund there is the amount of \$2.1 million to be used for operational requirements that were not anticipated earlier in the year, including security for Canada's 150th celebrations. I'm assuming, obviously, this has been planned for years and that you've been looking at all kinds of scenarios. I recognize that you can't go into too much detail, but have other challenges come up that have resulted in these additional funds being put aside?

• (1120)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Well, every year is different. Things come up that you may not know in advance of that year but that you have to prepare for. Obviously last year, for example, we had the visit of President Obama, which led to additional expense.

As for what other kinds of events will happen during the course of this year, but that we don't know about yet, is a good question. But I think it's important that we prepare for that.

Is there anything else we need to add to that?

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Do the funds being set aside for the baggage screening machine include staff as well or is that just for the machine requirements?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: It does include the staff as well, sir.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Just out of curiosity more than anything else, with the 150th anniversary coming up and a whole bunch of things, will overtime be used more regularly given that we're expecting, I would assume, more visitors around Parliament Hill, in the area? Will overtime be used? Obviously you can't hire more officers just for a short period—or maybe you can.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Well, it's not a plan to temporarily increase the size of the force, for instance, for the time around July 1 or during the course of the summer. However, for large events we co-operate with other police forces like the Ottawa Police Service or the RCMP who can supplement us.

I'll let Mike add to that.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's correct. We have a good understanding of the events that will be taking place in our area of operation in and around Parliament Hill. However, we're always in constant discussions with the partners on this, internally and externally, to really get a good understanding of the scope and magnitude of them. This will inform our personnel requirements. As Mr. Speaker mentioned, we do call upon some partners to assist us when and as required.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Obviously, when a bunch of tourists are walking around, they're not always in the right spot when wandering and what have you, and that's going to have to be dealt with as people converge.

Something else that has come up in previous meetings is access to the building for MPs, for senators, and for staff. Is that still something you have made a priority, with regard to ensuring that access is there and privileges are met?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Absolutely.

Part of the ongoing training of members is understanding, for instance, the privileges of members of Parliament and the importance

of letting them get to where they need to be, along with their staff who need to work on the Hill and within the precinct.

Do you have anything to add to that?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: There's just one final point.

That is certainly our main effort on a daily basis. We ensure that we emphasize that as part of any of our operational plans. We include contingency plans in the event that there are many visitors or there is a blockage of the lower drive so that we can try to deal with those.

Hon. Geoff Regan: A key point that is made is to understand how important it is for members of Parliament to be able to do the things they must do in order to act on behalf of their constituents. That's what it's all about.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Building on that, has PPS encountered any challenges in its planning? Are there issues that you may not have been able to find a solution for? Is there anything at all? Is everything moving smoothly?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: If I can speak in general terms, I think as far as challenges go, one of our ongoing challenges is to ensure the seamless integration of all the previously separate entities so that we're able to provide a world-class security service.

That includes ensuring the cultural integration of all our folks. We've had some great initiatives in the last while to deal with those challenges. Since the commissioning of the 180 Wellington building, our folks are beginning to co-locate there, which has led to combined and integrated briefings and the rapid exchange of information, which is critical for entities such as ours or for any organization really.

I think another challenge is, perhaps, external pressures, or external points that we are constantly trying to be nimble in our response to. They include, as Mr. Speaker mentioned, the Canada 150 events that are coming. There are also the requirements to position ourselves to respond to LTVP pressures and to the very real global threat environment.

These are challenges that we keep at the forefront of our attention everyday.

• (1125)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Did the events of this past weekend prove to be a kind of training or observation opportunity for you with Crashed Ice going on just off Parliament Hill?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Were you in it?

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I was not participating in that. I would like to think that I'm smarter than that.

Hon. Geoff Regan: You're sticking to running, right?

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Exactly.

Did that provide an opportunity to see what it would look like when people are in mass numbers around Parliament Hill, trying to get various views, and what you could be facing as we get into the summer months?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: Certainly it gave us another glimpse into what we can expect moving forward as the summer months come and as we move towards Canada Day, which is promising to be a grand event.

