



CANADA

Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament

BILI • NUMBER 002 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, March 12, 2009

—
Co-Chairs

Mr. Peter Goldring

The Honourable Sharon Carstairs

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament

Thursday, March 12, 2009

• (1205)

[English]

The Joint Chair (Senator for Manitoba Sharon Carstairs): Good afternoon to colleagues from both the House and the Senate.

I'm Sharon Carstairs, a senator from Manitoba. I thank you for electing me the joint chair last week.

So that you know I wasn't absent without leave, I was conducting a parliamentary from Yemen back to Yemen in order to hopefully prevent his imprisonment or something worse, because in my other life I co-chair a committee on the human rights of parliamentarians. That is what I was up to. I will try not to be absent on other occasions.

Colleagues, I want you to be very much aware that this is a joint committee. As a joint committee we have to pay attention to the rules of both the House and the Senate.

Until late yesterday afternoon I did not have a mandate from the Senate to deal with anything other than the estimates. I did get that mandate last night, and now we have a broader perspective on what we can do. We have a quorum established at six members, and things have now been set in place.

I didn't want to waste a week of meetings, so I invited the chief librarian to come today to do only one thing, which is to give us a background piece. That is because I could not request anything else. I could not make a meeting request for anything other than that for today, because I must give you 48 hours' notice with respect to your rules.

That is what I've asked him to do today, but before we do that, we have a very important task. We must establish a steering committee.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): A point of order.

[English]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: The last time we met, we adjourned the meeting.

[English]

Last week we adjourned the meeting. We have to continue the meeting with the order we had.

[Translation]

I had made a motion and wanted it to be voted on. If people have comments, they can make them, but I want us to deal with my motion, because that is the point we had reached at the end of the last meeting.

Madam Chair, I point out to you—and the clerk can confirm this—that this committee has its own rules. It does not go by House rules, nor by Senate rules. It has its own rules. So we should follow the rules that the clerk will describe to us.

First, we have to deal with my motion. After that, we can continue with the agenda as proposed, which I agree with, and call the Parliamentary Librarian as the first witness.

[English]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): With the greatest respect, Mr. Plamondon, there are rules of the Senate and there are rules of the House. There are no specific rules for this committee that are in conflict with those rules.

The rules of the Senate are very clear. We cannot presume to move on events unless we have a mandate from the Senate of Canada. We did not get that mandate until last evening.

What I am proposing to do is to establish a steering committee. You have a motion before you. The steering committee would be composed of seven members, two from the Senate and five from the House. In total it would be three Conservatives, two Liberals, one Bloc, and one NDP. That would create a steering committee of seven. There would be a balance between the House and the Senate, but clearly there would also be a majority for opposition parliamentarians.

If we put that steering committee in place, I am suggesting that it meet before our next meeting and prepare a draft working plan. In that plan there will be three issues, because we have three things with which this committee must deal.

The first thing we must deal with is estimates, but we can postpone that for a period of time because they are not due to report until sometime in May. As well, clearly we have the issue that you, Mr. Plamondon, have raised, which is the issue of funding for the budget officer of the Library of Parliament. We also have the issue that has been put before us by the two Speakers, the issue of the functioning of the Library of Parliament with the budget officer as part of that Library of Parliament.

I think it is only appropriate that we have a steering committee meeting in order to put before you the best plan that we believe can effectively bring about the resolution of those three issues. I am asking today for a motion to establish the steering committee.

•(1210)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): So moved.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Seconded by the Honourable Carolyn Bennett.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Madam Chair, there is no conflict between what you have just said and what I have just said, but I would like you to consult the clerk.

I consulted Library counsel, and they told me very clearly that this committee should begin today by dealing with my motion. It is easy; it will not take a minute to vote. You are for or you are against, and it is done. That is how you should proceed.

I would like the clerk's opinion on the rules of this committee in this matter. This committee does not follow Senate rules; it follows its own rules. I would like you to ask the two clerks for their opinion.

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): The advice I am receiving from the clerk is that it does not have to be the first item of business today. My suggestion is that since we have a guest whom we have invited today, and this was cleared with the co-chair and the vice-chair, we begin now with the presentation by the chief librarian, who will present us with an overview of the work of the Library of Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Madam Chair, I am going to make a motion that the first item at this meeting be to discuss my motion. I have the right to do that. I move that we deal with my motion before hearing witnesses. It is in order for me to make that motion.

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Mr. Plamondon, the rules do not give you the absolute right to have it as the first item on the agenda. I am suggesting that since we have a guest here, the first item of our agenda is to deal with our guest.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: It is a motion; it is up to the committee to decide.

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): I see agreement.

I invite the chief librarian to begin to present.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: It is a motion; it is up to the committee to decide, it is not up to you to decide. A motion is a motion. You are not scaring me at all.

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Mr. Plamondon, I have ruled. We will begin to hear from the chief librarian.

Mr. Louis Plamondon: You have to respect the law. You have to respect the procedures. The procedure is that if I depose a motion, the committee—

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Mr. Plamondon, you asked for the opinion of the clerk. The clerk's opinion was that we did not have to deal with your motion first on the agenda. So we are not dealing with it first on the agenda; we are going to hear from the chief librarian.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: When are we going to discuss my motion?

[*English*]

When will you dispose of my motion?

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): We will call your motion at the end of this meeting today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: At the end of the meeting today?

You should have said so right away. I can accept that.

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Yes.

I invite the chief librarian to present an overview of the operations of the Library of Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Mr. William R. Young (Parliamentary Librarian, Library of Parliament): Madam Chair, honourable senators and members, thank you for inviting me here to provide you with an overview of the work of the Library of Parliament, our plans for the future and some of our current priorities.

