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Thursday, March 26, 2009

—
Co-Chairs

Mr. Peter Goldring

The Honourable Sharon Carstairs

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• (1200)

[English]

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs (Manitoba)): Welcome.

We're going to begin on time. What you will soon learn is that the old school teacher never dies. The bell rings at 12 and we begin at 12.

We have two guests with us today. But before we move to the guests, there are a couple of things we need to do quickly.

First, your steering committee met in camera earlier this week. We had unanimous agreement on a number of things, including that the committee undertake a study on the Library of Parliament and the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and that senior officials from Treasury Board and Privy Council Office involved in the legislation be invited to appear before us. Also invited to our meeting next week would be members of the committee of former parliamentarians who oversaw or made suggestions with respect to the legislation, and the consultants who worked with the Library of Parliament to establish the office when it was set up. We do so in order to set the context for everyone, so that we will all be on the same page when we move on to deal with future issues, as soon as we come back in the new year.

The other thing we decided was that witnesses would be given ten minutes to make their presentations, and that during the questioning of witnesses, each one would be limited to five minutes, because this is a very large committee. Then we would move on, and you can go to a second round.

A very quick item is that we need to get a budget adopted before the end of the fiscal year, which, as you know, is next week. So would someone move that the proposed budget in the amount \$29,500 for the study on the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer be adopted?

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs) : Now, without any further ado, let us move to our two witnesses who are before us today.

We have, as an individual—because that's what he is now—a former senior special advisor to the Library of Parliament and a distinguished public servant in his own right, Allan Darling. From the Treasury Board Secretariat, we have Mr. Joe Wild, executive director of strategic policy, who I understand was very much

engaged in the legislation and eventually in the way in which the budget officer was established.

We begin with Mr. Darling. I'd ask that you limit your remarks to ten minutes. Then we will move to Mr. Wild. Finally, we will open it up to questions for both of them, if that is agreed.

Mr. Darling.

Mr. Allan Darling (Former Senior Special Advisor to the Library of Parliament, As an Individual): Thank you, Senator Carstairs and Mr. Goldring, for your invitation to brief the committee on my understanding of the accountability framework and the role of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

I believe you have just received a copy of my CV, and a summary description of the terms of reference prepared by the library when I was engaged in October 2006 has been circulated to you. I also received from the library a copy of the documents binder that has been circulated to all members. I was directly involved in the preparation of some of those key background documents and would certainly be prepared to comment or respond to questions from members about them.

I will focus my opening remarks on two key issues that I believe the committee should study and on my understanding of the statutory provisions that frame those issues. The first issue is the management accountability of the Parliamentary Budget Officer within the library, and the second is the autonomy of the officer with respect to the content of his work.

With respect to the issue of the accountability framework, the act in section 79.1 states that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is “an officer of the Library of Parliament”. The position created is that of an officer, not of an office. Section 79.5 authorizes the Parliamentary Budget Officer to exercise specific authorities in his own name to fulfill his mandated duties. It specifically does not authorize the direct hiring of permanent staff.

Subsection 79.5(4) makes clear that the exercise of those authorities is subject to section 74, which vests the direction and control of the library in the Speakers, and subsection 75(2), which establishes that the Parliamentary Librarian has the rank of deputy head of a department of the Government of Canada and, subject to the direction and control of the Speakers, has the control and management of the library.

My understanding of the Financial Administration Act, which is referenced in the legal opinion in your binder from Gowling Lafleur Henderson... I'm citing the bottom of page 2: Under the Financial Administration Act, responsibilities for that act are vested in a deputy head, "...which for the Library is the Parliamentary Librarian. Any other employee of a department or agency can only exercise authorities under the FAA as specifically delegated to them."

I would note in parenthesis that the Governor in Council appoints many persons to positions within the organizational structure of a department—for example, associate deputy ministers. However, I am not aware that any such appointed individual has claimed the authority to function outside the management framework of the Financial Administration Act.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has made public a legal opinion from McCarthy Tétrault, which asserts:

...the librarian is, in fact, obliged to ensure that his overall control and management of the library facilitates the ability of the PBO to fulfill his mandate.

I am quoting page 6 of that opinion.

The issue for the committee to examine is the extent to which the Librarian is required to compromise his legal authority as deputy head to another position on the sole basis that the Governor in Council appointed an individual to that position. Against that legal framework, I would like to outline to the committee the assumptions under which I developed the job description and the organizational framework for the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

The first assumption was that the statute created a focused capacity within the library to carry out the specific mandates enumerated in section 79.2, paragraphs (a) to (d). It is interesting to note that, unlike the case with other positions that are by statute created as officers of Parliament, the Librarian controls the selection process. In addition, the executive brief prepared by Ray & Berndtson for all candidates approached to consider the position stated on page 3: "For purposes of management accountability, the Officer is subordinate to the Parliamentary Librarian and the two Speakers."

The brief also noted that the officer was responsible directly for the implementation of the mandate set out in the statute.

A second assumption concerns the specific mandates to assist in the review of the estimates, which is in paragraph (c) of section 79.2, and to "estimate the financial cost of any proposal that relates to a matter over which Parliament has jurisdiction"—paragraph 79.2(d).

• (1205)

These functions have always been carried out on the request of committees or members by the library, specifically by the research branch. One of the specific accountabilities enumerated in the job description of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the third accountability, is to establish an effective working relationship with PIRS, the branch of the library that provides research and reference services for Parliament, so as to "ensure the integration of the work of the PBO in the overall support of the library to the effective operation of parliamentary committees".

My working hypothesis was that the Parliamentary Budget Officer represented an enhanced capacity within the library to improve its

support to parliamentarians, who are the clients and decide what to request from the resources of the library. Within the legal framework outlined above, the Librarian has the sole accountability for the stewardship and allocation of all resources appropriated by Parliament and consequently must be able to retain ultimate authority over those resources.

I will speak for a moment to the mandated autonomy of the office. While I believe the authority of the PBO to manage resources is legally dependent on delegated authority from the deputy head, I interpreted the mandate assigned to the officer in section 79.2 to fall within his authority to execute.

There is a distinction, however, between the mandate in paragraph (a) of section 79.2, which confirms a proactive role to provide independent analysis to the Senate and House of Commons "about the state of the nation's finances, the estimates of the government and trends in the national economy", and the other three areas of the mandate, which depend upon a request from a parliamentarian or a committee for the officer to undertake the work. As I noted earlier, I think the statute anticipates, in paragraph 79.5(c), that the Parliamentary Budget Officer would draw upon existing resources within the library to assist him to respond to requests under those sections. I would also observe that the word "independent" appears in the statute only with respect to the analysis mandated in paragraph 79.2(a).

I think there are two areas in which this committee could provide guidance related to the execution of the mandate. First, it was always anticipated that demands from parliamentarians, especially for costing of proposals, would exceed resources available. In fact, the Librarian is constantly realigning resources within his organization to maximize the support he provides to parliamentarians. The Parliamentary Budget Officer job description, in point 5 in his accountabilities, anticipated such a scenario by assigning responsibility to the budget officer to ensure the creation, in consultation with the Speakers of the Senate and House of Commons and the Librarian of Parliament, of criteria and guidelines to manage requests for expert analysis or cost estimates from the clientele. Your observations on managing with scarce resources could provide helpful guidance to both the Librarian and the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Second, I think this committee could provide an early sounding board on whether the style of reporting that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has adopted is useful to parliamentarians. The Parliamentary Budget Officer published on his website, on August 15, a proposed operating model. Observations on the acceptability of the approach outlined could provide useful guidance as the work of the Parliamentary Budget Officer evolves.

In summary, in fulfilling my mandate to elaborate a role and organization structure to support the Parliamentary Budget Officer, I anticipated that the officer would enrich the capacity of the library to fulfill its traditional role to support parliamentarians in carrying out their responsibilities. I foresaw the Parliamentary Budget Officer as an interpreter of economic and financial proposals advanced by the government, an innovator in identification of systems and technology improvements that would enhance the presentation of information on fiscal and budgetary proposals of the government, and an educator enriching the understanding and insights of parliamentarians.

I believe establishment of the officer to be a significant step to strengthen the accountability role of parliamentarians, and I hope your deliberations will help clarify the operations of the officer and ensure his continuing contributions to Parliament's deliberations.

• (1210)

Thank you for your attention. I am certainly prepared to respond to comments or questions.

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

Mr. Wild, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Joe Wild (Executive Director, Strategic Policy, Treasury Board Secretariat): *Bonne après-midi.*

Thank you for your invitation to appear before the Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament to discuss the creation of the office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. If it pleases the committee, I would like to give you a brief overview of how that office was created under the Federal Accountability Act.

[English]

As honourable members and senators know, the Federal Accountability Act was omnibus legislation that amended 46 existing statutes and created two new ones. Included in this package were amendments to the Parliament of Canada Act to create the new office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, or PBO. These amendments came into force when the Federal Accountability Act received royal assent in December 2006. The Library of Parliament then began work to establish the office, including running the search process to identify candidates for the position of PBO.

Under the statutory provisions, the PBO is appointed by the Governor in Council from a list of names provided by a committee that is formed and led by the Parliamentary Librarian. The first PBO, Kevin Page, was appointed through this process in March 2008.

As stated in the legislation, the PBO is an officer of the Library of Parliament, with a specific mandate to provide the Senate and House of Commons with independent analysis on the state of the nation's finances, the estimates of the government, and trends in the national economy. This mandate also includes undertaking research at the request of certain parliamentary committees as well as responding to requests from parliamentarians for costing of proposals that may be considered by Parliament.

As I just noted, the legislation expressly states that the research and analysis provided to parliamentarians by the PBO is to be independent. The Library of Parliament reports through the Parliamentary Librarian to the Speakers of the House and Senate, and its direction and management are completely independent from the executive, meaning the government.

This means that the Treasury Board Secretariat and other central agencies play no role in determining how the library and its offices, including the PBO, operate or perform their mandates. The estimates for the library are prepared by the Parliamentary Librarian and approved by the Speakers of the House and Senate. They are then

transmitted to the President of the Treasury Board, who tables them in Parliament, and nothing more.

• (1215)

[Translation]

As honourable Members and Senators can see, the PBO and the Library of Parliament as a whole are fully independent from the Government in their operation and funding. However, one area where TBS and other departments continue to interact with the PBO is the provision of data.

[English]

Specific provisions in the Parliament of Canada Act grant the PBO access to financial and economic data that is in the possession of departments and agencies and that is needed for the PBO to perform its statutory mandate. When providing such data, departments follow statutory limits placed on the disclosure of cabinet confidences, personal information, and information subject to specific prohibitions.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): If I could interrupt you, Mr. Wild, we're having some technical difficulties.

Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Joe Wild: Additional statutory safeguards place an obligation on the PBO not to disclose certain kinds of information unless necessary for the discharge of the mandate. This includes information the government has obtained in confidence from a foreign government or a provincial government, information that would be injurious to federal-provincial affairs, information relating to trade secrets that would harm the economic position of the Government of Canada, and information that is commercial, confidential, or received from third parties.

I hope this provides the committee with some useful context and background as you begin your study of this important office. I look forward to any questions you may have.

Thank you.

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

We're going to begin our questioning with the Honourable Carolyn Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Thanks very much.

Last evening, at the finance committee of the House of Commons, the Parliamentary Budget Officer expressed concern that he was not getting the information he needed from the departments. He also expressed his concern that he had been referred to the public website in order to get his information. That website was still calling on the Senate to pass the budget bill, which doesn't seem to be timely information.

I am wondering if either Mr. Darling or Mr. Wild could tell us if there are sufficient provisions in the bill to ensure that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is given the cooperation and the data he requires to do his job.

