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Joint Chairs

Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell

Mrs. Susan Kadis

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• (1640)

[English]

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.)): I apologize for the delay. Welcome, everyone.

I believe members have been notified of the content, which is the estimates for 2005-06. I believe we have a brief presentation by Mr. Finsten.

Mr. Finsten, please begin.

Mr. Hugh Finsten (Associate Parliamentary Librarian, Library of Parliament): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am the associate parliamentary librarian. Currently the position of parliamentary librarian is vacant. Richard Paré retired last week, so the position is vacant, and I understand a competition is under way to fill the position.

I will introduce the other managers from the library. Here with me today are Monique Boutin, director of finance for the library; Lynn Brodie, director of information and documentation resource service; and Dianne Brydon, director of parliamentary public programs. We also have our director of human resources, Roland Bonnaventure; Pierre-Vincent Galipeau, the chief of our library information technology office; Alain Guimont, director of corporate planning; and Guylaine Rondeau, former executive assistant to the parliamentary librarian.

The library's total budget for 2005-06 is \$32,105,000. This is an increase of \$1.7 million from 2004-05, or 5.5%. It includes 3.9% in non-discretionary expenditures and 1.6% in discretionary expenditures.

A breakdown of the budget includes \$25.9 million that goes to salaries. So of the total budget of \$32 million, 81% is for salaries. That includes the employee benefit plan, which represents \$4.6 million. Goods and services are 11% of the total, representing \$3.5 million. I've separated library collections out of that, which are 5% of the total, at \$1.6 million; and our information technology budget is 3%, or \$1.1 million of that total.

As I indicated, the increase for 2005-06 is \$1.7 million. We have our non-discretionary expenditures. The largest part of that is \$850,000, which represents salary increases. These are the agreements that were previously signed—salary increases for our support staff, unrepresented staff, guides, students, library technicians, executives, and order-in-council appointments. They represent the largest chunk of the non-discretionary expenditures.

The rest of it involves the provision of tenant and accommodation services, representing \$200,000. The supply of stationery was originally handled by the House and the Senate. We have taken it over, and have a \$179,000 increase in our budget as a result. This is basically a reallocation within the parliamentary envelope, because it doesn't increase Parliament's overall budget.

We also have \$40,000 in additional resources for the environment program on the Hill, and \$43,000 for the transfer of salary funds for one of our librarians. There is a return of funds allocated for library renovations of \$135,000, so that does not increase the budget. That was taken away from the increase.

On discretionary expenditures, some \$309,000 was for communications for the library. This is new. A couple of clerical and general services staff members were added. That represents the two staff at \$100,000, which includes a new section for our central inquiry section and our web-based and electronic-related activities and products. Finally, under the modern comptrollership program, we have our awards and recognition program, and there was an increase of \$79,000 in that regard.

That's a quick overview of our budget increase and total amounts. I'll leave it for any questions committee members may have, Madam Chair.

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): Thank you very much.

Before we proceed with questions from members, I'm sure that you see the letters from Speakers regarding the parliamentary poet laureate. There are also briefing notes on this, as well as the actual notes on the main estimates, and excerpts from part II of the main estimates documentation.

Do you have any questions?

Yes, Mr. Vellacott.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): We all have to get to votes fairly quickly. I have one question in respect to the poet laureate scenario.

I think that the poetry and the work of these people in serving our country is a good thing. I have a bit of an objection, though, when some of these bills are sold to us in the House of Commons, that this is not going to cost us any money and it's a volunteer position. When this type of language is used, and it's passed in the House, all of a sudden it begins to take on a life of its own. It feels like you've been duped and deceived, I guess, in respect to the bill that is there now.

It's not a big sum. It's now going to be a stipend of \$37,000, with possibly \$23,000 for travel.

As a committee member, I'm somewhat bothered by the fact that we innocently pass some of these things and are sold on certain language in the House, and then all of a sudden, as I said, it begins to grow and snowball on its own. I would entertain discussion, if others want to comment in respect to that.

Are we going to put some caps on this at some point? It was initially intended to be a volunteer position. I think that if we're walking into this, we need to do it with our eyes wide open. We need to fess up that it's not a volunteer position.

I have a suspicion that this is going to get away from us over time. It may well grow to a more elaborate scenario, with multiple staff employed and that type of thing. I would be curious in terms of what others surmise the direction of the bill to be.

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): Apparently the bill regarding the poet laureate was part and parcel of 2001. That was the direction at the time.