The Library's unique *raison d'être* is to provide information to Parliament. We work hard each day to be your preferred and trusted source of independent, accurate and non-partisan information and knowledge.

We offer research, analysis, information and documentation services to help you fulfill your roles as legislators and representatives.

We also provide information products and services, such as guided tours, the Teachers Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy, and our call centre, that help you make Parliament accessible to the public.

•(1215)

[*English*]

Our annual budget is roughly \$40 million, 80% of which is dedicated to the salaries of the 400 highly trained researchers, librarians, and other information specialists who directly support the work you do.

Copies of our independently audited financial statements are here for your reference and will be distributed later.

As Parliamentary Librarian, I'm accountable for managing the library and all of its various services. I report to the Speakers of the Senate and the House of Commons, who in turn may rely on this committee for advice and recommendations regarding the direction and control of the organization.

The library was established at the time of Confederation, and over the past 140 years its operations have evolved significantly to meet the changing needs and expectations of parliamentarians. The traditional library functions of collecting, cataloguing, and conserving have been supplemented by research services and public programs.

Three years ago, shortly after I began as Parliamentary Librarian, the library set out a plan for institutional renewal, with three priorities to help us become a more modern, efficient, transparent, and effective knowledge organization. The first priority was modernizing our knowledge management capacity, the second was strengthening our management support capacity, and the third was putting in place a new Parliamentary Budget Officer function.

Behind this broad-based renewal initiative remains a desire to respond to your demand for more analysis, synthesis, and interpretation in more flexible and customized formats. But we also recognize that delivering enhanced services to parliamentarians requires rebuilding the library's neglected administrative infrastructure and management culture. We are determined to demonstrate the greater accountability and transparency expected of public organizations today and to model best practices in managing people, resources, and relationships with our clients.

So how have we done? Over the past year, we've increased our ability to manage and share knowledge. We have completed the consolidation of our corporate infrastructure and have enhanced corporate support to managers and staff, the foundation on which we offer services to parliamentarians.

We know that systematic consultations with parliamentarians are essential if we're going to provide you with the right information in the right format at the right time. This is why we launched our client consultation program last year, with an independent audit carried out by Harris/Decima, a perception audit surveying clients about what they are looking for from library products and services. Copies of that research summary are here for you today as well.

To remain open to innovation and to improve services to Parliament, it is important that we develop networks with our colleagues around the world. This past summer, from August 6 to 8, I hosted a conference called, "Legislative Libraries: Partners in Democracy", which brought legislative librarians and heads of research services from over 30 countries together with our parliamentary clients, including several members of this committee who attended, to examine issues of mutual concern.

The themes we introduced in August were further developed at a conference in October, organized by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, along with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments. Working in partnership with the IPU and the ASGP and extending this dialogue in the broader parliamentary context affords a unique opportunity for parliamentarians, secretaries general, and

staff from parliamentary libraries and research services to collectively debate and explore shared challenges.

● (1220)

At a time when events are moving at lightning speed, clients need access to timely information, not only on the issues with which Parliament is currently seized, but also on those that might take centre stage in upcoming debates.

This past year, the library restructured its research services to create a new reference and strategic analysis division. This new division will undertake forward-looking issue monitoring that will deliver specific information to parliamentarians when they need it. The Canada-U.S. relations compendium that was produced and distributed to parliamentarians prior to President Obama's visit last month is one example of the types of products and services that this division can produce and that parliamentarians can expect to see more of in the future.

The perception audit showed that parliamentarians want more frequent learning opportunities on everything from public policy issues to how to answer constituents' questions. They are also seeking different vehicles for learning, including via podcast or pre-recorded seminars.

Last year we partnered with the House of Commons and offered seminars to new parliamentarians and parliamentary staff following the recent election. In working with the new strategic analysis unit, we are setting out a program of relevant and timely learning events in concert with our issue monitoring.

Our vision for a virtual library is taking shape. We are finalizing an overall digital strategy. We are finalizing also a partnership with Library and Archives Canada to digitize the debates of both chambers that are currently unavailable in electronic form.

As part of the virtual library, we're developing a parliamentary newsroom, an innovation that will make it easier for you and your staff to get the current events information you need electronically, including enhanced alerts that provide full-text access to news stories via your BlackBerrys. The newsroom will supplement traditional publications, such as *Quorum*, with other customizable products that provide access to current research, news, and emerging issues. We will be piloting our supporting software internally over the spring and summer and expect to launch the newsroom to parliamentarians in September 2009.

Let me quickly touch on three critical issues that you should be aware of as members of this committee: the realignment of our research services; the rebooting of our IT capacity; and the implementation of the Parliamentary Budget Officer functions.

First I'll deal with the realignment of research services.

As you may know, the library does analytical work for over 48 parliamentary committees and subcommittees and plays an advisory role to more than 12 parliamentary associations and other interparliamentary groups. We respond to thousands of individual requests from members and senators, from looking up data and finding articles to explaining programs and legislation and developing legislative proposals for private members bills.

We have currently restructured the research services to meet the management challenges of a medium-sized organization and to cope with the impact of the retiring boomer generation.

Given the modest level of new resources allocated in the 2009-10 main estimates, we have implemented this restructuring largely through internal reallocation of existing resources. We remain committed to sustaining service levels for now, but with an eye for the future we are developing for this committee's consideration an action plan to deal with short-term pressures and ensure the sustainability of research services in the medium to long term, including more adequate support for analysts and succession planning.

The second critical issue is the rebooting of our IT capacity.