Specifically to the Red Bull Crashed Ice event, it unfolded without any incident. That's largely due to the great co-operation between the PPS, Ottawa city police, and the RCMP. These three entities were all involved in the pre-planning phase. Certainly in the execution phase of the event, there was kind of a multi-jurisdictional effort. That's a model we continue to build on. We learn from every event. We take best practices and incorporate them into future events.

That certainly has positioned us for future successes.

The Chair: Thank you, Jamie.

Mr. Christopherson.

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

Mr. Speaker, it's good to see you, sir, and your delegation.

If I may, I would like to touch on the new screening process. I assume it has been covered in some of this. As you know, there have been some serious concerns raised about this whole new issue.

I want to draw attention to your remarks, Speaker, in the last paragraph of page 1 at the bottom, where you refer to supporting an autonomous security service.

In camera, you and I have had discussions about just how autonomous this is, and if I get time I'll come back to that, because it's anything but. However, I would like to ask you just what the current status of the suggested new screening process is, sir.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Well, there are two kinds of screening. There's the screening of people who will arrive in buildings like this one, and there is the screening of personnel who are here on an ongoing basis. Of course, both are important and both have a role. At the same time, it's important that we respect certain institutions, such as the media, and work out arrangements that make sense from all perspectives.

Mr. David Christopherson: If I may, sir, of the two areas that have jumped out so far, one, of course, is the media itself, through the press gallery, their organized representative body, and also people who work for members here, or may in the future. They're raising serious concerns that tie into the notion of being autonomous.

Once we start getting into anything to do with the RCMP, we see that it is not autonomous at all. Nobody suggests that the RCMP is autonomous, and yet they're responsible for security in this building.

We still have this facade of an independent security service, but at the end of the day, in a crisis, when the rubber hits the road, the Prime Minister will dictate to the RCMP commissioner, who will then issue orders that will be followed. If they have time, I'm sure they'll loop in the Speaker, but if it's a big enough emergency, sir... and we've had some of these discussions in camera, which I can't divulge.

The reason I'm raising that, sir, is that once we start bringing in the press gallery, the free press—and we see the issue of defending the

right of the press in a free democracy roiling away south of us—who decides what the threshold is going to be as to who gets accredited?

Now we have linked the ability of the press to be in the building to do their job with the ultimate control of the security service that's going to decide whether or not they are entitled to a badge to work here.

Help me and others to understand why this shouldn't be a concern when it certainly seems like it is.

• (1130)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Well, I've certainly had discussions on this topic. I must say, though, there are....

You referred to some of the conversations we've had during in camera meetings, and some aspects of this, of course, would have to be in camera.

I think Superintendent O'Beirne is probably better placed to make the assessment of which comments might fit into each category in that sense, so I'm going to let him respond to your questions, if I may.

Mr. David Christopherson: It rolls downhill you know.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: Thank you, sir.

I think you have brought up quite a few points, and if I may, I'll try to address each one.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: I do believe that while there are some linkages, there are some aspects that are completely separate.

In regard to the involvement of the RCMP in the PPS, while, again, we could probably expand on this in another forum, the amendments to the Parliament of Canada Act, and the subsequent MOU were very deliberate in ensuring that the trilateral governance was in place. This ensures that rights and privileges are absolute.

There is no conceivable environment where the director of the PPS would be asked to contravene an existing piece of legislation. If I can tie that into your comment about the press and the security clearances there, I will say that the RCMP is simply a service provider in that regard.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm sorry to interrupt. I don't mean to be rude.

But the criteria for what will be acceptable in terms of security, who will make that decision?

And by the way, I don't accept any of this, that there is this independence and all that. We've been through this. I'd love to do it in public, to go through the actual command and control and who does what. At the end of the day, I think it's very clear that King Charles would be thrilled with this kind of a set-up. Let's just put it that way. I can only hope that some day Parliament takes back its autonomous control of security.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Let me tell you that I don't forget William Lenthall and what he said to King Charles. In fact, it's something that I very often quote because, as you may know, the face of Speaker Lenthall is in the ceiling of my office. So he looks down upon me and reminds me often of the importance of the autonomy, independence, and authority of the House of Commons in relation to the executive.

Since you mentioned King Charles, I couldn't resist.

Mr. David Christopherson: Fair enough, but let's hope that we return to a day where Parliament actually has sovereign autonomy over its own security services, which at this second we do not.

So would you continue, please. Who sets the criteria to decide whether or not a journalist is allowed to conduct their profession here on the Hill? How will that—

Hon. Geoff Regan: It's actually not the PPS, but the Corporate Security Office. You might want to have us come back some time when I have Mr. McDonnell with me to talk about that some more.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay. How does one find out how they set these, and where is the input to decide whether or not the thresholds are fair?

Hon. Geoff Regan: In fact, there are discussions going on right now between the Corporate Security Office and the press gallery to work out what those rules should be. I think we're moving in a good direction in that regard, as I think you'll hear.

The Chair: Thank you, that is the time.

• (1135)

Mr. David Christopherson: It goes so fast, Chair.

Thank you for those answers.

The Chair: Ms. Tassi.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presence here today.

I'm new to this committee, so I apologize if my questions are basic, but they will just help me get up to speed.

First, what I'd like to say is just to commend the security team. They're absolutely fantastic.

As a new member of Parliament, I have to tell you that I'm not only impressed with the professionalism, kindness, and compassion in how they wish to take care of us and do take care of us, but also want to commend you and all those responsible for the oversight of the security here.

In that same spirit I also want to make sure that they are at the top of their game, that they are able to do the job they are set out to do. I have had some conversations, which get back to MP Graham's questioning, with respect to overtime and fatigue levels of the security service.

Superintendent O'Beirne, we started that conversation but then I think we got sidetracked a bit. You mentioned the concept of being fully staffed and that you've done research in that regard to determine what it takes. Do you have the number of current security officers that you have and the number you would need—because my

understanding is that we need more based on the overtime hours—to be satisfied that you are fully staffed?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: You're correct in that the overtime is always at the forefront of our concerns, and not only from a fiscal risk perspective, but also as a wellness concern for us. To that end, I'll mention that we've developed a multitude of initiatives geared towards employee wellness—physical and mental health initiatives. That is certainly at the forefront of our concerns.

From an overtime perspective and how that translates into our posture, as I mentioned, the coming together of the three separate entities was at a time when there were a multitude of security changes on Parliament Hill, on the grounds and in the precinct. As we've come together as a security entity, we have had the opportunity, for example, to optimize our levels at areas such as, let's say, the vehicle screening facility where we continue to employ our defensive posture strategy of multiple layers of security. As I mentioned, we've had some optimization there when it comes to resourcing pressures.

To your question about the actual number, you'll be pleased to hear that we just launched one of our training courses yesterday, which sees our brand new recruit class starting. It's a nine-week training course, so we're looking forward to having them join the force for the upcoming summer months.

I mention that because this is an ongoing effort for us as we position ourselves as well for the 2018 LTVP pressures of the decommissioning of Centre Block and also the ramping up of other areas.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: I can appreciate that, but I guess, for me, it's do you have a number for the positions you are looking to fill with respect to the security? Is it 50, 20, 30? Do you have a number of people you are looking for so you will in fact be, as you refer to it, fully staffed? I am referring to vacancies, in other words, so that the overtime issue...

I appreciate the initiatives you're taking, but my question is why wouldn't you just hire people? What's happening with respect to the hiring? How many positions are you looking for to fill that gap, so you don't have to rely on overtime?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: What we're doing to come to that number... It is constantly in flux. We have an attrition rate that we deal with as well, but also an expansion rate that we foresee as likely being temporary. Again, as I mentioned, with the West Block commissioning sometime in 2018, we're looking forward to knowing what the final timelines are going to be.

• (1140)

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Okay.

You don't have a number right now, but you're looking to add people. When you're adding people—you mentioned this training course—how many are you looking at? What would be ideal? How many are in the training course?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: I would be more than happy to give you some numbers, perhaps in another medium or in written form, if that could be acceptable.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Okay.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: We are looking to find that optimum balance to be able to ensure that our overtime is brought to a minimum in the not-too-distant future. We're under no illusion that we'll ever get to zero because of the external unknowns that we have to be responsive to.