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

Mr. Joe Wild: The statute is fairly clear that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is entitled to certain financial and economic data in a free and timely manner. There are specific exceptions to that, which are laid out in the statute, particularly around cabinet confidences and personal information. Then there are some confidentiality obligations on the Parliamentary Budget Officer for other types of information. Certainly, I think the government is responding within the parameters of the legislation to the requests it receives from the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Obviously we'll be hearing from the Parliamentary Budget Officer, but my concern is that, in these desperate economic times, some of the things the Parliamentary Budget Officer has been asked to report are whether or not indeed the money is getting out the door and how it's getting out the door. So are you at Treasury Board giving him that data he needs in order to reassure Canadians that the money is getting out the door in the way it was intended?

Mr. Joe Wild: I'm not aware of any particular current requests from the Parliamentary Budget Officer to the Treasury Board for specific economic or financial data.

Mr. Allan Darling: I could do a supplementary.

When I was developing the protocols and work on the organization in January of 2007, I did explore this very subject with senior officials at both the Treasury Board and the Department of Finance. What we discussed was that it would be helpful if the officer were to develop a protocol, between his office and those departments, that would establish the frameworks to allow him to seek the information quickly and rapidly. I don't think anything was followed up on that, but I think protocols of that sort would help facilitate that information coming quickly.

• (1220)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: You're not aware that any of those protocols have been set up right now?

Mr. Allan Darling: No, I do not believe any have.

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

Senator Stratton, do you have a follow-up?

Senator Terrance Stratton: Yes, I just have a point of clarification.

So it's the responsibility of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to develop the protocols for obtaining information from various departments. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Allan Darling: That's what I suggested, yes.

Senator Terrance Stratton: Thank you.

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

Mr. Malhi, followed by Mr. Plamondon.

Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.): In February 2008 you appeared before the House finance committee, which had undertaken a follow-up on the creation of the Parliamentary Budget Officer position. What did you tell the committee when you appeared before it, and what were your observations on the creation of the function of the Parliamentary Budget Officer position at that time?

Mr. Allan Darling: You've caught me off guard, because I didn't review my testimony at the committee at that time, but I would basically have outlined.... I think the committee's focus was on what the reason was for the delay of the appointment of the person to the position. So that was the main area of discussion, as well as the question about the appropriateness of the classification level of the position.

There was an exchange with respect to whether the mandate of the officer should be to provide their own projections of the state of the economy or whether their mandate should focus on explaining to parliamentarians the assumptions underlying the government's projections of the state of the economy so they would have a better understanding of how to interpret those.

I argued for the latter interpretation. Certain committee members felt quite strongly there should be an alternative projection prepared by that office, and I suspect that is what you're seeing today.

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

Mr. Plamondon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Last night, I reviewed some background material supplied by the Library of Parliament on the creation of the office of Parliamentary Budget Officer. According to these documents and others that I have read, everything seems to have been done to ensure that things run smoothly. However, after several months, the realization has dawned that the relations between the Parliamentary Librarian and the Parliamentary Budget Officer are strained. There are those who say that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is overstepping his mandate by pursuing initiatives not set out in his job description or primary mandate. Others maintain that the Parliamentary Budget Officer's mandate will not amount to much if the incumbent continues to encounter roadblocks in communicating his reports.

You were involved in drafting the job description for the position of Parliamentary Budget Office. A consulting firm was subsequently hired to do the head hunting and to provide an exact job description. In the job description, it is mentioned only once that the Parliamentary Budget Officer reports to the Parliamentary Librarian. However, the job description appears to give the incumbent considerable latitude and his relationship with the Parliamentary Librarian seems limited to something more superficial. In fact, he could operate independently.

In your opinion, is the PBO which you helped create and which is experiencing some growing pains moving in the right direction, or is there in fact a problem?

• (1225)

[*English*]

Mr. Allan Darling: I think that's a very fundamental question.

The office has not evolved as I expected it would, in the sense that I anticipated that it would follow much more closely the perspective of the role outlined in the document he received on the views of a committee of former parliamentarians. I would urge you all to review that document, because I think there is considerable wisdom in that, and it very much guided our future direction of how we should establish the office.

If I could just make a comment, the officer has to be in a partnership with the Librarian with respect to resources, because the Librarian has the legal accountability. The officer seems to believe he is not part of the library, but separate from the library. That is not my reading of the construct of the act. You, as the committee, may decide it should become separate, and that's certainly within your purview, but I think this tension between the Librarian and the officer reflects the fact that each has his own responsibilities. I don't think anybody has challenged the officer's responsibility for the execution of the mandate, but the Librarian has responsibility for the accountability of resources.

Those two responsibilities have to be bridged in some way, and it will take a dialogue between the two participants to bridge it. I'll be blunt and say that until the Parliamentary Budget Officer recognizes that he must work with the library and the Librarian, this tension will continue. Like a bad marriage, if the two parties don't talk, something is going to fail.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Mr. Plamondon, you have time for just a very quick supplementary question.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Nothing seems to be working. At our last meeting, for example, Mr. Young said that he had not spoken to Mr. Page since December. There has been no contact between the two. In fact, I think you were hired as a consultant to get the two parties to start communicating with each other.

Given your involvement in the creation of this position and your vision of how this office should work, if you had to make a recommendation to the minister or to the government, what would that recommendation be? Would you recommend that a position that operates independently from the Library be created, that Mr. Page be fired and simply that the position of Parliamentary Budget Officer be abolished?

[English]

Mr. Allan Darling: If I had one recommendation to make, I would say find a way to ensure this office will function, because I think it's very important.

It is unfortunate the incumbent has what I call an alternative vision. His vision is that he is like the Congressional Budget Office in the United States, an independent authority with its own right and resources to do as it wishes and to recommend what it wishes.