It's no surprise to you all that technology has brought a world of resources to your desktops and has revolutionized the way you use information and altered your expectations about service delivery.

• (1225)

Today, serving you effectively at the Library of Parliament means providing you with accurate, relevant information through fast, secure, and reliable Internet-based applications. The reality, however, is that the library's current IM and IT architecture is outdated, inefficient, and inadequate to this task. It prevents us from responding to an increasingly technology-savvy Parliament, wastes employees' valuable time, and limits our ability to digitize historical volumes before they become degraded beyond repair. If we are going to maximize the use of technology to conduct our business, our renewal agenda requires investment over the next few years.

We are reviewing our plans to identify our most critical requirements and are hoping, again, to fund some advancement in reallocation of existing resources.

Let me turn now to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the PBO. The library's role in planning and implementing this new function has always been guided by the law and by our ethos of providing independent analysis and non-partisan advice to Parliament and to parliamentarians. A plain reading of the relevant statutory provisions within the Parliament of Canada Act shows that the PBO is an officer of the library and is subject to the control and management of the librarian and not a stand-alone office. Of course, it is always open to lawmakers to reconsider this role or the status of the PBO, to rethink his responsibilities, and, in light of this thought, to amend the Parliament of Canada Act.

To this end I have written the Speakers and suggested that a panel of distinguished former parliamentarians be appointed to consider such changes and offer recommendations for your consideration. I believe the Speakers have referred my letter to this committee. Should Parliament exercise its prerogative to amend the act, I will stand ready to contribute in any way I can to achieving the most

effective outcome. Meanwhile, the library is striving to carry out the intent of the legislation regarding the PBO as it is presently written.

My focus as librarian is on integrating the overall resources available, including those for the PBO, to achieve the maximum support to parliamentarians. Indeed I believe that by clearly understanding and implementing the mandate assigned to this new officer, the library is better positioned than ever to provide parliamentarians with the independent, objective, and comprehensive information that good decision-making requires.

In closing, let me say that your insights are essential in helping the library meet the needs of Parliament effectively, not simply in the case of the PBO but with regard to all the services we provide.

I look forward to your support as we continue to plan and implement services in support of a 21st century Parliament.

[*Translation*]

I cannot finish without paying tribute to my colleagues and to the staff. It is a privilege for me to work with these devoted, professional, non-partisan and, let it be said, highly intelligent people. They certainly keep me on my toes.

• (1230)

[*English*]

I will also be leaving behind a briefing book that will help you to delve a little deeper into questions and issues that may be of particular interest to you.

Thank you again for your invitation to appear today.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Thank you, Mr. Young, for your presentation.

Colleagues, Mr. Young's remarks today were not available in both official languages. However, they are presently in translation, and as soon as they are ready, they will be distributed to all of you.

The first question is from the Honourable Mauril Bélanger.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you, Madam Joint Chair. Can you tell me how much time I have?

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): The House of Commons rules would say seven minutes; Senate rules would say whenever there was somebody else who wanted to ask a question. So start to ask questions and we'll see how many there are.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I like the rules of the Senate.

[*Translation*]

Some Hon. Members: Ha, ha, ha!

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Nevertheless, I will limit the number of my questions. Madam Joint Chair, the first thing I would like to discuss is this.

[English]

I've moved the motion that was before us on the steering committee—it's been adopted—and I would hope we would be in a position fairly shortly to have it struck and to engage in the development of a work plan along the lines of what you've defined, that is, the issues that are before us: the estimates, of course, that we will be delving into, but the budgetary process with the budget officer, and also the mandate and the relationship of that. That's fine.

[Translation]

I would like us to start this task quite quickly and to discuss the committee's procedure with regard to the time allotted to each person who asks questions. We can ask the steering committee to make a suggestion in that regard.

[English]

I'm not good at sticking my head in the sand, nor at putting it on a chopping block, so I'm going to try to proceed in a careful manner, to establish a baseline of information from which we can all then try to come to grips with the issues before us. Let's not kid ourselves, there are some issues that we as a committee have been asked to offer advice to the Speakers about.

[Translation]

Mr. Young, there are two or three matters of interest that could help us in our future deliberations.

First, what is the process for establishing the budget of the Library and the budget of the officer we are discussing, the budget officer? What is the budget process in these two cases?

Internally, what is the process for setting priorities? I imagine that, at some point, there are more requests than resources. That is quite a normal situation.

How does the Library set the order of those priorities? The same question applies both to the Library and to the budget officer.

[English]

Is there a code, and if so, how was it established? Would you share it with us? If not, what is the procedure used to establish how individual demands that are presented to either the budget officer or to the research capacity of the library, other than the budget officer, are responded to, mechanically, that is?

If I put in a request, for instance—and I have not yet with the budget officer, but I have frequently with the research component—I expect the response to come to me and then I'll dispose of it. What procedures are in place for the budget office and how have they been set? These are the three areas, with the time and perhaps in response to other questions, that I'd like to explore so that this information baseline can be useful, as I said, in subsequent discussions that we're bound to have.

Thank you.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): William.

Mr. William R. Young: The first question was with regard to the budget process. The second question was with regard to how the priorities are established. The third question was, how are individual demands of parliamentarians responded to? Is that correct?

• (1235)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Yes.

Mr. William R. Young: I'll start with number two first, because the priorities actually have an impact on the budget process and some of the decision-making there.

