

Minister
of Foreign Affairs



Ministre
des Affaires étrangères

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0G2

February 1, 2024

Mr. Kelly McCauley
Chair
House of Commons Standing Committee
on Government Operations and Estimates
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. McCauley:

On behalf of the Government of Canada, we would like to thank the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates (OGGO) for its report entitled: *Travel Expenditures Related to the Office of the Governor General's Secretary Since 2014*. We appreciate the Committee's time and dedication to ensuring the stewardship of public funds in organizing high-level visits, particularly during this time of heightened fiscal restraint, and in fostering the preservation of public trust in the Government.

We would like to take this opportunity to respond to OGGO's recommendations, by highlighting new practices that serve to institute greater co-ordination, controls, and accountability associated with the Governor General's travel. These practices build upon existing mechanisms that serve to promote good value for money and the oversight of public funds.

As established during the Government's testimony, the Governor General has a mandate to travel internationally, to advance Canada's interests and priorities.

Planning and Coordination

In coordination with the office of the Governor General, federal departments supporting the Governor General's travel do so through established practices and processes that intend to minimize risks and maximize cost savings and other efficiencies in all aspects of a high-level visit. Partners continuously monitor and enforce the many internal controls during all phases of a visit, including procurement of services for accommodation, ground transportation, event venues and hospitality. For the large part, these mechanisms function effectively, however, sometimes factors outside of the Government's control, such as short lead-times in organizing the trip, or travel to particular locations, impact the cost efficiency of travel arrangements.

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That said, the government seeks to continually review and improve its current practices with a view to deliver better oversight, controls and value on a range of cost drivers. Fundamental to these practices is the need for rigorous transparency and information-sharing among federal departments and offices which have a decision-making responsibility for high level visits.

We therefore accept the Committee's recommendations to improve co-ordination and planning practices, which are aligned with our own efforts.

Catering Costs

Since these concerns were raised, the Government has implemented a number of controls on the variable costs of catering, including:

- requesting caterers to provide costs of meals in advance, where possible;
- standardizing menus and limiting choice; reducing the percentage of contingency meals to 20%;
- minimizing and sourcing food or meals in Canada when possible, and
- setting guidelines for frequency of meals while onboard government aircraft.

These practices have already been adopted and provide the opportunity to either mitigate against cost overruns, or address them proactively, thus generating cost savings.

While the cost of catering is affected by location, we believe that these afore-mentioned controls, which are aligned with OGGO's recommendations, are good steps to offset recurrences of high costs associated with the Governor General's travel, and we are committed to ongoing scrutiny to identify and implement further cost savings.

Open Government and Transparency

The Government of Canada remains committed to transparency and accountability in the management of public funds. Federal departments supporting high-level travel closely adhere to all financial and procurement policies and procedures established by the Treasury Board. This information is made public in the Public Accounts of Canada, tabled annually in Parliament. Under the leadership of my colleague, the Minister of National Defense, the government will continue to examine ways to better meet the government's commitments to provide openness and transparency to Canadians on government expenditures related to travel by the Government General on Canadian Armed Forces aircraft.

In closing, we would like to assure the Committee and all Parliamentarians that the Government takes seriously its responsibility for proper stewardship of public funds. We support all measures to add

further structure and rigour to our practices to promote good value and stand the test of scrutiny of all Canadians.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, we would like to thank once again the members of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates for the diligence and commitment undertaken in its work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Joly', is positioned above the typed name.

The Honourable Mélanie Joly, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs