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—
Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

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• (1100)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC)): I'll call the meeting to order.

Before we welcome our guests, let me say that I have had discussions with at least one member of each of the parties. We obviously anticipate bells ringing very shortly. What I will do at that point is ask for unanimous consent to sit for at least the first 20 minutes of the bells or so.

What I hope to accomplish by doing that is to allow for opening statements and then allow each party a round of questioning—maybe five minutes for each party. What would probably take place is that one or two of those rounds would occur before the vote. Then we would come back after the vote and carry on until either noon or at least until each party has had a chance to ask one round of questions. Then we would move to our second hour, which is with the Elections Canada officials.

I'm also going to suggest that we consider moving our committee business to Thursday, because we're going to be very tight on time, obviously, given that we're compressed as it is and that we will of course have a vote in there. I will suggest that at that time as well.

As long as there is no objection, we'll move on. When the bells ring, we will certainly ask for the unanimous consent to—

I see a number of hands.

Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would propose that we get a couple of minutes of committee business in. I know we are pressed for time, but I would like to at least table the government's position with respect to managing the way we deal with committee business on Thursday.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): I don't know whether anyone else has comments on that.

From my perspective, it was Mr. Christopherson and I, and I think others, who raised at the last meeting last week the view that we felt it might be best to see where we are after Thursday before making those determinations. Obviously, this is part of the agenda. We'll let members make the decision at that time. It seems that there isn't a unanimous feeling on the question, so we can have that discussion, I guess, when we get to that point.

What I'll do, then, is welcome our guests and get started, so that we can at least get through some of the statements prior to having to miss....

I'll welcome the Speaker. The Honourable Geoff Regan is here with us.

I'll let you start. You can introduce any others who are giving opening statements.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Speaker of the House of Commons): Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

Members of the committee, distinguished guests, as Speaker of the House of Commons, it's a pleasure to be back before this committee to present our main estimates for fiscal year 2017-18.

I'm equally pleased to present the main estimates for the Parliamentary Protective Service, or PPS, which maintains the physical security of the parliamentary precinct and the grounds of Parliament Hill and reports to me and the Speaker of the Senate on such matters.

• (1105)

[Translation]

Joining me at the table today are Marc Bosc, Acting Clerk; Daniel G. Paquette, Chief Financial Officer....

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Pardon me, Mr. Speaker.

I see that the bells are ringing now. I of course officially have to receive unanimous consent to carry on.

Do I have that consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): I'm sorry for the interruption. We'll let you have the floor.

[Translation]

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am also joined today by Mike O'Beirne, Superintendent and Acting Director of the Parliamentary Protective Service; as well as Robert Graham, Administration and Personnel Officer at the same service.

[English]

I'll begin this morning's presentation by highlighting key elements of the 2017-18 main estimates for the House of Commons, which total \$476 million and represent a 2.7% increase over the previous year.

The presentation of the main estimates for PPS will follow.

[Translation]

To help guide the first part of my presentation and facilitate our exchange, I have provided a handout that outlines each of the 14 line items included in the House of Commons' 2017-2018 Main Estimates.

I will address each of these in the order in which they appear, leaving, I hope, ample time for discussion.

As you will note, there are nine items included under the broad category of "Members, House Officers, and Committees, Associations and Exchanges". Further down, there are four items under "House Administration". Last, but not least, we have a final item related to "Employee Benefit Plans".

[English]

To begin, we have sought a 1.8% increase to the members' office budgets and House officers' budgets. Together, these represent a permanent increase of \$2.8 million, with the greatest proportion being allotted to the members' office budgets.

[Translation]

As you know, these budgets give members of Parliament and House officers the resources they need to carry out their parliamentary functions on behalf of Canadians. The adjustments were calculated based on the consumer price index as measured in September 2016. They were scheduled to take effect on April 1.

[English]

In addition, a 20% increase to the MOB supplements, which totals \$1.5 million, has also been sought. The supplement assists members who represent constituencies that are densely populated, geographically large, or remote in responding to the needs of the people they represent.

[Translation]

The electoral list, which we use to calculate the amount of the elector supplement, was revised and published by Elections Canada in February 2016. That occurred after the submission deadline for the main estimates in 2016-2017. Consequently, the revised list of electors required that an adjustment be applied to the supplement, resulting in a decrease of \$308,000 in 2017-2018 and in subsequent years.

[English]

Specifically, supplements recognize the challenges inherent in serving larger, more populated, or more remote constituencies, which members, I think, will understand. They help level the playing field to ensure that Canadians are well-served by their members of Parliament. The increase in supplements was made during the 2016-17 year and took effect on April 1, 2016.

[Translation]

Also on that date, members' sessional allowances and additional salaries increased by 1.8%. This amount reflects adjustments made every year on April 1 based on the average increase in Canadian wages resulting from major settlements in the private sector. The adjustment represents a permanent increase of \$1.1 million for 2016-2017.

● (1110)

[English]

The next line item represents a funding adjustment to the travel status expenses account for 2013-14 and 2015-16 in the amount of \$743,000. Specifically, this increase equals the total amounts approved over a four-year period by the Board of Internal Economy but not yet reflected in the main estimates. The increase will ensure that in the future, funding in the mains and the approved allocations will correspond.

[Translation]

Let me now draw your attention to the next four line items related to parliamentary associations and conferences.

I will first provide you with a bit of context.

As you may know, funding for these items is shared between the House of Commons and the Senate. As such, the amounts to which I will refer in a moment represent the 70% portion of the total budget that the House of Commons funds. The remaining 30% is paid by the Senate.

[English]

We have experienced a growing demand for Canadian parliamentarians to further engage internationally. It's something I hear about often from foreign delegations, ambassadors, and high commissioners who come to see me. While this pressure has been building for some time, it has recently become more prevalent.

[Translation]

Funding for this important work remained relatively stable for several years. However, a significant increase in 2013, coupled with increases in association membership fees and other costs—including travel—hampered association activities.

[English]

Add to this the unprecedented number of new parliamentarians, many of whom wish to play a role in the 12 parliamentary associations that support Canada's international efforts. For all of these reasons, the board recently accepted a recommendation from the Joint Interparliamentary Council to increase its share of permanent funding to Canada's parliamentary associations by \$700,000.

[Translation]

Likewise, Canada will play host to the Interparliamentary Union's Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians in November. To support the conference, which brings the best and the brightest young parliamentarians together to address pressing challenges to democracies around the world, temporary funding of \$324,000 has been sought.