Normally what happens is we have a retreat—we had one last spring, we've had one not that long ago—that looks at what we have accomplished during the year. This is the executive committee of the Library of Parliament, so that is the director general of corporate services, the assistant parliamentary librarian, the head of IDRS—the library functions, Information and Document Resource Service—me, the director of finance, and the director general of learning and access services. We go through what we have accomplished or what we expect to have accomplished by the end of the year and what we expect to be our priorities for the following year.

Once those priorities are established, we then look at funding issues. The managers are given a management letter, a performance agreement is signed shortly after the beginning of the year incorporating these priorities, and they're responsible for meeting those priorities by the end of the subsequent year.

The budget process flows from that exercise, and each senior manager is expected to prepare business cases for existing and new initiatives, which go before the executive committee. Those business cases are looked at and analyzed. Then we have a series of meetings. I have one-on-ones with the individuals, and then we have a series of meetings with the executive committee, where we put together a budget basically prepared, aggregated by the director general of corporate services and the director of finance at the library.

Once that estimate submission is prepared sometime in the fall, I go to a meeting with the Speaker of the House of the Commons and the Speaker of the Senate, accompanied by, usually, the director of finance and the assistant parliamentary librarian, where we present the business cases and the summary budget and estimate submission for their consideration. This has sometimes involved some to-ing and fro-ing. Finally, the Speakers will agree on what the library's budget for the subsequent fiscal year should be. They sign off. That is transmitted to Treasury Board.

That, I hope, answers questions one and two.

How are individual demands responded to? Well, across the library we have what we call the central inquiry service, which we're encouraging members of Parliament to use. It depends on whether the demands come from a committee, in which case they're transmitted directly to the analysts that support that committee, or whether they come as a request, for example, for policy work that could be used in the preparation of a private member's bill. In this case, hopefully they would go to the central inquiry service, which serves as an intake point. Then they're transmitted through to the managers and to the appropriate analyst or subject matter specialist who will undertake that work.

Requests for the Parliamentary Budget Officer, I believe, go directly to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, so essentially they are not tracked in the same way. When the requests from members come in, they go into a tracking system to ensure the request is responded to in an appropriate and timely way. With the Parliamentary Budget Officer, those requests don't go through that tracking system. I am not aware of how those are handled.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Fine. I'm sure we'll have occasion to ask the budget officer how he handles those, but I want to go back to the

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Mr. Bélanger—

• (1240)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I'm done? *C'est beau.*

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): —I think we'll move to Mr. Plamondon and put you on a second list.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Welcome, Mr. Young. Please convey our congratulations and thanks to your entire team. They do a remarkable job for members of Parliament, and for senators too, I am sure.

Mr. Young, something is bothering me. On February 12, 2008, before the Senate's finance committee, you said that the budget officer would have a budget of \$2.7 million. He had received \$1.8 million for the part of the year that remained after he was appointed. On February 13, 2008, you confirmed the amount once more before the Standing Committee on Finance. When you presented your submissions for the main estimates for 2008-2009, you said that the budget officer's budget would be \$2.7 million. Now, at the end of 2008, when you presented your 2009-2010 budget, you put the amount allocated to the budget officer at \$1.8 million; that is, the same amount that he had received for part of a year, given that he had been appointed part way through a year. The difference is 32%.

Why was a decision like that made? Was it you who decided to set the budget at \$1.8 million, or did you receive any directives along those lines from Treasury Board, from the Minister of Finance, or from another department?

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Go ahead, Mr. Young.

Mr. William R. Young: Can I give you a little bit of history on this one?

When the Parliamentary Budget Officer function was conceived of, and shortly after the passage of the amendments to the Parliament of Canada Act in response to the accountability bill, I received a letter from Treasury Board, or there was a communication from Treasury Board, saying that there was a notional amount established for this particular function. That amount was not authorized. It was put in the fiscal framework as a possibility, the way it was, I believe, for all the other positions created at that point in time.

When we started to plan and to implement this function, I believe, even though there was \$2.5 million at that point allocated, we asked for \$400,000. The second year, I believe, it was \$1.8 million, as you pointed out. And that, as I say, was authorized at that time by the

submission I made on estimates through the process I described earlier to Mr. Bélanger.

As I said, we moved forward with an authorized amount through the budget process of the library, and it was submitted to Treasury Board.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Judging by your introduction, it looks like putting the budget officer under the authority of the Parliamentary Librarian disrupted a number of things and was not altogether to your liking.

You say that you are prepared to comply with the mandate because that is what the legislation requires, but, at the same time, perhaps you would prefer different legislation. In fact, truth be told, I feel that you would like the budget officer to be like an ethics commissioner and for his budget not to be the Library's responsibility.

Basically, the dialogue between you, as the man in charge, and him, as budget officer, is extremely difficult. You have hired—feel free to confirm this—a firm of consultants to establish a dialogue between you. That means that things are not going very well between you and him. The very public role that the budget officer has played, holding news conferences and making announcements, really disturbs you. Perhaps you feel that money that you have allocated to him has gone, not directly to serve senators and members of Parliament, but much more to public information.

Am I wrong in my analysis?

• (1245)

Mr. William R. Young: Let me give you some history again.

Mr. Louis Plamondon: I like history.

[*English*]

Mr. William R. Young: When the Federal Accountability Act was being prepared and the policy work was being done, I pointed out to the officials in charge that I felt that the position of Parliamentary Budget Officer within the library would be a natural complement to the work we already were doing, because I felt that the analysis as proposed in the act was something that the library partly was already doing—things such as costing private members' proposals, costing issues that would be before Parliament, costing legislation—and that this provided an opportunity for us to actually do this job better than before.

Far from not wanting the Parliamentary Budget Officer in the library, I worked very, very hard for probably close to a year and a half, from the very conception of the office, from the time that the legislation was introduced, to make this work. I went before the Senate national finance committee. I proposed certain amendments to the bill that I thought would improve the ability of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to do his job. For example, the whole provision with regard to free and timely information was inserted as a result of a proposal I made before that committee. I believe Senator Stratton was there at the time.

So I actually welcomed the function. I welcomed the ability that the position, that function, would provide parliamentarians to do their jobs better. It was something that I strongly believed was an important function that Parliament hadn't had access to before. I brought in a former deputy secretary to the cabinet, a former deputy secretary to Treasury Board, to ensure that we had access to the best possible advice. So—

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: You are always talking about the past. What is the situation now?

[English]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Mr. Plamondon, your time is finished, but I will let the chief librarian complete his answer.

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Okay, continue. Excuse me.

Mr. William R. Young: In terms of the current operations of the library and its relationship with the Parliamentary Budget Officer, I have not met with him since I believe it was December. I have issued invitations. I invited him to every management meeting that has been held, until he sent me a note saying he did not want to come. I have kept the door open. The door is still open.

In my view, with the establishment of any new function like this one, there are going to be bumps in the road. We're just encountering some bumps in the road. The relationship I have with Mr. Page has always been cordial. I think what you're dealing with here are two different views, potentially, of what that function should be. That was the reason I wrote a letter to the speakers requesting them to ask you folks to study this issue.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Thank you, Mr. Young.

Mr. Braid.

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Young, for your attendance today, and for your participation and your presentation.

As the member of Parliament for Kitchener—Waterloo, the home of leading international high-tech companies such as RIM and Open Text, and a community described by many people as the knowledge capital of Canada, I was very pleased to hear about your plans for a virtual library.

Could you expand a little bit on where those plans are at, what your vision looks like, and what some of the steps along the way will be?

• (1250)

Mr. William R. Young: If you go onto the parliamentary website, you'll see a section called “virtual library” that is virtually unpopulated. What I'm trying to do is create an integrated structure that will move the library into a position such that we do have a virtual library. I have a digital strategy under preparation with regard to how we acquire and manage digital collections. I have a digitization initiative under way, which is looking at how we're going to provide access to the debates and ultimately to committee

proceedings, sessional papers, and the whole range of parliamentary documents that are currently not available digitally.

The other part of it is the new division I've established, which is planning on using Web 2.0 technologies so that we can look at an issue, have a sense of where the expertise exists in the library on that issue, pull it all together, and include things like webcasts or podcasts from distinguished visitors. It will initially be made available internally so that we can respond very quickly to a request, although eventually it will be made available to members of Parliament. You may be able to access that information sometime in the future and be able to pull together information about issues that are just coming up, as opposed to issues on which we provide information to you as a result of your requests.

A lot of it is conceptual. I'm very fortunate that I have an IT director who came to the library from JDS Uniphase. I'm trying to keep him; he keeps getting other job offers from other areas. However, a lot of it is increasing the synergies or interactions between parts of the library that may not have worked very well together and focusing them on functioning in a digital manner in a way that allows the best possible information and analysis to be put in place and made accessible to everyone.

Mr. Peter Braid: Through you, Madam Chair, I have a particular interest in any future plans with respect to digitizing historical archives and items of historical value so that all Canadians can benefit from access through the Internet.

Mr. William R. Young: That's the debates project, which I have been negotiating with Library and Archives Canada. We have our own little project that you might be interested in. As you may not know, Hansard didn't start in the House of Commons until the mid-1870s. Before that, debates were reported on by the press.

What we're doing started in 1967 and fell into disuse. We've been recreating the debates of the House of Commons for those years when there were no debates or official documents, and I have a couple of volumes ready. Newspaper articles were collected in scrapbooks. We've hired editors and we're putting together a Hansard—obviously an unofficial Hansard, but a Hansard. If you come, I'll show you the scrapbooks. We're trying to do both the print and the digital piece as our contribution to preserving that historical record.

For the Senate, by the way, we are translating the debates, which were only published in English, into French. We have several volumes of those documents. They will be ready in the next few months as well.

• (1255)

Mr. Peter Braid: I will change tack a little bit, Mr. Young. With respect to the budget formulation and approval process, is that process any different for the Library of Parliament from what it is for any other government department?

Mr. William R. Young: I would say it's probably unique.

Mr. Peter Braid: It is unique?

Mr. William R. Young: Well, it is in that it goes to the Speakers. The House of Commons has the Board of Internal Economy. The Senate has the equivalent Standing Committee on Internal Economy. They normally study the estimates before they go through the process. Parliament, the legislative branch of government, does not go through the same process overall as government departments.

One of the things I've been hoping is that this committee would become much more involved in looking at our estimates as we go through this process. I think it would be hugely useful to me, and to the library, if this committee were to take an active interest in the estimates at the preparation stage.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Thank you, Mr. Braid.

Monsieur Laforest.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Young, last May, before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, you said that it was important to establish the position of Parliamentary Budget Officer in order to provide Parliament with new ways to require the government to justify its spending. You decided to budget \$1.8 million in the first year and \$2.7 million in each of the following years. I imagine that those amounts reflected your idea of the mandate that the Parliamentary Budget Officer was supposed to have.

Today, we find out that you want to reduce the budget by 30%. But we parliamentarians have seen an increase in the requests made since last May. We can easily establish a link between that and the serious economic crisis we are going through at the moment. As we are in a recession, requests made to the Parliamentary Budget Officer have gone up significantly and are taking up even more of the allocation you set up last May. The number of requests has gone up, so the budget should be higher than forecast. Instead, you are reducing it by 30%. That makes no sense to me.

