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Chair

Mr. Leon Benoit

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC)):

Good afternoon, everyone. We're here today to continue our review of the estimates. Today, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), we're dealing with the main estimates 2005-2006, and in particular we're dealing with vote 1 under the Governor General, referred to the committee on Friday, February 25, 2005.

We have appearing today the Honourable Reg Alcock, President of the Treasury Board, returning to us after our meeting just a couple of days ago. We have as witnesses, as well, from the Office of the Governor General, JoAnn MacKenzie, director general of corporate services; and from the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Wilma Vreeswijk, executive director of the government operations division. That's for the first hour.

In the second hour we'll return to the review of Bill C-11, the whistle-blower legislation.

Could we start with a presentation, Mr. Alcock?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Before I start with my remarks, let me just reference two or three things.

I think you already had circulated to you the main estimates transition document. You'll recall that at the end of my presentation on Tuesday, you had asked whether or not it would be possible to create the table that referenced spending in other departments, which I now have copies of in both languages. Also, the Governor General's office has prepared another document that tries to lay out for you the year-over-year differences of where things have moved. Could we get those circulated to members?

The irony of my sitting here at this end of the table in this particular process will not be lost on any of you who have been around this committee for a while. As you know, I was chair of this committee the first time we called the Governor General's office. I think it's important to revisit what we were doing and what our intentions were.

This committee was established to take responsibility for ensuring that the management of government was of the highest quality and for starting to model, and to show the House and other committees, how these practices should be performed. Estimates were something that we dealt with very quickly, and I think it's to the great credit of this committee that it's putting in the time that it is into the estimates;

given all the pressures on everybody, I think it's very important that you do that.

The principle I had wished to establish and, I believe, the committee wished to establish, for the Governor General's office at that time was that the Governor General's office, like any other function of Parliament, was accountable. When you're spending taxpayers' money, you need to come before the representatives of the people of Canada and defend that spending.

There are, however, some unique characteristics in the relationship between the Governor General's office and government. I believe they go back to the time of Cromwell when the King or the Crown was prevented from entering the House of Commons. They simply could not; it would have been improper for them to go there. That prohibition continues in our constitutional arrangements today.

There's another aspect to the Governor General's office that I think is important to consider as we go through our work, and that is, the Governor General, Parliament, and the judiciary constitute three separate bodies in our system of responsible government. The Governor General is the de facto head of state, as well as being commander-in-chief of the Canadian Forces. In these capacities, the Governor General carries out constitutional and state responsibilities.

There are those who would argue that the Governor General is the linchpin of our responsible government, in that it is the Governor General, in addition to her other responsibilities, who ensures the continuity and functioning of government; ensuring that Canada always has a Prime Minister is a responsibility of the Governor General. It is to the Governor General that individuals would go should they ever wish to request a change in government. Summoning, proroguing, and dissolving Parliament are the responsibilities of the Governor General—not the government—as are reading the Speech from the Throne and granting royal assent to government legislation.

In the role of commander-in-chief, the Governor General performs an extremely potent symbolic role, building pride and morale among the troops and Canadians at large. For example, the Governor General visits Canadian forces in conflict zones such as Kosovo, Bosnia, and Afghanistan, meets with Canadian forces on bases in Canada, and represents Canadians at memorial services and funerals of fallen military personnel.

The Governor General also fulfills important traditional roles related to bringing Canadians together and upholding and promoting Canadian values. Examples of these would be the regional visits to small communities and isolated communities in northern Canada, and to urban centres—approximately 50 communities per year in the very busy schedule of this Governor General.

I'd like to highlight some of the key initiatives that have been planned by the Governor General for 2005-06. The Governor General will be representing Canada alongside hundreds of Canadian veterans at events to commemorate the liberation of the Netherlands. She will officially open the Canadian War Museum. With Canadians in Saskatchewan and Alberta, she will celebrate the centennials of those provinces. She will visit with Canadians in a variety of northern communities, as well as other regions of the country. She will preside over as many as 14 honours investitures and several Governor General's Awards presentations. She will welcome up to 200,000 Canadians and other visitors to the official residences in both Ottawa and Quebec City.