The Canadian Parliament will also host two significant conferences in the second half of 2018.

[English]

The 64th annual session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly will take place in my hometown of Halifax in November of 2018. MPs from across the Atlantic alliance will gather to discuss important matters related to security. To support early preparations for this important event, \$72,000 in temporary funding has been sought in fiscal year 2017-18.

Also next year, in July, the 56th Regional Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference will come to Ottawa. They'll probably have almost as good a time as they would if they were in Halifax. The conference will gather parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth to promote co-operation and good governance. To help host this event, \$19,000 in temporary funding for 2017-18 has also been sought.

[Translation]

I think I speak for many around the table today in saying that we look forward to the results of the work of our parliamentary associations over the next 12 months, and in the future.

Let me now turn to the group of items listed under the general category of "House of Commons Administration".

As you know, the administration plays a crucial role in supporting the work of each and every member of Parliament, as well as that of the institution, including helping to ensure our collective security in partnership with the Parliamentary Protective Service or the CSO.

[English]

The corporate security office—or for short, the CSO—is responsible for security in the House of Commons chamber, providing project management for security infrastructure, conducting investigations, coordinating visitor and event access, providing security accreditation, promoting security awareness, and administering parking services.

[Translation]

The CSO also develops and implements House-wide security policies, standards and processes aimed at preventing, detecting and responding to security risks and threats.

Since the 2015 launch of the integrated security model, in partnership with PPS, our understanding of the roles and responsibilities shared by the CSO and PPS have evolved.

• (1115)

[English]

As a result, and to better ensure our security, a permanent increase of \$3.6 million to the CSO budget was sought, in addition to a temporary increase of \$69,000 in 2017-18. This temporary funding will help to pay for additional staff and office space. It's worth noting that the security enhancement measures identified in 2016-17 and presented the last time that I appeared before you are either under way or being completed, so we are on track with those.

[Translation]

The House of Commons and its partner, Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC, are also on track with the renovations and rehabilitation projects underway throughout the parliamentary precinct. To that end, we have sought an increase of \$2.4 million in temporary funding to maintain and, in the longer term, replace crucial information technology assets; transfer the building components and connectivity program from PSPC to the House of Commons; and better meet those building requirements that are specific to our institution.

[English]

Remuneration under the page program, whereby top students from across Canada have the opportunity to support the work of the House and witness the legislative process first-hand, accounts for a permanent aggregate increase of \$60,000, beginning this year. That increase is calculated on the basis of the average increase in tuition and residence fees at Carleton University and the University of Ottawa and is reviewed every year.

While we're on the topic of the page program, I'd like to take a moment to say how very satisfying it was to learn that the House administration had been recognized as an exceptional workplace for young Canadian talent in this year's Top 100 Employers national competition, as well as being named the top employer in the region.... Excuse me, "a top employer". Darn it, just "a" top employer, but that's still good.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Geoff Regan: Of course, we've always known this, but this year's public endorsement by the Top 100 Employers project was indeed a welcome one.

[Translation]

Another highlight: the opening of the Sir John A. Macdonald Building, or SJAM as we affectionately call it, and more recently, the Wellington Building, resulted in a decrease of \$99,000 to our main estimates for this year. The amount represents previously approved and temporary funding that paid for non-recurring costs associated with the renovation and rehabilitation phases of these very successful and now completed projects.

[English]

I look forward to your questions concerning the main estimates for the House of Commons, but first let me quickly turn my attention to the main estimates for the Parliamentary Protective Service.

I'll begin by providing you with an overview of the PPS's main estimates request for 2017-18, which totals \$68.2 million. This includes a voted budget component of \$62.1 million and a \$6.1 million statutory budget requirement for the employee benefits program. This 2017-18 main estimates request represents a \$5.8-million increase from the PPS's 2016-17 main estimates submission.

[Translation]

In addition to PPS's permanent voted budget of \$56.3 million, which was approved under the 2016-2017 Main Estimates and established as a result of Bill C-59, PPS is seeking an additional \$5.8 million in permanent funding to support the ongoing implementation of security enhancements and to further stabilize the organizational structure.

• (1120)

[English]

Following the events of October 22, 2014, several reviews surrounding this incident were conducted, resulting in 161 recommendations on improving security on Parliament Hill. The PPS received funding approval in September 2016 to launch the PPS mobile response team initiative.

[Translation]

The implementation of this initiative will address a significant number of these 161 recommendations and enhance PPS's overall response capacity.

PPS is requesting permanent funding in the amount of \$1.2 million to further implement and sustain the needs of this initiative.

[English]

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

The PPS is also seeking permanent funding in the amount of \$3 million to stabilize the protective posture in the newly opened 180 Wellington building, and to uphold pre-existing third party security agreements throughout the precinct.

[Translation]

Given the anticipated increase in visitors to the precinct and grounds of Parliament Hill throughout Canada's 150th anniversary celebrations, a total of \$400,000 is required in temporary funding to support the costs of the baggage screening facility at 90 Wellington Street through 2017-2018.

This renewed temporary funding will not only enhance the visitor experience, but it will also enable PPS to evaluate this facility's effectiveness, feasibility and long-term sustainability.

[English]

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

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

[Translation]

PPS remains committed to operational excellence through the provision of professional physical security services throughout the parliamentary precinct and the grounds of Parliament Hill.

[English]

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

[Translation]

This concludes my presentation.

[English]

My team and I look forward to your questions.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Given the length of the presentation—which we appreciated, by the way, as it was comprehensive—and given our tight time frame, I think what I am going to do for now, rather than go into the rounds of questioning—I think we would start to push our luck a bit to do that—is to leave the rounds of questioning and have them following the votes. That will mean about 15 minutes, with five minutes for each party.

I'll ask our guests either to remain or to return as soon as the votes end. I know that some of you of course have a duty, as we do, to be there. I'll ask all members to then arrive here as quickly as possible, and we'll pick up as quickly as we can. However, that will probably require us to extend this a bit past noon.

I understand, Mr. Speaker, that it is possible for you to remain for just a few minutes following noon.