I have a second question for you. Have any of your budgeted amounts for the year just ending not been spent, money possibly set aside for travel, conferences or other discretionary expenses? If so, how much? Could you not have reassigned those amounts to the Parliamentary Budget Officer's budget? There are a lot of requests there, and a significant need.

[*English*]

Mr. William R. Young: What I can say is that there's been more demand on library services across the board. The whole organization has had to live within its means, given the economic times and the amount of money we were given. It's been the same for both the Senate and the House of Commons. The library's position is no different. We've all had to scale back in our plans. We've all had to look at what our core activities are, and at how those core activities can be funded. It has been, and is, a difficult exercise looking at the whole process of internal reallocation.

As for amounts not used, I don't have those exact figures at this point in time. The fiscal year is not over. I will be in a far better position to talk to you about that once we have ended the fiscal year at the end of March.

I wouldn't be surprised at all if the Parliamentary Budget Officer has not spent the full allocation that he may have had.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Mr. Young, you say that you are not in a position to determine the various major expenses that you will have in the next budget given that you have to tighten your belt.

So why have you done so with the Parliamentary Budget Officer specifically? Why did not you not do so in advance for the other services of the Library? You cut this budget by 30% but you say, for the other areas, everything is pending. I do not understand.

[*English*]

Mr. William R. Young: There was no budget cut for the Parliamentary Budget Officer. He received the same increase as the rest of the library received. It was not reduced by 30%. There was what I'd call a notional allocation. There was no authorization for any amount of money.

I was asked several months ago, before the economic crisis took hold, to submit reference levels for the whole library. Believe me, the amount that was put in the fiscal framework for the whole library was far higher at that point in time, but we've all had to pull back; we've all had to live within our means, and we've all had to look realistically at the nature and level of the services we can provide with the amount of money we have available.

My senior managers are meeting to do precisely this, to identify what the core activities are, and what do we absolutely have to maintain for you to get the kinds of services you require.

Quite frankly, the Parliamentary Budget Officer was not treated any differently from any other service head in the Library of Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Could you send us the other figures I asked for? I would specifically like to know if there is money unspent in the various areas and services.

[*English*]

Mr. William R. Young: After year end, we will.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: I would like to get them, please.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Thank you, Monsieur Laforest.

If I could beg the indulgence of the committee, I want to put a very little question.

Mr. Young, what was your increase for next year? What was the increase for the budget officer?

Mr. William R. Young: My total percentage increase was 1.5%, or \$615,000.

Of that increase, \$270,000 was for non-discretionary items, collective agreements, legal fees, etc., and \$335,000 went for direct support to committees and parliamentarians—basically for new analysts for the research branch.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer, I believe, received a net \$10,000, which was the same 0.08% that the rest of the library got.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Thank you.

Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Thank you very much.

You actually started down the road I was going to travel, which was to ask for a little more detail about what the funding allocation actually amounts to. All I really know at this time is what's in the main estimates, that there's \$35,649,000 for program expenditures and \$4.6 million for employee benefits plans.

You've told us there are 400 information specialists. Can you tell us, for example, how many information requests come from members of Parliament generally?

How many people do you have employed who are dedicated to assistance to committees?

What is the personnel complement for the Parliamentary Budget Officer?

Could you help to fill in some of those details for me?

Mr. William R. Young: I'll give you what I have. Some of it we may have to send to you later on. I can give you the projected or the actual amounts for 2008-09.

For parliamentary research services, there are 159 FTEs.

Information and resource services, the traditional library function, have 88 FTEs.

Learning and access services—that is, public outreach, seminar programs, client relations, and publications—have 36 FTEs.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has 9 FTEs.

Corporate services have 35 FTEs.

And information technology has 5 FTEs.

In terms of major spending in our budget for the current fiscal year, salaries and benefits are about \$26.75 million.

Would you rather I just send you a sheet, or would you like this on the record now? I can provide it to you. It may be in some of the material that we're going to be distributing later on as well.

• (1305)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I guess I'm partly trying to understand the relationship between the expenditures and the products produced, if I can put it that way, in terms of inquiries and so on.

Mr. William R. Young: I don't have that information with me. I have budgetary information, but I don't have the final.... You have to remember as well that last year was pretty exceptional, with elections and the fact that Parliament wasn't sitting for a very long period of

time. Rather than mislead you, or not give you accurate information, I'd prefer to be able to send you that.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I'm content to let the chair decide whether or not to impose that obligation on you. I think in these circumstances, I'll defer any further time I have until the discussion goes a little further.

Thank you.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Thank you, Mr. Woodworth.

As I indicated, this was just to give us an overview today. We will have a number of meetings in which we'll go through the detailed estimates of the library, and I assume we'll have all of that information at that particular point in time.

I'm now going to turn to Ms. Hughes.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Thank you.

First of all, I'd like to thank you for being here to discuss this with us. I think it's really important that we get this dealt with as quickly as possible.

I'd like to start by saying that Canadians are in the middle of an enormous economic crisis. The PBO has provided excellent advice to Parliament and Canadians. I understand that the PBO position was actually put in place to make sure that we had accountability, that it was open, transparent, and independent. I think that's the word we need to look at—"independent".

Basically, the position is no different from the parliamentary budget officers who are in place across the world. They are independent, and I think that's the important part we need to remember.

Do you actually agree that the PBO's position has an important legislative function? And do you take issue with the content of any of Mr. Page's reports at all, or is your concern more with process over substance?