My vision of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, as I understood the legislation, was that it was an enrichment of the traditional capacity of the library to provide support and background explanations to parliamentarians, and not an independent advocate for a point of view. So I think that's what needs to be bridged.

This committee could recommend that the office be independent, which is entirely within your purview, but that's not my under-

standing. It may be the only solution to make it work, but that's not what I understand the statutory basis to be.

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

Mr. Braid, followed by Monsieur Bélanger.

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

Thank you very much to both of you, Mr. Wild and Mr. Darling, for your presentations and for helping us with the background to the creation and outset of the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

First, is the Parliamentary Budget Officer an officer of Parliament, or an officer of the Library of Parliament?

• (1230)

Mr. Allan Darling: He is an officer of the Library of Parliament. It's very clear in the statute.

Mr. Peter Braid: Okay. And what is the difference between the two? He's an officer of the Library of Parliament. How would you distinguish between that and someone who is an officer of Parliament?

Mr. Allan Darling: I'm not an expert in this area, but I think one of the key distinctions I would make, in my understanding of the statutes that create officers of Parliament, is that Parliament itself becomes involved in the appointment process. In this case, there was no role for Parliament in the selection and appointment process. It was embedded within the library and under the control of the Librarian, recognizing that the position being created was that of an employee of the Library of Parliament, with certain specific functions for the position set out in the statute.

Mr. Peter Braid: Very good.

In your mind, Mr. Darling, do you feel there is any ambiguity with respect to the reporting structure or relationship of the Parliamentary Budget Officer in the Parliament of Canada Act?

Mr. Allan Darling: I do not believe so, especially when you read it in conjunction with the Financial Administration Act.

Mr. Peter Braid: When you were working as an advisor as the office was being considered, did you consider other types of reporting relationships that may exist in other countries? And how did you come to the conclusion you did, thinking that this particular role was best suited within the Library of Parliament?

Mr. Allan Darling: As part of my background research, I investigated as many officers of parliamentary systems as I could identify—and there are very few in the world. There are probably only about a dozen, and most of them are created within congressional systems of government, where the executive and the legislative branches are very separate, and the office created is a servant of the legislative branch, full stop.

This office is an experiment within a Westminster-style of government, where the executive is part of the legislative branch. In that sense, you have to bear in mind the constitutional conventions governing the overall state of how governments in a Westminster system operate. I don't believe you can create a separate office for a budget that doesn't have to reflect the fact that there's still an executive embedded within that legislature. It's quite different.

Briefly, I didn't find any precedents for this in a Westminster-style system of government. There is a type of office in the United Kingdom called the scrutiny office, which is staffed by public servants on loan. Its main function is to try to improve the interpretation of data provided in expenditure proposals placed before the United Kingdom Parliament. I think there are 18 individuals in that office at the present time.

In answer to the other part of your question, I considered the constitutional framework, but I didn't consider whether there were any other options for the design of the office, because I was governed by what the statute provided. When I was engaged, that statute was in second reading before the Senate, and amendments, to the extent it was going to be amended, had already been tabled in the Senate and the House. So I was dealing with what Parliament would obviously approve. That constrained my terms of reference.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you.

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

Monsieur Bélanger, followed by Mr. Christopherson.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Because it is the only such office in the Westminster style, I think it behoves us to try to make it work.

Mr. Darling and Mr. Wild, I have four questions, and I'll pose them rapidly. I hope we'll have time.

In your opinion, could a source of the conflict—as you've identified that there is a conflict here—reside in the insistence, I suppose, by the executive to retain the authority to appoint the budgetary officer? Because the appointment was by Governor in Council, as opposed to from within the library itself. That's the first question.

Second, when I read the act, I sensed there was an inherent conflict in giving the budgetary officer the ability—and I don't deny there should be an ability—to direct the use of staff when required, yet the ultimate responsibility for the allocation of resources rests with the library. How could that be addressed?

You referred to the style of reporting, and then you encouraged members to read former parliamentarians' reflections on this matter. I would like you to elaborate on that. You said this was one of the areas that we, as a group, perhaps should consider.

Finally, Senator Stratton asked you this, and you said yes, that the responsibility of setting up protocols rests with the budgetary officer. I would have thought that establishment of protocols also requires agreement with the Department of Finance and Treasury Board officials, and Parliament, because it is the entity that this office serves. Would an agreed-upon protocol—agreed upon by the budgetary officer, the governmental institutions, and Parliament—be an avenue of solution?

Thank you.

• (1235)

Mr. Allan Darling: I'll deal with the last question first. Mr. Wild probably has views on that one as well.

I think it is incumbent on the officer to take the initiative to develop protocols. But I agree that protocols are two-way streets, and the other parties have to be part of the discussion.

I was going to add that I think it's within the authority of this particular committee, as advisors on the library, to be consulted, or even to state that you want to participate in or approve those.

I think a dialogue is what's needed, and that's what's been missing.

Mr. Joe Wild: On the protocol question, I would like to add that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has put a protocol on his website.

I'm not sure how they view the exact status of that protocol, but basically it was in furtherance of discussions with Treasury Board, the Department of Finance, and the Privy Council Office on having some form of understanding around how information should flow between the parties. It's focused on that.

It wouldn't deal with any of the issues around the relationship with the Library of Parliament or the relationship with parliamentarians. It's a protocol that looks at how the information sharing should work, laying out the process of how requests should be made, and what is meant by timely in terms of responding to those requests.

Discussions are continuing around making that relationship work. I don't want the committee to be left with the impression that there's a vacuum on the side of the government in having discussions with the Parliamentary Budget Officer around the process and timeliness of information flows. Those discussions are going on.

Mr. Allan Darling: Could I go back to your first question, which was whether there was a conflict inherent in the way the appointment process worked?

To my knowledge, no, there was not. Mr. Page was one of many candidates approached by the executive headhunters to consider the position. He agreed to participate in the interview phase. It was quite clear, in his mind—and he had the documents you have in your binder—that he was part of the library.