Are there any other comments on that?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: That's correct. That was in respect to it's being perceived to be mostly a volunteer position.

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): Yes, I believe that was predominantly the understanding at that time.

Yes, Mr. Lapointe.

[Translation]

Senator Jean Lapointe (Saurel, Lib.): I don't sit in the House of commons and I don't know how this was presented, but I have seen what Mr. Bowering, the first parliament poet, has done. I have seen on Internet the incredible work that he and his assistant have done and the figures shown here do not bother me a bit. I have a suggestion for the future: shouldn't we have a second poet? I think this is absolutely necessary when you see the work these people have accomplished with the young Canadians, be they francophones or anglophones. I think the idea of alternating— an anglophone for two years and then a francophone for two years— is completely stupid. We should examine the possibility of having an anglophone poet and a francophone poet in this position. It is much more important than you would think. I was impressed by the work done by the first poet and if his successors show as much initiative and accomplishment, then the salary we give them is ridiculous.

•(1645)

[English]

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): Okay. Apparently, having two simultaneously would require a bill or an act, Senator.

Are there any other comments or questions?

Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Yes. I wonder if I could get a clarification, Madam Chair.

My colleague was saying that it would be an additional \$37,000. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Well, \$37,000 would be the total stipend.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Plus \$23,000 for travel and living expenses. Is that correct? That's not what I read here. What are the exact numbers?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: The \$25,000, plus \$12,000, is \$37,000.

Hon. Raymond Simard: What was there prior to that?

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: It was a \$12,000 stipend.

Senator Jean Lapointe: It was about \$12,000 or \$13,000.

Hon. Raymond Simard: I only wanted clarification.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I believe that it was initially \$12,000. We're asking for \$25,000 more for a stipend.

Ms. Monique Boutin (Director, Finance and Material Management Division, Library of Parliament): Originally, the total amount was \$22,000. There was \$12,000 in a stipend and \$10,000 for expenditures, such as travel from Ottawa to whatever place, and a few little things like that.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Is the increase that we're asking for from \$12,000 to \$25,000, or is it to \$37,000?

[Translation]

Can somebody answer my question?

Ms. Monique Boutin: The increase Mr. Paré mentioned in his letter was aimed at meeting some more immediate needs. We agree that the Library of Parliament is only a haven for the poet, because he is the parliamentary poet, but we are wondering what the parliamentarians wish to do. Do they wish, for example, to set up a poetry program? The bill seems to contemplate a more limited position, that is a parliamentary position. Should activities be added to that? That's what we are wondering at the moment.

[English]

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): Permit me, if I can, to clarify. The additional money is for administrative support for the poet laureate.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Yes, administrative support. That's the way I understood it. The additional \$25,000 is for administrative support. Correct?

A voice: Yes.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Then for the poet laureate himself or herself, there would be an increase from...?

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): From \$10,000 to \$13,000.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: That's the travel aspect, right?

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): Yes. So there's nothing else that—

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: No, let me understand again. It says an additional \$25,000. So we have \$25,000 plus \$12,000, which equals \$37,000. Is that correct?

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): Yes.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: In terms of stipend and how she dishes that out or how she puts that out—

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): No, it has to be specifically for expenses for travel, etc.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: No, you're wrong there.

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): She's not getting paid directly.

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell (New Brunswick, Lib.)): No. It says for travel and living.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: You are looking at the second point in the third paragraph, where it says:

In addition, the Library of Parliament is seeking authorization to increase the allowance for domestic and international travel and living expenses from \$10 K to \$13 K due to the increase in travel costs....

Okay, so you're saying the increase in travel is only going up from \$10,000 to \$13,000?

Hon. Raymond Simard: That's right.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: But the stipend goes up from—

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): I will explain this administrative support, if I may. It's just secretarial support, office support, and so on.

• (1650)

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): It's not a salary.

Mr. Hugh Finsten: The letter from Monsieur Paré indicated in the second-last paragraph that the amount of the annual stipend and of other expenditures “be reviewed at the end of the current Poet Laureate's mandate”. That was the recommendation with regard to the stipend and any other expenditures.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: The total sum of whatever you choose to call it, the \$25,000 increase adding to the \$12,000 is \$37,000 now—you can dump it all into one category. Is that correct, Marilyn?

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): It depends on what is used. The poet may not need that much administrative and logistical support.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Is this on a receipt basis?