Mr. William R. Young: Well, to begin with, the Library of Parliament is independent of the executive branch of government. It is probably about as independent as you can get, in the sense that unlike a lot of officers of Parliament, its boundaries are not as circumscribed. A lot of the legislation setting officers of Parliament has been there to put them in a box and say what they can or can't do. The independence of the library is the independence of the legislative branch of government from the executive, so there's no interference from the executive in the functioning of the Library of Parliament, nor, by extension, in the functioning of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. I would like to make that very clear.

As for the work that was performed, I have not interfered with nor seen any of those reports before they were published. The Parliamentary Budget Officer, in that sense, has been as independent from me as he could be.

By the way, I should tell the committee, that is precisely the way the rest of the library works as well. There's no oversight or scrutiny of the content of any material you would get or request from an analyst in the Library of Parliament. It is a matter between you and the analyst. The publications are not vetted by anyone in the administration of the Library of Parliament, any more than Mr. Page's have been. In that sense, the library is independent, and the analysts are free to provide independent advice to parliamentarians.

Have I answered your question?

•(1310)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Yes. It's just that I do have some concerns. I'm not sure, but I'm assuming from what I've gathered here that you would like to vet that work first.

Mr. William R. Young: No! I do not want to vet it. It is not my job to vet it.

My job is to administer and manage the Library of Parliament, not to get involved with individual papers or projects—believe me, not at all. I'm not the expert on renewable energy. Why would I vet a report on renewable energy? I'm not the expert on the Afghan war. Why would I want to vet a report on the Afghan war?

No, please.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Has anyone in your office spoken with anyone in the Prime Minister's Office or with the Department of Finance regarding the role of the Parliamentary Budget Officer?

Mr. William R. Young: No.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: No?

Mr. William R. Young: No.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Is it just that there is a dispute over the resources and the reporting? I'm trying to get some sense as to—

Mr. William R. Young: There may be issues that need to be resolved. They will become clear as this committee's work moves forward. I'm not going to prejudge your consideration or finding. There are different views of how Parliament could best be served, and I would be happy to explain mine. You need to have a....

Excuse me, I'm used to being an analyst. I think the chair knows this. I'm used to sitting up at the end of the table. I did that for 20 years, advising people on how to proceed. I don't mean to be directive. I think the committee should decide how you want to handle this issue. I'd be very happy to collaborate with you and provide you with any information you require as you move forward. On some of this stuff, I don't want to prejudice the findings by giving you my views now, if you understand.

As I said, there are different views of how Parliament needs to be served and what Parliament needs in terms of information. Quite frankly, this committee, as representatives of parliamentarians from all parties in both chambers, needs to decide how you feel Parliament should be served and what you require. I'm here to help you, not make decisions for you.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Are you in agreement that the PBO actually does play an important role with regard to the legislative function?

Mr. William R. Young: I believe that in terms of assisting parliamentarians to hold the executive to account, the PBO function is one that is very valuable.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Thank you.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Thank you.

Colleagues, we have about 15 minutes left. We want to deal with Mr. Plamondon's motion. I also have a couple of small motions that I have to deal with. Mr. Plamondon wants a very short question, as I assume Mr. Braid does.

Let's make them very short, colleagues.

Mr. Plamondon.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Last year, the budget officer's budget was \$1.8 million for nine months, was it not? He was appointed in May?

Mr. William R. Young: Yes, for the financial year.

Mr. Louis Plamondon: His budget is going to be the same, \$1.8 million, for 12 months this year. Is that correct?

•(1315)

Mr. William R. Young: Yes, for the financial year.

Mr. Louis Plamondon: So he is going to have a budget of \$1.8 million for 12 months. But he had a budget of \$1.8 million for nine months.

Mr. William R. Young: It was for 12 months too.

Mr. Louis Plamondon: But he was appointed in May.

I asked you a question earlier, but you did not reply.

Have you hired a private consultant to help with your relationship with the budget officer?

Mr. William R. Young: No. Let me explain.

[English]

Allan Darling, who helped me set up the office, has been retained in essence to help work out a series of protocols between Mr. Page and Sonia L'Heureux, who is the assistant parliamentary librarian, to ensure the appropriate exchange of information and routing of requests so that members of Parliament get appropriate service from either and both in a way that will satisfy their needs. That is what that was about.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Thank you, Mr. Young.

Mr. Braid.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Continuing on the budget formulation conversation and the scenario whereby there's a notional amount indicated through the budget formulation process, and then I presume through the natural give and take and discussions that go on, at the end of the day, if the final, approved amount is different, it strikes me that this would not be an unusual outcome.

Could you comment on that?

Mr. William R. Young: It's not an unusual outcome at all.

Mr. Peter Braid: Mr. Young, I suspect you've been a public servant for many years.

Mr. William R. Young: I've worked at the Library of Parliament since 1987, with two absences of several years.

Mr. Peter Braid: In your experience, have there been other examples where that same scenario has occurred through the budget formulation process, where there's a notional amount indicated and then if the final confirmed amount is different from the—

Mr. William R. Young: Yes, that's true.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Thank you, Mr. Braid.

Colleagues, we're going to distribute to you a series of three motions: Mr. Plamondon's motion, Mr. Mauril Bélanger's motion, and one that the clerk has asked me to put before you with respect to the tabling of documents.

Colleagues, I received a request from the Parliamentary Budget Officer to provide him with a copy of the Speakers' letter. I didn't think I was authorized to do that until that had been tabled with this committee. So I am asking for your agreement to table the following things today: a letter signed by the Speaker of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Commons, dated February 25, 2009; a letter signed by the Parliamentary Librarian, dated February 20, 2009; a proposed witness list for a study on the mandate of the Parliamentary Budget Officer as presented to the committee by Senator Stratton at a meeting held on March 5, 2009; a letter signed by the Parliamentary Budget Officer dated March 9, 2009; and background on the budget of the Parliamentary Budget Officer as sent to the committee members on March 12, 2009.