The style of appointment tended to underline, because of the key role it gave to the Parliamentary Librarian, that this was indeed within the library. I think it's only when he arrived that Mr. Page concluded he should set up what I would call an independent office.

He's not drawing on any of the other support systems, as far as I understand, within the normal mechanisms of the library to support parliamentarians. He is drawing upon the central corporate services, the finance services and personnel services, to support what he's doing, but he's not engaged in a dialogue to work out procedures and protocols.

Let me go to your second question, but I'll give you an example for the first.

Is there a potential for conflict in the allocation of staff? There could be. But at the moment, Mr. Page has not asked for any staff from the library. He has insisted on hiring only staff who report directly to him. And when I look at his mandate, for example, he is to assist you as parliamentarians in the review of the expenditure estimates of government. Those estimates take place in a very tight timeframe under parliamentary rules, and the entire resources of the research branch are utilized to assist all the committees who have to do that review.

If you have to start staffing a separate parliamentary budget office to duplicate that function, or, alternatively, to strip that capacity out of the research branch and assign it to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, you are designing an entirely different support system for Parliament from what is in existence today, and you ought to think seriously about the implications of doing that.

• (1240)

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Mr. Darling, I'm going to cut you off and move to Mr. Christopherson.

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

Thank you both for appearing today.

I have to tell you, at a time when the economy's going to hell in a handbasket and we're spending unforeseen billions of dollars and going into deficit, the fact that we're debating the person who is going to be providing us with analysis of what's going on economically is just plain nuts. Hopefully, we'll get this resolved quickly.

I was interested to hear, Mr. Darling, that you went as far as you could in referring to an independent office, given the legislative framework you were handed. I'd like to take you outside of that and just ask you, what would be the downside? I ask this because some of us are looking at this and saying the only way we're really going to resolve it is to have an independent officer of Parliament, and decide what the rules of engagement are, if you will, and then move forward. And rest of this is just not going to get cleared up.

I can make the argument for the upsides. What are the downsides, aside from the cost? There is an increased cost, I accept that—and that may be the biggest downside. But are there any other downsides we need to consider structurally, were we to go to that system, if you will, rather than this unravelled golf ball we have now?

Mr. Allan Darling: I think that is an entirely legitimate alternative for the committee to consider.

In terms of downsides, you would have to work through the mandate and how you want to set it up. But I think one of the upsides, quite clearly, if you created it as a separate office of Parliament and made the individual an officer of Parliament, would be that Parliament itself would then have a role in the process of appointment. And that would be a very fundamental change of the dynamic.

Is that an unreasonable option? I don't think so. It was not the statute I was asked to work with, so I didn't explore it.

Mr. David Christopherson: I understand. I appreciate that.

That's good. Thanks, Chair.

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

We're going to move into a second round, unless there is another individual who has not asked a question.

All right, Mr. Braid.

Mr. Peter Braid: Madam Chair, I'd like to pursue two lines of questioning, and I'll start with this.

Mr. Darling, you've identified that one of the needs is perhaps dialogue, and that there's an opportunity there. Do you have any specific suggestions or recommendations on how we can encourage or facilitate that constructive dialogue, which seems to be required between the two positions?

Mr. Allan Darling: I have one thought, but I don't know whether it's a solution. I think this committee could reinforce the authority of the two Speakers, which even the Parliamentary Budget Officer doesn't dispute. He alleges that he reports directly to them, and I'll set that question aside.

The two Speakers gave very clear direction to that officer, in separate letters to the Librarian, who is the legal head of the institution, as to what they expect that office to be doing. I think as a minimum an instruction to the Parliamentary Budget Officer to respect the direction received from the offices—i.e., the Speakers, who have legal authority over the institution—should be reinforced. At the moment, there is no dialogue.

I don't think there's a question of ill will on the part of either party. I've had chats with Mr. Page. I actually met with him in the fall to see whether I could start that process, but he never came back to me. He just doesn't want to deal with it, and I think he needs to be instructed to deal with it—unless you change the legislation.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you.

The second area of questioning is perhaps to either one or both of you, Mr. Darling or Mr. Wild. Could you walk me through what parameters there are that direct or define how and when information is released by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, either in the legislation or in guidelines that may exist or in protocols, whatever the case may be?

• (1245)

Mr. Allan Darling: That's a very good question, and it's one I did some reflecting on. I realized that until we had the individual in place it would be difficult to set out any protocols. But you have a point of view of the guidelines, set out by the officer in his operating model, which he posted on his website. One of his guidelines is that he will only appear as a witness and he will publish in advance on his website everything he does.

I have difficulty with that, for two reasons. The first is that the individual is presuming how he will relate to Parliament. Maybe Parliament would rather he appear not as a witness but as a briefer to the committee. I think Parliament should review how it wants its relationship with this individual to evolve.

My second difficulty with it is, as I pointed out in my remarks, that three of the four mandated areas are on request. It seems to me, as a matter of courtesy, that if I request something, I receive the report and I decide what use I wish to make of it, including doing nothing with it. I think that control must also be in the hands of parliamentarians.

I think there's a void here that needs to be reviewed, and that some steps need to be taken to clarify, because I think Mr. Page put a proposal out and I don't think you've had any discussion as to whether it's an acceptable proposal. I would urge you to examine it. That's one of the comments I made in my opening remarks.

I do think there should be a different regime from what's there now.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you very much.

Mr. Wild.

Mr. Joe Wild: Let me add to that from the government perspective. I don't think we view it as our role to be involved in how the PBO decides to report or the mechanisms the PBO decides to use to report. Those are issues that are very much between parliamentarians, the Librarian, the PBO, the Speakers, and this committee. The government doesn't have a view on what would be an appropriate mechanism.

Mr. Peter Braid: Mr. Darling, you described the scenario whereby information should be provided to the requester. Are you aware whether that process or approach has been followed by the Parliamentary Budget Officer in the past?