Then, of course, what we would have to do is to start with the Elections Canada officials. I would ask my Liberal friends to reconsider the idea of moving the committee business to Thursday. If not, we will be very tight on time with the Elections Canada officials. If that's not something that we can get consent for, we will have to end that round of questioning. I'll just adjust the questioning accordingly. You can speak to me before or after the votes and let me know if that's possible, and we'll adjust the rounds of questioning according to what that decision is.

At this point in time—

I'll recognize you, Mr. Reid, but could you make it very brief? I don't want to push our luck.

• (1125)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Just to echo your point, on behalf of the opposition, I would request that we move the scheduling issues to Thursday. It will be very hard to have proper and fulsome questioning of the acting CEO if we don't do that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Thank you for that.

I will now suspend the meeting. We will be back as quickly as possible after the votes.

• (1125) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1150)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): We'll call the meeting back to order. Welcome back, everyone.

We'll now go into the rounds of questioning with the Speaker before we move to our Elections Canada officials.

We'll start with the Liberal Party and Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for joining us after the bells and for your excellent summary and explanation of these estimates. It does help to translate them all into English.

The page program is indeed exceptional. You may recall that my daughter very briefly joined it at Halloween last year. I dressed her up.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Geoff Regan: That's right.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: To nobody's surprise, my questions are mainly going to be for Superintendent O'Beirne.

I'll put it this way. We have noticed a change in our colleagues' uniforms recently with the introduction of the hats and these "Respect" stickers we have been seeing. I'm wondering if you could describe your relationship with the PPS unions and when we can expect to see a resolution to the obvious dispute currently taking place.

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

Mr. Graham, I guess I'll start by saying that at the PPS, truly, our strength is our people. The bringing together of the three separate entities upon the creation of the PPS connected corporate knowledge and experience. None of that is lost on us. We've been factoring all of that into every step we take in moving forward as an entity.

To your specific question, I guess what I can say is this. As you know, the creation of the PPS brought together three collective bargaining units: the SPSEA, the SSEA, and PSAC. Since the creation of the PPS, we have believed that it would be best for operations—our concept of operations and employees—if there were a single bargaining unit. It supports our objectives of effectively unifying all the personnel for the service under one operational umbrella, towards a common goal.

The associations have a different perspective, and it's certainly their right to do so. They have articulated that they prefer two bargaining units. In accordance with the law that actually created the PPS, the PPS and the associations have each submitted a request to the PSLREB as to what that right number would be. We currently have three. With this, we've been respectfully waiting for a decision, and we look forward to that decision, hopefully in the coming months.

In regard to the issues you've brought up, there has been some question about whether the PPS will meet with the associations.

From our perspective, the PPS would prefer to continue meeting with all three of the bargaining units, as we share common interests and common goals. In the past, not all bargaining units have agreed to this approach, and we've had varying degrees of success in having attendance at some of the joint meetings scheduled by the PPS. We do understand that some would prefer to meet individually. It's very complex to accommodate this at all times. For example, we often deal with the exact same issue but then have to hold three different meetings with three different associations to discuss the very same issues.

I can assure you that at the PPS our strength is our people, and that's not lost on us. We continue to communicate with them at every possible turn, whether it's directly with the associations or directly with our PPS personnel.

I can close perhaps by letting you know that, further to the views we're not communicating, there is also a view that the PPS will not enter into collective bargaining. On the stickers question, I'll answer from this perspective. The SSEA's collective agreement has indeed expired, and they have requested that we enter into collective negotiations. In the legal opinion that the PPS has received, we've been informed that we cannot start negotiations of any kind with any of the bargaining units until the labour board decides on the actual number of bargaining units that in their view would be appropriate.

Again, the legal opinion that the PPS has received differs from the SSEA's legal opinion. To that end, I'll say that it's not a question of strategy or tactics but simply a question of what we understand to be legal. Because of the difference of opinions, we've asked the labour board to render a decision on whether or not we should bargain in the current environment, and we anxiously await the decisions of the PSLREB on that.

• (1155)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Thank you very much. Time has expired on this round.

I did allow it to go just a few seconds over, but I'm going to be very strict about the times because of the compressed schedule we have today. I will just remind members, before I move to our next round of questioning, that the use of props, as is in the chamber, is not to be permitted in committee rooms.

I will move now to Mr. Schmale, for five minutes.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I will set my timer so that I adhere to your times.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and the rest. I appreciate your taking the time. I would like to direct my questions to Superintendent O'Beirne, if I could.

In terms of the PPS, how many vacancies do you have currently in terms of personnel on the floor?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: Perhaps I'll turn it over in a moment to Mr. Graham here, who could perhaps clarify the numbers.

As you know there was a change in posture following the October 22 incident in 2014. Since the creation of the PPS, we've been working hard with our partners to find the right number. We're continuing to work alongside our partners in gaining a better understanding of the LTVP projects, the openings and closings of the buildings, to again find that proper number. It's not lost on us that our folks are working hard towards a common goal.

In regard to finding some respite in the short term, I can tell you that we have a class of graduating recruits, PPS members who just graduated yesterday. We have another class graduating in the middle of June that will bring some greatly needed support. We're anticipating that will bring the total to about 40 members. As the Speaker put forth in the main estimates, we've received funding for 45 more positions at 180 Wellington. These are all steps that are positioning us for future successes.

Perhaps I'll turn it over to Mr. Graham for some more analysis.

Mr. Robert Graham (Administration and Personnel Officer, Parliamentary Protective Service): I want to make sure I come back with the facts. We're coming back on Thursday. I can bring you the specific number on Thursday. As Superintendent O'Beirne said, we have some vacancies that we've been filling. We had a new class of recruits that started just this week, and we're happy to have them on board.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: First, I apologize if I cut you off; it's all respect. It's just that I have three minutes left and a lot of questions.

Do you feel that you're filling these vacancies quickly enough? From what I'm hearing, there are a lot of people doing a lot of forced overtime, and these vacancies aren't being filled quickly enough in order to anticipate the demand that you have here.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: Our recruiting, hiring, and training cycle is approximately eight months, so we do have to really lean forward and anticipate future needs. As I mentioned, we're trying to be as nimble as possible in response to future needs. We have an attrition rate as well that we're always mindful of.

To your point about overtime, perhaps I can draw from my comments about the three separate bargaining units that we have. There are some limitations we have to work within in regard to these three units—two associations and one union—that we have to be mindful of. There are a few constraints and restraints that we're currently operating under in this environment.

• (1200)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I have maybe a minute left and a lot of questions, so I do apologize if I bounce around a bit.