The social aspects of the Governor General's commitments include comforting people in times of loss, offering hope and inspiration, recognizing achievement and celebrating excellence, bringing Canadians together, fostering unity, and promoting Canadian values. And all of this costs money.

The visitor services program, in which the agency invests \$1.2 million annually, is one of the Governor General's most highly visible and popular initiatives. The objective is to promote greater awareness and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the Governor General and the history of our democracy through school visits, historical exhibitions, and guided tours. Visitors to Rideau Hall and La Citadelle, as I've mentioned, number 200,000 annually, and surveys indicate that at least 82% leave with an increased understanding of our country.

There is also tremendous interest among Canadians in receiving milestone anniversary and birthday greetings, and we as members often participate in that and request those from the Governor General. Between 25,000 and 28,000 such messages are sent to Canadian citizens annually at a cost of \$90,000.

Over the past two years, the Governor General has presided over eight combined citizenship and Caring Canadian Award ceremonies, and during each of these, approximately 35 to 50 new citizens were sworn in. These events are held across Canada in the many recreational centres and schools the Governor General visits. Approximately 500 people attend each of these events, and the costs are from \$8,000 to \$10,000.

Each year the Governor General presents honours and awards on behalf of all Canadians to recognize people who have demonstrated excellence, courage, or exceptional dedication to service in ways that bring special credit to our country. The Order of Canada, the Order of Military Merit, the Order of Merit of the Police Forces, decorations for bravery, and Meritorious Service decorations are some of the Canadian honours with which committee members are most likely familiar.

The Order of Canada, established in 1967, is the country's highest honour for lifetime achievement. More than 4,000 Canadians have

so far been invested for their contribution in making Canada a better country. And each year about 200 additional Canadians are so honoured. Four investiture ceremonies are held per year at a cost of \$75,000 per ceremony. Appointments to the order are made on the advice of an advisory council, chaired by the Chief Justice of Canada, that meets twice a year to review the over 1,000 nominations received from Canadian citizens.

Bravery awards are an example of the many honours and investitures over which the Governor General presides each year. You can imagine the poignancy associated with recognizing Canadians who have, in many cases, risked their own lives to save another. Three times a year the Governor General presides at awards and presents these awards. On average, 45 Canadians are honoured at each ceremony attended by approximately 200 people, including family and friends of the recipients. Each ceremony costs approximately \$60,000, including the cost of travel and accommodation within Canada for each recipient and one guest, as well as the cost of the reception following. In each case, there's a process to identify award recipients that involves research and analysis by the advisory committee. Many of you have attended ceremonies when your constituents are being so honoured.

Now to the details of the estimates. For the fiscal year 2005-06, the office is seeking \$19,060,000, a total amount that is \$121,000 less than the amount approved in their 2004-05 estimates, and this amount will be further reduced by their contribution to the expenditure review committee. The 2005-06 main estimates can be summarized in two areas of activity. First, the Governor General's program: \$9.4 million. This includes constitutional and traditional activities, at a cost of about \$4.3 million; visitor and outreach programs at Rideau Hall and La Citadelle—the one I mentioned before that has nearly 200,000 visitors—\$1.2 million; communications, at \$1.5 million; activities to promote citizens' engagement in communities across Canada as well as public events, at \$1.3 million; and funding for pensions and operating expenses for former Governors General, \$990,000. And the Governor General does receive a salary of \$114,000.

The second area of activity is the Canadian honours program, at \$4.1 million. This includes administration and implementation of the national honours system and the Canadian Heraldic Authority. An additional \$5.5 million is attributed to both of these program activities for corporate services support. The business line for former Governors General no longer appears in these estimates, as this is now incorporated in the Governor General's activity lines. These program activities will be measured and evaluated against the office's threefold strategic outcome: representing the Crown in Canada, promoting Canadian sovereignty, and recognizing excellence among Canadians.