Mr. Allan Darling: I'm aware of two or three requests that were received by his office. I understand that in early days he sent a letter back to Senator Day, I believe, in response to a request.

The Afghanistan budget study was a request from an individual member of Parliament. He completed the study and made that member of Parliament aware that the study was ready, but I don't know whether it was the Parliamentary Budget Officer or the member who indicated a wish that it be made public. That may be something you could explore.

But I would have an observation, and I know this is how the officer was counselled by the library and senior officers. At the time that study was available, Parliament did not exist. You were in an election mode, and there are very strong protocols with respect to parliamentary procedures during an election period.

Mr. Peter Braid: Could you explain what those are?

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Sorry, but you've gone over your time.

I'm going to turn to Madam Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I would like to continue on that theme.

Within the culture of the library, it is at the discretion of the member or the person requesting a study when they get to release it. I have expressed concerns before that if the Parliamentary Budget Officer put every study he has completed on his website, that takes away the discretion of the member of Parliament to share it with some knowledgeable stakeholders, to then do a round table, and then release it at the time of their choosing.

In your original concept of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the three out of four parts of his job that were the "on request" parts—obviously, his mandate on forecasting is his prerogative—your understanding was that these would be returned to the member and the release would be at the member's discretion.

• (1250)

Mr. Allan Darling: My understanding was that the established procedures and protocols within the library to provide information and responses to requests of committees or members would apply equally and with the same concept to any work done by the officer.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Long before the Accountability Act and the Conservative platform that talked about a budget officer, the Library of Parliament committee struggled with the idea that we, as parliamentarians, weren't doing a good enough job at estimates. We thought that maybe if there were increased resources to the library, at every committee there might be the ability to annualize from estimates to performance reports, to estimates to performance reports.

Sometimes you have an analyst who has been there for a very long time—and I think some of you know that for me that was Bill Young, at the disability committee. He would whisper in your ear, saying "That's what they said last time", when the department was before you.

We felt that every committee should have that encyclopedic knowledge of the history, and the ability to really look at the estimates, particularly around sunset programs that aren't articulated but they're now gone.

So on the downside of making him totally independent, but on the upside of how he could be more useful to parliamentarians, do you have some concerns that unless he is embedded in the library that sharing of expertise as well as analysis will not be reflected in a better approach to estimates by each of the parliamentary committees?

Mr. Allan Darling: My short answer to your question is that I think you should look at how you can strengthen the overall staff support capacity to improve the review of estimates. Whether you embed it in an independent Parliamentary Budget Officer or leave it with the library and separate that function out—it could go either way.

Let me remind you that the review of the estimates, in committee stage, in the House, was only added to this bill on the suggestion of a former Clerk of the House, Robert Marleau. It was never part of the original construct that was tabled by the government.

Quite frankly, it was accepted by the government, but there weren't any consequential changes made because of that. For example, with that addition, you should have listed in this statute a reference to the parliamentary Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. It's missing. The budget that was set up, and it was a very notional budget before anybody started to think about how it would work, assumed that the focus would only be on the costing of requests, the costing of private members' bills, which was subsequently dropped, and preparing a report on the analysis of the economy.

The concept has evolved, and it will continue to evolve. I think we should be conscious of that.

Your suggestion of embedding a capacity within a parliamentary library or Parliamentary Budget Officer to provide Parliament with continuous review and analysis of expenditures of departments is a step forward. I think there are other areas that could be improved on, such as changing the format in which you appropriate money for estimates, but that's an entirely different discussion.

I think it's a positive idea, and it should be part of your thinking of how you want the support of parliamentarians and the review of the estimates to evolve.

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

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thank you, gentlemen, for taking time out of your very busy day to appear before us to share some thoughts with us.

As I listened to your presentation.... Let me bounce this off you. The office really commenced in 2008?

Mr. Allan Darling: The officer was appointed on March 25—yesterday—of 2008, by the Governor in Council. By the end of the summer he had recruited, I believe, about three or four additional staff.

•(1255)

Mr. Ray Boughen: And at the time of appointment, it seems to me that there wasn't a job description that really said what it is the officer is expected to do, when he is expected to do it, and to whom he reports—those basic kinds of things that people look at when they're looking at filling a need. Apparently the government of the day decided there was a need to have this person in place. He didn't exist until just lately.

I'm thinking that the function seems to be a totally accounting function. Is that right or wrong?

Mr. Allan Darling: It is not an accounting function. It's a policy analysis function.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Okay. It seemed to me, when we are talking about budgets and estimates, that it relates to numbers on paper, but there must be more to it than that.

Mr. Allan Darling: Just on your comment, indeed there was a job description. You have it in your binder. It was sent to the Privy Council Office on December 22, 2006. They finally classified it in July of 2007 and they classified it at a level—and this was subject to discussion in two other parliamentary committees, one in the Senate and one in the House—equivalent to an executive director, an EX-3 in the public service, one step below an assistant deputy minister.

It was our judgment that the level probably wouldn't attract good candidates, and we asked the recruiting firm to approach every person they could identify who would have appropriate qualifications, recognizing that the salary could be a barrier. The firm did that, and a number of individuals refused to be considered for the competition because the salary was too low. And in fact Mr. Page, when he participated in the competition, made clear that he would not accept the appointment unless he received a salary equivalent to the grade he then held in the public service, which was at an assistant deputy minister's salary level.

So there were some problems in recruitment related to the level of classification, in that qualified candidates screened themselves out at the salary that we could legally represent was available.

I think the accountabilities are there. I have just one further point. Before I left the office, I had prepared job descriptions for two direct reports to the office, one being for the position responsible for fiscal analysis, and the other for the position responsible for budgetary analysis. The officer made changes to those, and that's his right, but there was work done to help get that person operational as quickly as possible. He received those job descriptions upon his appointment.

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

Mr. Goldring is next, followed by Mr. Rickford.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC)): Thank you very much.

