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• (1105)

[English]

Hon. Anthony Rota (Speaker of the House of Commons): Welcome to the third meeting of the 44th Parliament.

[Translation]

We will now go to the first item on the agenda, minutes of previous meetings.

Are there any questions?

[English]

There are no points to bring up.

Seeing none, we'll move on to the second item: business arising from the previous meetings.

[Translation]

Does anyone wish to comment on business arising from the previous meeting?

Since we have no comments, we will move on to the third item, the proposed 2022-23 main estimates.

The floor is yours, Mr. St George.

Mr. Paul St George (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am here today to present the proposed main estimates for the House of Commons for 2022-23, which I submit for your approval.

My presentation is divided into two parts since I am also recommending a change to how the statutory authorities are presented.

In accordance with the Parliament of Canada Act, the House of Commons must complete its expenditure estimates for the upcoming fiscal year and submit them to Treasury Board for tabling along with the main estimates of the Government of Canada.

These estimates summarize the funding for items already approved by the Board of Internal Economy. The House of Commons regularly aims to keep requests for additional funding to a minimum, so as to promote the efficient use of resources and avoid having to seek approval for additional resources.

The total proposed 2022-23 main estimates for the House of Commons are \$563 million, which represents a 3.5% increase over the previous fiscal year. As shown in the table, the total increase in the proposed 2022-23 main estimates is \$19.3 million.

Funding changes for initiatives approved by the Board of Internal Economy are broken down as follows. First, \$5.4 million in funding is sunseting, which is offset by \$1.3 million in security support enhancements for members. Second, committee operations support is increasing by \$800,000, that is, \$300,000 in permanent funding and \$500,000 in temporary funding. Third, funding to sustain facility assets from the long-term vision and plan has increased by \$2.3 million. Fourth and finally is an \$800,000 increase for the 47th annual session of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

[English]

Turning now to items included under the category of cost of living increases, an amount of \$6.3 million, representing an increase of 3.7% compared to the previous year, has been added to the members' and House officers' budgets as well as the travel expenses accounts. This increase follows the board decision of 2015 to apply the annual CPI rate to these budget items.

Continuing with other cost of living increases, the sessional allowance and additional salaries for members and House officers have been increased by \$1.1 million, or 1.8%, as provided for in the Parliament of Canada Act. This increase is tied to the remuneration increase that came into effect on April 1, 2021.

Also included are economic increases over multiple years that were approved by the board earlier this year for represented and unrepresented employees of the House administration, for a total amount of \$6.4 million.

The last category of adjustments relates to items that are more technical in nature, stemming from board-approved methodologies or established rates set by the Treasury Board. There's a budget adjustment of \$38,000 for House officers to account for the revised party representation in the House following the 2021 general election. There is also an increase of \$3.6 million for the contributions to the members' pension plans relating to the revised contribution rates for members as set by the Treasury Board, and an adjustment of \$2.2 million for the statutory funding for employee benefit plans as per the revised Treasury Board rates.

In the main estimates, the total funding of \$563 million is divided between voted and statutory authorities.

Voted authorities would be provided through appropriation acts approved by Parliament and account for \$395.3 million of the total \$563 million, whereas the statutory authorities are grounded in separate legislation and are estimated at \$167.7 million.

With that said, it is recommended that the board approve the House of Commons' proposed 2023 main estimates in the amount of \$563 million.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes the first part of my presentation. I'll be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any questions or comments?

Mr. Julian, I believe you have a comment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (House Leader of the New Democratic Party): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have questions about appendix C, but if the presentation isn't over, I will wait until such time.

Hon. Anthony Rota: If everyone is in agreement, we will now proceed with the second part of the presentation.

Mr. St George, please continue.

Mr. Paul St George: Thank you.

The House Administration is also recommending that the presentation of statutory authorities be revised to show the following as two separate line items: members' and House officers' salaries and allowances, and contributions to members' pension plans. The purpose of this change is to align the items with the specific pieces of legislation under which the spending is authorized, in other words, the Parliament of Canada Act for members' and House officers' salaries and allowances, and the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances Act for contributions to members' pension plans.

• (1110)

[*English*]

It is therefore recommended that the board approve the revised description and proposed changes to the presentation of statutory authorities to show on two separate lines items the members' and House officers' salaries and allowances, and then, separately, the contributions to the members' pension plans.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes the second part of the presentation.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Okay. I will go to the questions.

Mr. Julian, you're at the top of the list.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With the omicron variant taking its toll throughout the country, I'm wondering about the impact the changes we've been seeing in recent days will have if they persist in 2022. Obviously, these estimates were prepared before the fifth wave hit. What impact will the current situation have on the budget?

[*English*]

I'm particularly interested because we saw with the first wave back in 2020-21 that there was a significant impact on budgets. The budget going into the next fiscal year, unfortunately, looks likely to be impacted. We're not out of the woods by any means. In fact, we seem to be going backward with the omicron variant.

What would the financial impact be? With finances already booked, given the potential over the next six months that we will continue to be in the situation we are in now, what would the impact be on the budget?

Mr. Paul St George: Thank you, Mr. Julian, for the question.

What we do know right now is that the impact as related to the first, second and third waves is about \$1.5 million for this part of the first fiscal year, meaning up to September. We're managing and monitoring on an ongoing basis.

We also know that we've seen improvements in some of the cost line items within the budget for 2021-22. As I said, we continue to monitor it and we are currently cash-managing those costs as we move forward. Currently, they're not being called out in the 2022-23 budget. However, if there were a time where we felt that they were incremental and causing undue hardship on the budget, we'd come back to this committee for, potentially, a submission.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any other questions or comments?

[*English*]

We have two decisions to make.

[*Translation*]

The first one pertains to the main estimates.

Is everyone in agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Anthony Rota: The second pertains to the proposed changes to the description and presentation of statutory authorities.

Is everyone in agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

We will now go in camera.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Excellent.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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