Again, I can provide those numbers to you—

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Okay, that would be great.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: —in another form.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: How many are in the training course that's going to start?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: We have approximately 22 at this time.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Twenty-two.

Is it anticipated that they will all end up going through the training course and then be ready to serve? Do some of them get dropped because they don't pass, or—?

Mr. Robert Graham: We hope they will all pass.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: Our intention is to train them so they're successful. In some instances, we do have varying success rates, yes.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: What would the average success rate be—90%?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: Again, those are the types of figures I would be more than happy to provide outside of this meeting, if you don't mind.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Okay. I know my time is almost up, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate your attention to this matter. I think it's a matter of concern. When I'm speaking on security—and I don't want to mention any names or anything—I don't want to see personnel overtaxed. I don't want to see them exhausted, not only for their own safety and wellness, but also for the safety of those they're protecting.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Before we go on to Blake, for the record, you've committed to getting three things back to the committee. You can get them to the clerk. One is the amount of overtime that's going on. Second is the number that you need to be fully staffed. Third is the success rate in the training program. If you could get that to the clerk, then we will give it to the committee members.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thank you.

I have a number of questions, so we'll see how we can do here.

The first one I want to ask about is that you mentioned briefly in your opening remarks the mobile response team initiative. I wonder if you or Mr. O'Beirne could briefly give us a sense of what that team and initiative is.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Once again, I think this is an area where he has a better idea than I do of what we should tell you and what we shouldn't in open meetings.

Mr. Blake Richards: Fair enough.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: The mobile response team initiative is going to be a group of individuals who are trained to respond to a broad spectrum of events that can occur within our area of operation. They're going to be operating amongst the existing forces.

Mr. Blake Richards: You seem reluctant to give us much more information than that.

Is that because of this meeting being public? Is that the idea?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: I would look very much forward to providing you further information on that, and perhaps in a different medium, yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Maybe we could set aside a couple of minutes at the very end, Mr. Chair, to do that. Would that be possible? Is there any objection to that?

The Chair: Does anyone have any objection to doing the last five minutes in camera so we can have more discussion on that item?

No?

Okay.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that and we'll undertake to do it.

I'll move to some other questions I have. You mentioned also in your opening remarks the communication resources to support both internal and external messaging in the PPS. I think I can imagine what the internal messaging would be, but maybe you could focus on the external messaging and give us some sense of what type of services are being provided for that funding.

• (1145)

Hon. Geoff Regan: There are times when there are media inquiries about issues related to security on the Hill, whether incidents have occurred, or what have you, and where there is a need for a response from the PPS itself. It does that in coordination with my office and, I suppose, with the Speaker of the Senate's office.

Mr. Blake Richards: Would someone like a media relations officer be hired? Is that what we're speaking of, then, or someone who dedicates a bit of their time to that?

Hon. Geoff Regan: There's media relations, and sometimes you need someone doing graphics for internal communications, that kind of stuff.

Mr. Blake Richards: Also mentioned in your opening remarks was \$400,000 in temporary funding to support the baggage-screening facility at 90 Wellington for 2017-18. It was termed "temporary funding". I'm wondering why it would be temporary? Why was it felt there was only a need for that funding for that period of time, and why would it not be permanent?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: We asked for that as a temporary measure because we're looking at re-examine that contract moving forward. We're looking forward to the commissioning of the visitor welcome centre in 2018. That's another one of those initiatives that will inform us on how best to navigate this large-baggage phenomenon we have to deal with. That's why we're asking for it as a temporary measure, and we look forward to revisiting that.

Mr. Blake Richards: So you will be re-evaluating it after that point and determining what the permanent needs would be.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: That's correct, sir.

Mr. Blake Richards: Fair enough.

Along that same line, you mentioned in a response to an earlier question the decommissioning of Centre Block, which coincides with a move to West Block. In my understanding, the expectations are that this would occur in 2018. Whether that happens or not, we'll see. Regardless of when it happens, you've been doing some planning for that. I wonder if you have any sense of what it is going to look like? What kind of challenges will that present? What kind of costs will there be?