And thank you for appearing here today, gentlemen.

My question is to explore a little further your comments, Mr. Darling, on the differences between the congressional system and the Westminster system and whether there is possibly a difficulty in this mainly due to how the congressional United States system functions. It's a two-party system, and this is a multi-party system. Does that add extra complexities?

Was the method of reporting ever detailed in job descriptions or given some definition? It would sound to me as though some matters, such as simply putting information on a website and releasing information during possibly sensitive times such as writ periods, could be readily dealt with. Understandably, parliamentarians are still members of Parliament until the day of an election, so we still have duties to do during the writ period. That might be an additional complication.

The question is about the complexities of the congressional versus the Westminster model and the methodology of doing the reporting, which sounds as though it would either be in conflict with the government's main reporting or would be duplicating the effort of doing the reporting. My comment is that maybe it is a more explanatory commentary on the government's reporting that should have been the intention of this job description.

Could you comment on some of that, please, Mr. Darling?

Mr. Allan Darling: Certainly.

First of all, let me state quite clearly that in my opinion this is an officer whose purpose is to support all parliamentarians, and it is indifferent to party structures or the number of parties in the House. It can work in any model. It's there to provide information to all parliamentarians. I don't think that's an issue. I don't think it's an issue in the case of the congressional versus the Westminster system either.

On the reporting question, I think the question is how the output of the office becomes released. I've explained my views on that. I think there has to be an engagement with parliamentarians to discuss how they wish it to be released. That hasn't taken place yet. I have views, but I think more importantly you should be looking at options that you would like to put in place.

On the difference between a congressional and a Westminster system, let me say this. The United States' Congressional Budget Office was established in 1974. The reason it was established was that Congress has the authority to add tax and expenditure measures to legislation, and they discovered that they were out of control. They created that office to provide a framework to know what they were doing. That was its prime function. I'm told that today 90% of its work is related to the costing of individual either tax or expenditure proposals from members of Congress or the Senate, and the office's estimate has to be attached as part of one before such a proposal can go forward to the assemblies for consideration.

The office also has a mandate to make a ten-year forward projection of the state of the economy and its impact on the fiscal expenditures of government. Interestingly, Tim O'Neill, when he did a study for the Department of Finance in 2004, made a similar recommendation for some sort of office that would have that long-term outlook. That was never implemented, and I don't think ten years is a very helpful framework anyway.

South Korea set up an office in about 2003 modelled on the American one. The Philippines have had an office, again modelled on the American one, since about 1989. You find in the European community some variants on the model. There is an estimating capacity in the government of the Netherlands. It's an interesting model. First of all, everything they do they put on their website—I think that may have influenced Mr. Page—but they are mandated to provide a cost of the electoral platform of every party that is running for office in that country and post it.

I'm making these points only to say that you can define what you want an officer to do. It doesn't matter what the system of government is, but in terms of its fundamental operating, you have to respect the constitutional frameworks that bind the government and how it operates and respect the role that parliamentarians and Parliament have in giving assent to what is being proposed.

I don't know whether that helps, but that's my thought.

• (1300)

The Joint Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring): It does. Thank you.

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

Now we go to Mr. Rickford, followed by Senator Stratton.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Darling and Mr. Wild, for appearing today.

I have two separate questions. First to you, Mr. Darling, are a couple of quick questions for the record and for certainty.

My own reading of the consolidation of existing statutory provisions of the Parliament of Canada Act regarding the Library of Parliament makes it seem fairly clear. In terms of verticality, the Parliamentary Librarian has the rank of deputy head of the department and therefore controls the management of the library, to which the Parliamentary Budget Officer is required under this legislation to answer. Is that correct?

Mr. Allan Darling: That is the only source of resources that the Parliamentary Budget Officer can access.

Mr. Greg Rickford: As the legislation currently stands, to the extent that there are problems now, is it simply an issue of enforcement, as to the Parliamentary Budget Officer answering to the Parliamentary Librarian?

• (1305)

Mr. Allan Darling: I wouldn't use the word "enforcement". I think it's an issue of dialogue. I think that's what's missing.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Dialogue? Okay, fair enough.

I'll turn to you, Mr. Wild. To an earlier question by one of my colleagues asking whether provisions were sufficient for the Parliamentary Budget Officer to have adequate resources to do his job, your answer was that the legislation was "fairly clear". "Fairly clear" is what keeps lawyers outside of this committee in business for a very long time.

What is it about the legislation that's "fairly clear", but could also have a side to it that is not as clear as it needs to be?

Mr. Joe Wild: The prior question, as I understood it, was with respect to the information obligations that the government has to provide free and timely access to information, and the parameters of the legislation are clear about the nature of the information and the exceptions to that. The "fairly clear", if you want to read it, is around what's meant by the word "timely", and that's where there was discussion around the protocol. Your question seems to be alluding more to the issue of resources for the office. By that I take it you mean budgetary resources and whether there's sufficient funding available.

Again, I think the process of funding is quite clear, and the role of the government in that process is also clear. The way the estimates process works for the Library of Parliament is that the Parliamentary Librarian works with the Speakers to develop the proposal; the Speakers then provide to the President of the Treasury Board that set of estimates. The role of the government is then to table those estimates in Parliament for parliamentary scrutiny, and eventual adoption or amendment or whatever Parliament decides to do.

The government plays no role in determining what that amount of resources will be. It's ultimately an issue that is discussed between the Librarian, the PBO, the Speakers of the House, and ultimately Parliament, in the form of the estimates, once they're tabled.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Great. Thanks.

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

Before I turn to Mr. Stratton, can I ask a question with respect to the mandate? Mr. Darling, you raised it when you were talking about the election writ period.

As far as committees are concerned, we all know the Library of Parliament literally ceases and desists with respect to any activity for committees of Parliament once the writ has been dropped. Do you think that is an appropriate activity, and should it also apply to the Parliamentary Budget Officer?