I just want to ask about and confirm with you some of the additional dollars we're looking at in funding, such as the \$5.8 million in permanent funding. I want to confirm that the plan is to make operations a priority, rather than administration. To me, putting people on the ground instead of into administration is where this money will be going. Can you confirm that as being a priority?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): You have about 30 seconds to answer that.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: It is a priority, and we're putting that forward for consideration. As you know PPS was created with the front-line members who were brought together. We're working hard

again to create the corporate side of the House to do the heavy lifting behind the scenes.

Mr. Graham.

Mr. Robert Graham: Yes, the purpose of the administrative functions is to hire the people necessary to support operations and provide the agility necessary to provide operations with the resources they need.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Sorry, Mr. Schmale, your time has expired.

Mr. Dusseault, you're next.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our guests for joining us today.

I would like to begin with you, Mr. O'Beirne. It seems to me that you are the focus of attention today. I have a very simple question for you: who is your boss and to whom do you report?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: As a result of the amendments made to the Parliament of Canada Act, the Parliamentary Protection Service, or PPS, was created. That led to the creation of

[English]

memorandum of understanding.

[Translation]

According to that memorandum of understanding, I report to the Speakers of the Senate and of the House of Commons with regard to any aspects concerning security throughout the parliamentary precinct and on Parliament Hill, as well as policies on these matters. However, in terms of operations, I report to the RCMP commissioner.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: So you report to two entities: the RCMP and the two Speakers.

I will turn to the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Has the relationship with the RCMP improved since those changes were made? Does the RCMP better understand the particularities of the House of Commons, such as parliamentary privileges? Can you comment on what has happened since the 2015 amendments?

Hon. Geoff Regan: I thank the honourable member for his question.

I have a very good relationship with Superintendent O'Beirne, who is the director of PPS, and with PPS in general, and I believe that is also the case with the House of Commons administration. The relationships have evolved, and we continue to work together to get to know each other better. As you know, the House of Commons administration does not really have the same capacities as PPS and its director. That said, I think that things are going very well.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. O'Beirne or Mr. Speaker of the House, I would like you to talk about the transition period.

When you appeared before the committee, you said that some services that were previously provided by the RCMP would now be provided by PPS, that there would be a transition period and that it may lead to an increase in the main estimates.

Is that the case now? Have all the RCMP services that should now be provided by PPS been transferred? If so, is that reflected today in the main estimates?

• (1205)

Supt Mike O'Beirne: After PPS was created, the RCMP did provide support for the transition. Human resources were allocated to facilitate that transfer. Those positions are crucial for continuing the transfer of those services from the RCMP to PPS and for consolidating the organizational aspect. So the main estimates contain a request for funding to help PPS consolidate those services going forward.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: In the main estimates, there is an increase of PPS expenditures in terms of personnel. The expenditures, which were \$39 million in 2016-2017, will be \$45 million in 2017-2018. That is an increase of nearly \$6 million for PPS, and that is only in terms of personnel.

Can you tell us whether that amount partially responds to the requests made by the PPS employees' bargaining units? Will that \$6-million increase under the "Personnel" category in the main estimates be used to hire more staff? What will it be used for?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): You have 20 seconds left.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: Are you asking for clarifications on the 2016-2017 main estimates?

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Yes. In the "Personnel" category, the amount has increased from \$39 million to \$45 million between 2016-2017 and 2017-2018.

Supt Mike O'Beirne: Are you asking that we explain that \$6-million difference?

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Exactly. There is a \$6-million difference between 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. How would you justify that increase?

Supt Mike O'Beirne: Okay.

I can say again what Mr. Speaker told you this morning. That funding is related to the mobile response team, Senate transfers, operational resources for 180 Wellington Street, the security contract for 90 Wellington Street, a communications specialist, infrastructure agreements between PPS, the Senate and the House of Commons, support services, human resources, compensation, and so on.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Okay. It's mostly....

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): We'll have to stop it there. We have gone past the time.

What we will do is thank our guests who are here with us now: the Speaker, the Clerk, and others. Thank you, all, for being here.

I see that we have a member, Mr. Chan, who would like to say something briefly before I suspend the meeting to bring forward the next set of witnesses here, the witnesses from Elections Canada.

Have you reconsidered the idea of requiring...?

Mr. Arnold Chan: No.

First, I want to thank our guests for appearing and for explaining today's estimates.

I just want your direction, Mr. Chair, on whether to move the appropriate motion with respect to the adoption of the main estimates for the House of Commons and the Parliamentary Protective Service now or at the end of the meeting?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): My intention is to conduct all the votes at the conclusion of the other panel.

Mr. Arnold Chan: That's fine.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Thank you.

I'll suspend briefly to allow the change of witnesses. Thank you.

• (1205)

(Pause)

• (1210)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): I will call the meeting back to order.

I have a point of order.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

We are starting 10 minutes late. If we take a further 10 minutes at the end to deal with the item of committee business and go in camera, we are going to have very limited time to deal with Elections Canada. Therefore, I move that we simply deal with Elections Canada until the end of the meeting, leaving enough time for votes on the estimates for Elections Canada and the House of Commons.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Thank you, Mr. Reid.

Because it was on a point of order, of course, I cannot entertain your motion. However, it is something I did intend to raise myself. I had mentioned it earlier. I know it seemed as though the Liberal Party members were the ones who seemed to disagree with the idea of moving that time to Thursday. Maybe they have had a chance to have a discussion.

Is that something you've reconsidered? Do you still feel it's absolutely necessary?

I will point out that, at this point, we'd be left with 37 minutes with the elections officials if we were to have committee business today.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Could I have two minutes just to give my point? I mean, at the end of the day we decide as a group.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Sorry, Ms. Sahota had her hand up first.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): I just want to say something. We're spending a lot of minutes talking about this back and forth, but maybe we can condense the time from 10 to two minutes. That way we could still save time and move on right now to Elections Canada.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): How do other parties feel about two minutes?

Mr. Scott Reid: If we come back at two minutes to one, then I'm fine with that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): That's what we will do, then. Rather than waste any further time, we'll get started.

We have with us, of course, the acting Chief Electoral Officer, Stéphane Perrault. We also have Michel Roussel, the deputy chief electoral officer; and Hughes St-Pierre, the deputy chief electoral officer for internal services.

Monsieur Perrault, I assume you have some opening remarks. If so, I'll let you have the floor to deliver those, and I'll determine in the meantime what we can do for rounds of questioning prior to the need for our committee business.

The floor is yours.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault (Acting Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks for the opportunity to appear to discuss Elections Canada's main estimates for 2017-18.

Before I start, I want to thank the chair and the members of this committee for the work that you have done in reviewing the CEO's recommendations and for reporting on those recommendations. Of course, Elections Canada's staff remains available to assist the committee in this regard.

[*Translation*]

Today, the committee is studying and voting on Elections Canada's annual appropriation, which is \$29.3 million. This represents the salaries of approximately 350 indeterminate positions. Combined with the statutory authority, which funds all other expenditures under the Canada Elections Act, our 2017-2018 main estimates total \$112.2 million.

During this fiscal year, Elections Canada is working on specific administrative changes to modernize the electoral process to address problems raised by Canadians during recent elections and meet their evolving expectations. I would like to highlight three aspects: voting services, voter registration services, and online services for candidates and political entities.

On voting services, the agency is hoping to see legislation that allows for our proposed new voting services model, which can be adapted to meet the specific needs of each electoral district. I was pleased that this committee agreed to the CEO's recommendations that would allow for the model's implementation. We look forward to the government's response.

In large urban centres, wait time is often an issue for voters, especially at advance polls. In those places, a new voting services model would allow voters to vote at any available table within their polling location, thereby reducing wait times. The new process will

also improve working conditions for poll workers by simplifying their tasks and allowing them to take breaks as required, without interrupting the vote.

To implement this new model, election workers will be equipped with electronic poll books. These are applications that will run on tablets or laptops to help election workers manage voters lists, forms and "bingo sheets". This will replace the cumbersome stacks of paper forms that they currently use and the need to cross voter names off of a paper list with pencil and ruler. It should also significantly reduce record-keeping errors, improve compliance with procedures and increase auditability. I wish to stress that we will retain paper ballots, which will continue to be marked and counted by hand.

We are currently mapping out scenarios for deploying this new voting services model for the 2019 general election, focusing on electoral districts where deployment would bring the most benefit. Deployment decisions will also be informed by a procurement process currently in progress and input from the Advisory Committee of Political Parties.

In more sparsely populated areas, travel time to voting locations, rather than wait time, was one of the main problems reported by Canadians in recent elections. In those areas, instead of introducing technology, we will increase the number of advance polling locations to improve proximity. As well, we will provide returning officers with routing data to support the selection of voting locations. This will help ensure that voters are directed to the polling location that is nearest in terms of travel time.

Since our departmental plan was published, we have decided to set aside one aspect of our transformation agenda—the electronic delivery of special ballots. While we continue to believe that legislation should be amended to provide flexibility in the delivery of special ballots, this is not something we will be pursuing for 2019.

However, based on the success of the pilot project conducted at some 40 post-secondary institutions in 2015, we will increase the number of satellite local offices. These offices will provide information, registration and opportunities for voters away from their electoral district to vote by special ballot.

• (1215)

[*English*]

Our priority for registration services is to increase the coverage and currency of the national register of electors, especially with respect to young voters. For instance, only one quarter—to be precise, 27%—of 18-year-olds are registered, compared with just over 70% for 20-year-olds.

I would note that our recommendations to pre-register 16- and 17-year-olds and to gain access to data from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada on non-citizens would also improve the coverage and the currency of the national register of electors. These measures are also included in Bill C-33.

In addition, we are working to make online voter registration services more universally accessible, particularly for voters in rural and remote areas who do not have standardized residential addresses and who had trouble using the e-registration function in the last election.

We will also offer an online portal providing a number of services to candidates and political entities. This will include the ability, with proper authentication, to download documents such as maps and voter lists, or to file electronically documents such as nomination papers. I do note that this committee, in its review of the CEO's report, supported the recommendations that will facilitate the electronic filing of nomination papers.

In moving forward with improvements to our service offerings, we will continue to consult with parliamentarians, including this committee, as well as with key stakeholders.

I would note, Mr. Chair, that we traditionally have an informal meeting session in the fall, usually in early September or October when Parliament comes back. I hope that we will have the opportunity in September to look at deployment options for new technology at the polls.

Elections Canada is also in the process of replacing and improving a number of existing systems and services that enable the delivery of modern elections. For the next general election, these include new telecommunications services for local offices and our central contact centres. This includes upgrades and maintenance for our IT network and the progressive implementation of a new solution for hosting our data centres. Upgrades and additional basic functionalities are also required for the system that supports returning officers in the hiring, training, and paying of some 300,000 poll workers in a general election.

These investments will allow Elections Canada to ensure that our IT services remain reliable and secure in this changing environment. We are working with lead security agencies, in particular Communications Security Establishment Canada, to ensure that our infrastructure continues to meet all appropriate security standards and requirements.

Lastly, I would like to touch briefly on the timing of the legislation. I understand that in addition to Bill C-33, the minister intends to introduce legislation related to fundraising activities in the coming weeks. She also indicated before this committee that she intends to introduce other legislative changes in the fall of 2017, building on the CEO's recommendations. The minister recognized the last time she appeared before this committee that Elections Canada needs sufficient time to implement the changes well ahead of the 2019 general election. In this regard, assuming that enabling legislation is enacted by the spring of 2018, this should allow us time to implement our proposed new voting services model and other legislative changes for the next general election.

To conclude, we look forward to the final report from this committee on the review of the CEO's recommendations for improved administration of the Canada Elections Act. As I indicated at the outset, Elections Canada staff remain available to assist the committee in this regard.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. My colleagues and I would be happy to answer any questions from the members of this committee.

● (1220)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): I'm sure there will be plenty of those. Thank you.

What I've decided we'll do is that for the first round we'll go with five-minute rounds. As we get close to the end of the first round, I can determine what time we have left to conduct some form of a second round of questioning.

We'll start with Mr. Simms for five minutes.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I come at this from a rural angle. I found that in the past two elections, the biggest benefits for people voting were that...and you'll find it increasingly so, especially with the onset of the oil and gas industry, way back when. I know it's in a downturn now, but it's still very important to a lot of rural areas. The idea, when I first started in 2004, was that to vote you'd do a special ballot. What was more beneficial was having the electoral office open, where you were able to vote for the duration of the writ period. There was a huge increase in participation, I think, or it certainly allowed a lot of people to participate.