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): Of course.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Well, no, it doesn't say that at all. In fairness, it doesn't say anything about a receipt basis. It's just saying it's for that. So do they just assign it? Do they say “I want to pay so-and-so to do my e-mail administration and so on”? It's not very clear.

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): If we have a motion today, I think that should be put in.

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): We should clarify it with a motion, absolutely.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Who was the one who made the request here again? I guess it was the Speakers.

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): Yes, the two Speakers.

It would be in order to have a motion here, wouldn't it?

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): Yes, it would be in order to have a motion, and I would encourage that. It would clarify what it is used for.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Yes, because this doesn't make a claim... whether it's just a salary that's assigned or whether it is automatic, then, for that person, or whether it is on a receipts basis....

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): It should be specific. We should specify that, absolutely.

Do we have a motion, perhaps, Senator Lapointe?

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): For these two amounts.

[Translation]

Hon. Raymond Simard: This is no problem.

We gotta go with it.

Senator Jean Lapointe: I move the estimates be approved.

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): With the document dealing with the votes and the expenditures?

Senator Jean Lapointe: Yes, yes.

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): Could we present a motion including these elements?

Senator Jean Lapointe: I don't know.

Do you want me to present a motion to that effect?

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): Yes, including the amount of the votes.

[English]

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): We have to do a motion to adjourn.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Madam Chair, I would suggest we come back for another ten minutes after the vote. Can we do that?

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): I actually can't. I'm speaking on something in the House.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Could we have Marilyn chair at that point?

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): We have a simple motion. If someone doesn't agree with this, that we would increase these amounts at least up to these two amounts.... But we insist that this be documented—

Hon. Raymond Simard: I will propose that we increase the international travel and living expenses from \$10,000 to \$13,000. Is that correct? That's what we're asking?

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): Yes.

Senator Jean Lapointe: I would also propose that we increase the additional funding for support for the poet laureate to a figure of up to \$25,000, but based on actual receipts. Is that correct?

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): Yes, and also that this will be reviewed at the end of the current poet laureate's term, which is the intent....

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): Are you satisfied, Senator?

Senator Jean Lapointe: Yes.

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): I will call the question.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): Is there a motion to adjourn? Mr. Simard moves the motion.

Thank you.

It is seconded by....

Senator Lapointe.

[*Translation*]

Senator Jean Lapointe: I should be the one asking for an adjournment.

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): Sorry. We need to go vote now. We just need a motion to adjourn.

A voice: We haven't included the main estimates.

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis) We should be approving the main estimates, yes. That was the purpose of today, and questions. We haven't really had much opportunity. It's up to you if you want to approve them or if you want to come back. They will be going automatically at the end of May if we don't.

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): We don't have to approve them here. It's just for our information.

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): Apparently it's okay. It's primarily for information only and we can suspend.

Hon. Raymond Simard: It will take ten minutes to vote. Will people still be here?

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): No, I don't think so. We're not going to have enough to make a vote. It's just for our—

Hon. Raymond Simard: Well, I'm not prepared to vote on the main estimates without going through this. Sorry.

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): Okay, absolutely, that's fine. So we'll suspend then.

Hon. Raymond Simard: I think we should take a few minutes and do it. Is there a rush?

Ms. Lynn Brodie (Director General, Information and Document Resource Service, Library of Parliament): We'll stay.

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): The adjournment is that there are not enough people.

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): You don't want to come back?

Okay. I have to speak in the House.

It should be no problem.

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): This is a crazy season, as everybody knows. It's like this everywhere.

The Joint Chair (Mrs. Susan Kadis): We have to go.

•(1655)

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): I think we should try to come together again, but we have the most important thing through—that is, the support for our poet laureate. That is through. That will pass. And we heard about the estimates.

Senator Jean Lapointe: Fine.

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): The senator says everything is fine.

We're sorry, but this is the way it is. You can go through every part of this building and you'll find the same chaos.

[*Translation*]

Madam, we have found a solution to better support your prestigious work. We thank you and wish you good luck.

Mrs. Pauline Michel (poète lauréate, Parliament of Canada): Thank you. I hope I will have the chance to explain exactly...

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): Thank you for being here; your contribution has been greatly appreciated.

[*English*]

Maybe Senator Lapointe could say it much more eloquently. I could read the poem, but I don't think this is the time to read poetry.

Senator Jean Lapointe: We're done? Okay.

[*Translation*]

I seldom have seen poems that were well translated, be it from English into French or the contrary. You cannot translate a poem.

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): The meeting is adjourned.

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