Mr. Allan Darling: I think it's for Parliament to determine those procedures, and if you think it's appropriate, it should apply to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. I think there's good wisdom in not releasing documents during a campaign. You've got many recent historical examples of that.

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

Go ahead, Senator Stratton.

Senator Terrance Stratton: Welcome, gentlemen. It's a delight to have you here.

Senator Carstairs asked the question I was initially going to ask with respect to protocol during elections. Mr. Braid alluded to it. Am I correct in understanding, then, that there is a definitive protocol used by the bureaucracy when it comes to releasing information during elections?

Mr. Allan Darling: I'm not the expert here. You'd have to have another witness to explain it, but my understanding is that Parliament itself has established protocols to apply to tabling of documents, etc., during the period of an election. These apply to people like the Auditor General, for example. They apply to departments that normally have a statutory mandate to table an annual report by a certain date. All those things go into suspension. It doesn't mean they won't be tabled; they're just in suspension.

Senator Terrance Stratton: Thank you.

The second question is with respect to trying to resolve the issue based on the existing system. You had mentioned, Mr. Darling, that there should be a dialogue between the Parliamentary Budget Officer and Mr. Young. If we're going to solve this problem using the existing system, do you think that a dialogue is possible, or do you think the two individuals are at such odds that it's not possible? Do you think there is a method, or could you recommend a method, whereby we could suggest to the Parliamentary Budget Officer that it would serve Parliament best if they sat down and resolved their differences? You have already tried that, I understand, to no avail. How do we get there?

• (1310)

Mr. Allan Darling: I didn't try to resolve their differences. I was following the Speakers' letter to the Librarian. The Librarian issued a letter to the Parliamentary Budget Officer to establish certain working relationships, one of which was to work through protocols to share how requests for information from parliamentarians would be allocated to the officer or to the research branch, and to work out a procedure so that each knew what the other was doing and knew what resources could be drawn upon from the others, etc.

I arranged a meeting with Mr. Page. Initially I tried to have a joint meeting with Mr. Page and Sonia L'Heureux, the head of the research branch. He requested a separate meeting. I met with him separately. He did not follow up with any other meetings, although I requested them.

This is the silence Mr. Young has been dealing with. Do I think there's ill will between these two people? On a personal level, I do not. I think they are both very respectful individuals who respect each other's talents and abilities. I think the challenge is that Mr.

Page has a vision, and I don't think that vision is consistent with the framework that's been established.

He loves to play hockey. I think if this committee were to call him offside and tell him what the penalty box has to be like in order to get him back on the ice, it might help push to get that dialogue started.

Senator Terrance Stratton: That's a wonderful answer to my question. Thank you.

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

Go ahead, Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you, Madame Chair.

You didn't have time to respond to one of my four questions, Mr. Darling. Hopefully we'll give you some more time.

Mr. Wild, you said something at the start in response to another question. I'm not sure if I'm quoting you precisely here, but it was something to the effect that obviously the government, in responding to demands for information from the budget officer, is responding according to the requirements of the law. It was something to that effect. Do you recall saying that?

Mr. Joe Wild: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: What information allows you to say that? Do you know for sure that the requests for information to Treasury Board, to the finance department, and to any other department, for that matter, have been responded to according to the requirements of the law?

Mr. Joe Wild: I can speak specifically to Treasury Board.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: You were responding for Treasury Board. You're sure that for Treasury Board, all such requests have been responded to according to the requirements of the law.

Mr. Joe Wild: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

Mr. Darling, would you comment?

Mr. Allan Darling: You probably wanted me to comment on what I saw as the style of reporting. You'd made reference to the document in the binder reflecting the views of the former parliamentarians.

At the very last page, there's a section about pitfalls we should avoid. Members thought that the PBO should work within, and be seen to fit within, the library's established tradition of service to Parliament and parliamentarians.

That was their point of view. All my comments today are based on assuming that it is that point of view that should apply. In other words, expectations about how this office should function should be the same as for all the other services provided by the library, because the office is embedded within that institution.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: In your opinion, is that currently the case?

• (1315)

Mr. Allan Darling: In my opinion, the individual is not giving any notice.... He has created a silo, and he's operating on what he perceives to be, and what he set out in his operating model as, the appropriate way to provide information to Parliament in response to requests.

As I indicated, I think parliamentarians should assess whether that is indeed the type of model they wish to have. It's a point of view.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I want to go back to my very first question, which was on the appointment by the Governor in Council.

Mr. Allan Darling: I think your question was whether this was a potential source of conflict between the Librarian and the Parliamentary Budget Officer. You'd have to ask Mr. Page that question—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: It's my understanding that because of the way the law was presented and approved, the executive decided to keep that authority for itself.

Mr. Allan Darling: It is in the control of the executive according to the way I read the statute, yes, in the sense that the process for identification is managed by the Librarian, who makes a recommendation with three candidates to the government house leader. The Governor in Council has the choice to accept any one of the nominated persons—or none, in which case there's no direction as to whether it's referred back to start the process over or whether the Governor in Council could intervene to appoint their own person to the position. My understanding is that they could legally do that.

In this case, did the government participate in this? To the best of my knowledge, there was never at any time any communication about preferred candidates, either to the headhunters or to the Librarian.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: The final comment is about protocols applying to the library and to government departments during election periods. I have no difficulties with that, Madame Chair. I would hope it would also apply to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): We do not have any other names on our list, honourable colleagues, unless someone wants to ask a last-minute question.

Go ahead, Madame Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think the binder is extraordinarily important. I notice some media at the back of the room. I wonder if they would be allowed to read some of the background material that has been prepared.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Then I would suggest, Madame Bennett, that you move a motion that the binder become a public document of this committee and table it.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I so move.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): All right. Now it is on the record and it can be released to anyone who requests any documents contained therein.

With that, honourable colleagues, the meeting is adjourned.

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