Hon. Geoff Regan: On the question of the timing, we are operating under the expectation of being in there in February 2018, but I'm looking forward to a meeting before too long with the officials from Public Services and Procurement Canada, which has custody of the building, to determine when it will be handed over to the House of Commons administration. There are things we have to do once that happens. They hand it over to us in a certain state, and then we have to get it into the readiness state, which is a different thing. It's going to require some months to do that. I'm anxious to know what date they're going to assure us that they're going to hand it over to us.

That doesn't answer your question, I don't think. That was actually part of the preamble, not part of the question.

Mr. Blake Richards: Would we be able to look to Mr. O'Beirne, if that is who was going to respond, for the remainder of the answer?

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: I'm sorry, your question...?

Mr. Blake Richards: I was asking about the decommissioning of Centre Block and the move to West Block. What challenges would that present operationally? What are the planning and preparatory stages? What kind of costs do you anticipate in meeting those challenges?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: We're in consultations with our partners on this, to come to ground and get a better understanding of the timelines and what they will entail. We're not sure if we can close Centre Block down on a Friday and have West Block open on a Monday. There may be a transition period there. We're going to be looking to get some further information on that.

There's also the government conference centre, which is at the forefront of our attention. As we get closer to 2018, we'll have a better idea of what our personnel pressures will be. Will we have to maintain a fully operational Centre Block concurrently with a fully operational West Block and the government conference centre? Those are some of the unknowns we hope will become clear in the remainder of this calendar year.

● (1150)

Mr. Blake Richards: It sounds as if it might be a question for a future meeting.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Sahota, and then we'll go in camera.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you for being here today. I definitely want to reiterate what my colleague said, that

the PPS staff are incredible. We've all built relationships with them in the hallways over the time we've been here, and they do an outstanding job, a phenomenal job.

A couple of my main questions relate to the integration of communications. How is that going? How have you seen it change the efficiency or the effectiveness of the force? Have there been complications with that? Have there been additional costs? I know that the last time you were here we discussed it a little, that there would be added costs to integrating. How is that working out? Did the integration go smoothly? How often are the different departments communicating, Senate to the House of Commons to the RCMP?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: This is happening on a daily basis now. With the full integration of the security forces, there are fully integrated briefings in the morning, fully integrated communication strategies where the messaging is immediate, whether it's corporate or operational. We have these on a daily basis, multiple times a day, if required. To complement this, for any kind of special events, notifications are sent to all personnel. The distinction that you had mentioned between the RCMP, the House of Commons, and the Senate does not necessarily exist anymore in the previous form that we understood it to be prior to the PPS. If I can use a crude analogy of 33%, each entity seemed to have been operating with, let's say, 33% of the plan or 33% of the information, and now, with the creation of the PPS, it's 100%. An operational plan will encompass every aspect of an operational plan, 100% of it, whether it's happening anywhere on the precinct, and all security forces are advised of that.

We are in constant communication with the corporate security office and the corporate security directorate. We work closely with them multiple times a day, or for any special event. We continue to ensure that the operational communications strategy and the corporate communications strategy are seamless. As I mentioned, the collocating of personnel at 180 Wellington has contributed to further integration and increased communication.

We continue to refine our model every time we possibly can, with learned and best practices.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: The increase that we are seeing in administrative costs, what is that a direct result of? You talked a little about HR, and different areas. Is there a key area that you're seeing the increase in?

Mr. Robert Graham: When PPS was formed, a lot of the focus was on combining the operational individuals from the House, the Senate, and the RCMP. Some elements were perhaps not a great focus at the time, like a finance group or an HR group. To leverage the good work already being done by the House and Senate, for instance to implement a financial management system, we're leveraging the work that the House administration is doing. The payroll is being administered by a group that's been seconded to PPS, but leveraging existing systems that are already extant on the Hill. There are some areas that it makes sense for us to leverage with our partners, but in some areas, for instance a receiving warehouse, it makes no sense for PPS to build its own. So we're going to continue

to leverage the partnerships we have with the House and the Senate administrations to take advantage of assets already there.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

The Chair: We're going to suspend for about 30 seconds. We'll try to stay a couple of minutes later.

Everyone at the back will have to leave the room because we're going in camera.

Thank you.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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