The only problem with this was that there weren't as many offices where that was available. Is it possible that you could expand that number within one riding, and is it also possible that you could expand that service and keep it for campuses?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Absolutely. That is precisely our plan. That is part of the feedback we also received.

By having satellite offices in addition to the main returning office, we can offer, for the duration of the campaign, voting opportunities by special ballot, whether for people who are within the riding or for people living outside the riding who happen to be there. The voting will be available for all voters, not just at the returning office but at additional satellite offices, very much in the same way it was for post-secondary institutions as a pilot for the last election. We are looking to expand this.

● (1225)

Mr. Scott Simms: I don't have a lot of time. I have five minutes. I want to expand on that, but I think that will suffice. It's nice to hear that. I just want to give you my feedback as well. It has gone a long way.

What stage are you at now with the electronic aspect of it, a portal for candidates? That could certainly go a long way when it comes to downloading materials as opposed to picking up the actual paper copy.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: To be quite frank with this committee, we are in the early stages but we plan to engage the advisory committee of political parties, in late June, with various options of this proposal.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you.

Switching gears for a moment, what progress have you made when it comes to the expansion in terms of people who can vote internationally? They were able to go to certain embassies or offices of that nature. Are we going to make any changes for the next election? Do you see any changes to help facilitate people being able to vote in other nations?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: There certainly will need to be changes, depending on the fate of Bill C-33, in our outreach and use of social media. That's something we will need to expand.

In terms of the delivery of ballots, people abroad will continue to be able to download application forms, if they've pre-registered, but not ballot kits. This was an initiative we were looking at, to deliver the ballot kits electronically, but we will not be pursuing that for 2019.

Mr. Scott Simms: I see.

Personally, I think—and obviously you feel the same way—that would go a long way towards that. In any particular nation, if you're in a rural area in that foreign nation, it's incredibly difficult. Hopefully the pending legislation will help make it that much easier, but of course you're also broadening the number of people who are eligible to vote. I hope that moves through.

Finally, I want to talk about something that is problematic, which is the identification of certain voters. Certainly in my riding there are a lot of elderly people who do not have the right identification. This is me speaking now. Have you ever explored the idea that in some provinces—I think in Newfoundland and Labrador you can do this—a person in the polling booth, who is designated as an elections official, can verify the identity of people they know and do that on multiple occasions?

Right now people basically come in and say, “I'd like to vote,” and the elections official says, “You can't.” They say, “But you've known me for 30 years,” and it's “Sorry, you still can't vote.” That's my concern. Have you addressed that in any way, shape, or form?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I agree that's a significant concern. It's particularly offensive when you're in a seniors' home, and you've done some targeted revision and met them a week before. They come to vote, and they have to prove to you again who they are and where they reside, when you're right there in the lobby of the seniors' home.

We have recommendations. In the CEO's recommendations report, there are a number of recommendations to deal with it. One of them, of course, is the issue of using the VIC as proof of address, in combination with another document.

Another recommendation is to allow, in certain circumstances, one person to vouch for more than one person. We've seen in care facilities how a nurse is allowed to vouch, if she or he resides in the district, but for only one person and not for the others in the long-term care facility. There should be some flexibility in the legislation to deal with these very special circumstances, in which, really, there is no concern about the residence of these people.

Mr. Scott Simms: But outside of—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Sorry, your time has expired.

We'll move now to Mr. Reid, for five minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you very much.

Thank you for being here, Mr. Perrault. I want to ask you a question regarding Elections Canada's legal expenses.

From 2009 to 2012, Elections Canada was involved in litigation in a case that was formally titled “Canada (Chief Electoral Officer) v. Callaghan”, also known as the “in-and-out” case. On several occasions this committee asked the then CEO, Mr. Mayrand, how much had been spent on that case. I've gone through the different reports, and although the case concluded in 2012, the most recent report we have from Mr. Mayrand actually dates from October 7, 2010, when he said to us, in response to a question from one of my colleagues, “I think last time we reported \$1.3 million to the committee, and I think there have been some increases of around \$300,000 [since that time].”

A further year and a half went by before it wrapped up. Do you have the final costs for that case?

• (1230)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I do not have the final costs with me. I'd be happy to provide them. I understand, Mr. Chair, that the question relates to the Callaghan case, which is the Federal Court case, not any investigation in relation to similar facts. I would be happy to provide the committee with those final numbers.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): You would want to provide that through the clerk.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Absolutely.

I don't have those numbers.

Mr. Scott Reid: Fair enough. I wouldn't expect you to come equipped with those off the top of your head, although I would have been impressed if you had. Thank you for that.

I asked that question for a reason. The legal costs of the Conservative Party at that time were also well over \$1 million. I've heard as high as \$2 million. I do know that it was the second highest ongoing expenditure in the inter-election period, when the Conservative Party finally gave up the battle and decided to abandon the case.

At that time, only about \$300,000 was actually being contested. Elections Canada, or the commissioner as it may be, had lowered the amount that was in contest to a point where it was significantly below the actual amount then being litigated, but was it necessary to go through that very expensive litigation in order to get that number—the claim about how much the party was illegally claiming—driven down to a \$300,000 level?

I raise this for the following reason. At that time, it was never clear to me whether, had I and others tried to assist in paying the Conservative Party's legal costs, Elections Canada would have taken the position that we were making an illegal contribution to the party, or whether they would have said that this is a legitimate exercise of a citizen's right to assist a group with a legal matter. If the latter position would have been taken, then that would have been fine, from my point of view. If the former, then effectively Elections Canada would have been taking the position—I think unintentionally, but that would have been the logical consequence—that Elections Canada can, through its prosecution of fundraising activities, drive any party into bankruptcy, simply by pursuing the enormous costs associated with litigation.

Let me ask you the question now. Should such a situation arise in the future, either with the Conservative Party or any other party, would it be your position that contributions made by private citizens to the legal expenses associated with a matter of this sort would be unlawful contributions to the party?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: As the law now stands, any amount of money that is not reimbursable and that is provided to a political party is a contribution under the act. I do know that in the CEO's recommendations there is a recommendation, not for parties but for candidates, to look at exceptions when there is a dispute regarding the campaign so that financial assistance for the cost of litigation may be outside the limits that are currently in the act in terms of expenses. But that recommendation does not deal with political parties.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Just to assist us, would you be able to draw that particular recommendation—I gather that's a recommendation that Elections Canada has made—to the attention of the clerk so he could provide it to all of us? It doesn't have to happen right now; it can happen at any time in the future.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Absolutely.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): You have about 30 seconds, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'll wait until the next round. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): No problem.