Do I have your agreement, colleagues, to table those documents?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): The other motion is by the Honourable Mauril Bélanger:

That 48 hours' notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the Committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration; and that the notice of motion be filed with the Clerk of the Committee and distributed to members in both official languages.

(Motion agreed to)

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Last, but certainly not least, is the motion by Mr. Plamondon.

[Translation]

It reads as follows: That the Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament invite the Minister of Finance, the President of the Treasury Board, the Parliamentary Librarian and the Parliamentary Budget Officer to appear before it to discuss the decision to reduce funding for the Parliamentary Budget Officer by 30% as well as the impact of this reduction on the Parliamentary Budget Officer's ability to carry out his mandate appropriately, and that at least two meetings be set aside for these proceedings.

• (1320)

[English]

Mr. Plamondon, do you wish to speak to your motion?

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: I have already made my case. I am ready to move to a vote.

[English]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Are there any comments?

Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you. I regret I haven't been present at this committee previously, so I don't know what other evidence has been heard. The only evidence I heard today was that there has been no cut. So it seems passing strange to me that we would have a motion inviting anyone to give evidence on a cut when the evidence suggests today that there hasn't been a cut.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Mr. Bélanger.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Madam Joint Chair, I invite my colleague to consider withdrawing his motion. There are aspects of it with which I agree, but there are other aspects with which I do not altogether agree.

In my opinion, it would be helpful for our steering committee to look at the whole question and suggest a work plan for us. Perhaps that could include most of those people, perhaps not. Perhaps it would take even more than two meetings. I am not necessarily opposed to the content or the spirit of the motion. But, in the light of what I have heard today, for example, I am not necessarily ready to say that there was a reduction. If voting for this motion is in effect saying that there was a reduction—something that I am not ready to do—I am going to have to vote against it, in spite of the fact that I am not opposed to its intent.

So I would invite my colleague to consider withdrawing his motion and giving the steering committee time to prepare a work plan for us. If he does not want to do that, I will understand, and I will just vote against the motion.

[English]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Mr. Plamondon.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Madam Chair, I agree with Mr. Bélanger's proposal, if the committee agrees to refer the motion to the steering committee.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Agreed.

Mr. Louis Plamondon: As long as the steering committee looks at the matter.

[English]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Thank you, Mr. Plamondon.

Do we have the unanimous agreement of the committee that this be referred to the steering committee?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Let me assure all members of the steering committee that this is an issue that is critical to all of us. We want to know exactly what happened.

Monsieur Plamondon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: I am going to read you a letter and take advantage of the Parliamentary Librarian's presence to ask him about it.

The letter was sent to my leader and deals with a problem concerning the parliamentary guides. I will read it to you quickly. I cannot circulate it because it is in French only, even though it comes from Dawson College, an anglophone college.

It reads: "Dear Sir, ..."

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Monsieur Plamondon, if you would provide me with a copy of that, I will have it translated into both official languages and we will deal with it at the next meeting.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Yes, I will give it to you, but I would like the librarian to receive the message while he is here. The letter deals with the parliamentary guides. Students studying in Quebec and those studying in the rest of Canada are not treated the same. Something needs to be put right, according to this history professor, who has been a great proponent of student guides.

I will read the letter quickly and then we will circulate it to everyone for the next meeting. I am not asking for a decision to be made today, but I just wanted to make you aware of the situation.

Here it is:

Dear Sir, I am a professor of history at Dawson College, and I wanted to advise you of a problem that affects not only our students but also students in other Cégeps in the province.

Let us remember that, in Quebec, students do eleven years, then two years of Cégep, then three years of university. In English Canada, it is twelve years, plus three years of university.

Back to the letter:

I used to teach at university and I made a point of talking to my students about the parliamentary guide program as a summer job. This is a pivotal experience for students in social sciences or the humanities.

I was getting ready to bring up the matter this year when I found out that Cégep students may not apply. Only university students may do so. As I said to the people

in charge of the guided tours program, students in the second year of Cégep are at the same level as those in first year university. Having taught at the University of Ottawa, especially first-year students, I feel that I am in position to know.

I am also a former parliamentary guide myself, having worked there as a student in 1991. As such, I can assure you that a number of second-year Dawson College students, and surely those at the same level in other Cégeps, have the ability and the maturity to be parliamentary guides.

The current situation, that prevents them from applying, seems to me to be nothing short of discriminatory.

I would like you to think about this, about the equivalency, and about giving young people who want to be parliamentary guides a chance.

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Thank you, Mr. Plamondon.

I'm sure the chief librarian will take that under consideration. I will make note to make sure we all get an answer.

Mr. Woodworth has a quick intervention.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I have just a question of clarification. At the beginning of the meeting, Monsieur Bélanger and Ms. Bennett moved a motion regarding the establishment of the steering committee. I didn't hear at that time any mention of the composition or the terms of reference of the committee, although I do have a draft that was put in front of me. I just want to make sure that the motion was to approve the committee in accordance with this draft.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): It was indeed, Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Braid, very quickly.

Mr. Peter Braid: Shouldn't we take the opportunity to identify the individual members of that steering committee?

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): No. The process will be that I've asked the clerk to get in touch with your whips if you are of a party that requires a representative on the steering committee, and we will take the recommendation of the whip for that representation.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you for that clarification.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.