We'll then move to Mr. Dusseault for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

First, I want to follow up on what you said in 2016 or 2017. Perhaps it was Mr. Mayrand, but the Chief Electoral Officer indicated that the audits and reimbursements for candidates in the 42nd election would be completed by the end of August 2017, which means in a few months.

Can you update the committee on the progress of this case? What about the finalization of all the reports and the reimbursement of candidates? Can you comment on the compliance rate in the 338 constituencies? Have all the many candidates completed the process in relation to the Elections Canada rules?

• (1235)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I'm not sure that I can answer all your questions, but I'll answer some of them.

During the election, there were 1,800 candidates, which is more than usual. The spending was also much higher than usual, because the limits were more than doubled given the duration of the election campaign. Our goal was to finish by mid-August 2017. At that time, we should be almost finished. The people in charge of some campaigns may still have documents to provide.

We've almost finished the reimbursements. We still need to hold discussions on reimbursements for eight campaigns. We've started working with the people in charge of campaigns for which we're owed money. When a candidate has received 10% of the votes, the person is entitled to an initial reimbursement amounting to 15% of the limit. In some cases, given the expenses, this amount is more than the final reimbursement. We're currently collecting overpayments.

Initially, 408 candidates received overpayments. We've collected the money owed by 338 of them. We're currently finalizing this. The work will probably be completed this spring or over the summer.

Afterward, we must take care of the campaigns that involved very little spending. This should be marginal, and we should complete the review by the end of August.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: My other question concerns the legislative changes that I assume are in the process of being adopted. I know we can't make assumptions regarding the results of a vote in the House. However, have you planned any extra spending in light of the legislative changes that will be adopted? Along with the changes currently before the House, other changes could follow in the next year, we hope in time for the election in 2019. Have you planned anything in the 2017-18 main estimates to adapt to these legislative changes?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That's an excellent question.

Obviously, we don't know the scope of the different bills. There seems to be three government bills. We intend to make a submission to the Treasury Board to make sure we have the resources needed to meet the new demands resulting from the legislation. We'll start our work in the summer. We've started looking at this, but we'll work with the Treasury Board Secretariat.

I must add that we currently have needs resulting from different factors. For example, our resources haven't increased since 2008. We've also had to serve 38 additional constituencies. Legislative changes have been made. We're currently under some pressure, and certainly we'll be under more pressure as a result of the legislative changes that will be adopted. Over time, as we become familiar with the scope of the bill, we'll be better able to determine the additional resources required. In due course, we can make a submission to the Treasury Board.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: That's fine.

I now want to talk about something that attracted my attention in the 2017-18 program activities. Regarding the “electoral engagement” category, I don't have the exact definition, and I'm not sure what it means. However, I see there was a \$500,000 increase between 2016-17 and 2017-18. Can you explain the increase from \$8,723,000 to \$9,279,000? Can you comment on this aspect of the 2017-18 main estimates, meaning the \$500,000 increase in terms of electoral engagement?

What does “electoral engagement” mean?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Regarding the increase, I'll ask my colleague Mr. St-Pierre to answer the question.

Mr. Hughes St-Pierre (Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Internal Services, Elections Canada): Thank you.

Basically, the variations you noted between this year's program amounts and the amounts in previous years are the result of a certain number of projects we're undertaking.

Regarding electoral engagement, different activities will be undertaken. These will be time-limited activities, in the form of projects to support engagement. There will be some research activities to support the committee's work. We're also reviewing our civic education program. These are the expenses reflected. It's a collection of small expenses. I can't think of an activity resulting in a major expense.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Thank you.

On the—

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Thank you.

The time for the round has expired.

We will move now to Ms. Tassi for five minutes.

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

Thank you, Mr. Perrault, for your testimony today and excellent responses to the questions.

I have one area of questioning that I would like to focus on, and that's the youth vote. You mentioned in your testimony the importance of getting younger people at least on notice and on the record, and then following up and getting them to vote.

I had the amazing experience, when I voted this time around, of voting on a campus that was located in my riding. I take it that it was a pilot project. It was very easy. It encouraged students on campus to be aware that an election was on. There was a lot of education going on at the campus. I think it was a fantastic experience all around in terms of student awareness and engagement.

My question relates to moving forward on these particular pilots that were run. I would like your comments on how successful you felt they were. I'm not certain how many of these pilots were run across the country. Was it cost prohibitive, or did you feel the cost was justified? Moving forward, is there any plan to have this be a regular course of action, so that it's no longer a pilot but turns into a regular routine for elections?

• (1240)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Absolutely. I think that in terms of the success, we cannot look only at the participation rate. I think you make the very valid point that it was not just a voting opportunity. It was an engagement opportunity. We do know, based on our research, that voters who vote early will tend to continue voting for the rest of their lives.

The number of voters was 70,000. The price of the pilot was \$2.6 million. If you look at the ratio of voter to dollar, it's a significant expense, but I don't think this is how it should be measured.

I have the same view with regard to the pre-registration of youth. Should we have that ability? At some point we will have programs going into the schools to pre-register young Canadians. That opportunity should not be looked at merely from the point of view of how many young Canadians we get on the register, but also how many we get to engage and talk about the electoral process and its importance.

I think we have to look at it in a more global way. We do intend to expand the campus opportunities at the next election. As I indicated, we would also have satellite offices outside of campuses for Canadians who may be outside of their district. We certainly will continue to have them on the campuses for the next election.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: That's fantastic, and I agree completely with everything that you've said.

Could you give me a number? How many campus stations were there across the country?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: There were 40 on campuses and at friendship centres. They were mostly on campuses, I think. The vast majority at least were on campuses. We would be looking to expand that where possible.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Do you have any idea of the number that you are looking to expand it to?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: No, not at this point.

For the most part, in the last election, those institutions that we engaged were responsive. There were a few cases where it was a challenge for various reasons, so we'll try again next time. We'll be happy to come back with some numbers when we're further ahead in our planning.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Will the stations that were implemented last time also be implemented next time? You mentioned that there were some challenges. Maybe some of those would be excluded?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I'm not aware of any institution where we would not repeat the experience.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Okay, very good.

Those are all my questions, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Thank you.

We do have some time for a second round, or at least a portion of one. I'll start that second round with Mr. Reid.

You did have a shorter round. I think I'll go with a full five minutes for you, and then we can see where we are.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Mr. Perrault, based on your response last time, I want to confirm your position. Is it Elections Canada's position that under the Canada Elections Act, as it is presently worded, it would be unlawful for any person to assist a political party in deferring the cost of litigation against Elections Canada?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Absolutely.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: It would be a contribution. Whether it's unlawful or not depends on the amount of the contribution. Any amount of money provided to a party to support any of the party's expenses and activities, not specifically litigation expenses, would be a contribution under the current regime.

• (1245)

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. Thank you.

I wonder if you're aware of the implication of this. For any party without millions of dollars in its war chest, based on the \$2-million cost of that previous round of litigation, this actually means that Elections Canada can, at its sole discretion, put any political party into bankruptcy.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I would hesitate to adopt the assumption that is underlying that question: that Elections Canada would intend to do that. I understand very well, however, the financial pressure that exists on parties, and that would be amplified in the case of expensive litigation.

I think it's an important issue. I certainly share your concern. I do think we have to look at the broader picture and consider whether it is appropriate for significant amounts of money to be provided to a party, whether those amounts should be completely unregulated, or whether there may be a different set of approvals that apply. I think that is something that maybe warrants some consideration.

I don't know that the policy answer to the question is a complete deregulation. There may be ways to calibrate the response.

Mr. Scott Reid: I appreciate that. First of all, I want to be very clear that I do not mean to suggest that either you or Elections Canada, and certainly not Mr. Mayrand, had that intention. I'm drawing your attention and that of the committee to the fact that this is just the situation as it stands if the law is interpreted as it is. That's very helpful. Actually, that was all I wanted to raise on that topic.

I do have two other things I want to ask you on completely different topics. One is this. The minister has promised to provide two additional pieces of legislation in addition to Bill C-33. Obviously, you have indicated that you would like to have this legislation dealt with and enacted by spring 2018. If you had to rank the importance of these pieces of legislation in terms of which ones you need to deal with most urgently given the follow-through you have to do, would you rank...?

I'm thinking most obviously of the fundraising legislation versus Bill C-33, and the other piece of legislation not yet introduced that will capture other aspects of your report on the 42nd election. From the point of view of your own implementation issues, what priority would you suggest be given to these pieces of legislation?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I must say that I find that question a bit difficult to answer, not having seen the contents of the legislation,

and in particular, the CEO recommendations implementation bill. Clearly, any legislation that involves significant technology would require some time for implementation and for testing.

With regard to the fundraising piece legislation, it does involve some changes to the system. That's something that can be done, I think, within a period of six to 12 months. I would have to get back to you on that.

It's not clear to me at this point which is a priority, but when we fix our systems, we do need time to make sure they are running properly.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you very much.

I have 30 seconds here, so I'll just ask this question. I know you can't give a response to us right now. It's more of an invitation.

The minister's mandate letter emphasized the importance of cybersecurity. We just recently had an example of what may become something we'll see frequently in the future: cyber-attacks on various systems. We saw how effective they can be if launched—in the short run, just creating chaos.

You obviously can't answer now, but if you could get back to us in the future with your thoughts on how best to deal with this from an elections point of view, we would be most grateful.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We have worked in the past, and we continue to work, with the Communications Security Establishment. It provides the standards that are appropriate for our services, and we rely on its expertise in terms of the level of security. It's our job to make sure that those standards are met. We are quite happy to have the benefit of that collaboration. This is something we are currently working on, and we are making sure that our system meets those standards.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Thank you. The time has expired.

The next round would have been a Liberal round, but I understand there are no more questions from the Liberal Party.

We are approaching about 10 minutes to one. We have some votes to dispose of, of course, and we will have to suspend briefly to be able to move to the committee business. Unless anyone has something that is burning, that they wanted to raise—I could allow that for just a couple of minutes—then we will move to our votes.

I did see Monsieur Dusseault's hand raise.

I'll give you two minutes. Just keep it brief.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: I'll be brief, Mr. Chair.

I want to talk about the new technology that you want to implement, including the technology for the voter registration service. You talked about polling stations, but particularly advance polling stations.

Are by-elections good opportunities for trying these types of models? Were these models applied during the recent by-elections? Do you think it could be worthwhile to do so? How much will it cost?

You talked about equipping election officials with iPads. How much would it cost to purchase or rent these iPads? What form will this take?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We'll need to test the systems. Of course, laboratory simulations will be conducted. Extensive testing must be conducted before the equipment is introduced at polling sites. We may have the opportunity to do so during a by-election. If the opportunity arises, we'll seize it, obviously. However, the opportunity may not arise. What matters is testing the technology.

We're also working with a number of provinces that are currently introducing the same technology. I was able to witness British Columbia's provincial elections last week. In British Columbia, they chose electronic poll books for advance polls and certain transactions for the regular polls. I was pleased to see how smoothly things ran and how comfortable the election workers were with using the electronic poll books. I spoke to a number of election workers who were clearly of retirement age, and they were very comfortable with using the technology. This option is therefore available.

We also worked with people from Elections Ontario during their by-elections. They will hold a general election in about a year, and they intend to deploy the electronic poll book technology at that time.

There are many possibilities, and we'll take advantage of all of them to make sure the technology is in top shape.

Costs will mostly depend on deployment. For the advance polls, at this point, before the procurement process, we're talking about between \$6 million and \$8.8 million. For the regular polls, the amount is between \$20 million and \$30 million, according to various deployment scenarios. Again, we'll have the chance to refine these figures as our initiative progresses.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Thank you for that.

Before I dismiss our witnesses we do have some votes to dispose of, and then we'll suspend to move in camera. I will put those questions now.

Shall vote 1 under House of Commons, vote 1 under Parliamentary Protective Service, and vote 1 under the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, less the amounts granted in interim supply, carry?

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$318,131,715

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

PARLIAMENTARY PROTECTIVE SERVICE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$62,100,000

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$29,253,454

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Shall I report the votes on the main estimates to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Blake Richards): Thank you for that.

I will now dismiss our witnesses.

Thank you very much for your statements and the answers to the questions from members. We will suspend briefly to move in camera for our committee business.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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