The Governor General has a constitutional responsibility to guarantee responsible government. It is her duty to promote Canadian sovereignty and to recognize excellence among Canadians. The agency is currently developing results-based performance measures to evaluate its success in reaching these outcomes.

● (1540)

The office has further contributed to the government priority of strengthening public sector management through the establishment of corporate pages on the agency's website; the proactive disclosure of travel and hospitality by senior officials and contracting information on this site; the implementation of a strategic planning framework to assist in resource planning; and the modernization of financial and human resource systems. The office is also finalizing its first annual report for the year 2003-04, which will be made available to Canadians on the website by May 16, 2005.

I want to stop there just for one brief second. I know there was a question raised earlier about why the Governor General's Office didn't produce RPPs and progress reports, DPRs. It's because the office is separately constituted and has no responsibility to do so.

I think this is something we saw the very first time they came in. The office has no inherent resistance to doing this; it's just not a tool by which it would be captured in the normal activities of government. So what it has done is undertaken to parallel the management requirements that we would have and the accountability and information requirements that we would have through these mechanisms. I believe there was discussion with the committee about the creation of an annual report, which for the first time, can I say, in the history of the office it is doing, and it is in direct response to the request from this committee.

Finally, there were questions in that very first visit, questions two days ago when I was here, about the support that appears in the Auditor General's budget not being all of the support this office receives. Because the Governor General performs duties at the request of DFAIT and others, there are other department lines. The activities of the Governor General are supported by six other federal government departments and agencies: the Department of National Defence, the RCMP, the National Capital Commission, Public Works and Government Services, Foreign Affairs Canada, and Canadian Heritage. They do this as part of their statutory responsibility and seek funds to fulfill these responsibilities as part of their own main estimates.

An overview of those estimates would be conducted through those departments, but we've pulled that information to give you the overview of it. To respond to the committee's recommendation and to satisfy the government's accountability and transparency requirements, the office of the secretary to the Governor General contacted each of these departments and agencies in writing to request expenditure information. The letter specifically requested information related to actual and forecasted expenditures so that the office would be better able to capture global costs.

The complete information has not yet been provided. The committee members are referred to the report tabled in March 2004, which outlines support provided by other departments and agencies.

Because we have not reached the point of the finalization of the public accounts for this year, I asked Treasury Board to undertake a quick survey of the departments and capture the numbers. The only qualifier I would put on is that they are within a small order of magnitude. I would not want to represent them as the final numbers that would appear in the public accounts, because we simply aren't at that point in terms of the closing of the books. That'll happen later this year. But I would undertake to warrant to you that this is as complete a representation of the information as we could gather together in the 36 hours or so I've had since you made the request.

With that, I would finally like to make this comment. When we first asked for officials from the office to appear before us, they appeared willingly and quickly. They worked hard to respond to the concerns of this committee, and it is no different today. I felt, and I think others felt, that it was important to have a representative of the government appear with them, simply because in any other case we would not expect officials to carry responsibility for all aspects of the office. Because the Governor General is constrained from being here, I felt that someone should be here to represent the positions that may be outside of the administrative responsibilities of the staff.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I am yours.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Alcock. I appreciate the information you have brought.

You did explain how this study was initiated some time ago, probably about two years ago when you chaired this committee. We asked the office to come back again because we didn't feel we were given enough information the first time.

I think we're guided in this process by two main principles. First of all is the principle of follow-up. If we don't get what we ask for—and this is a principle this committee will follow into the future—if we don't get what we feel is appropriate accounting, we'll have a department or representatives of a program back as many times as it takes to get that information. The second principle involves our expectation of adequate accountability, in terms of dollar figures but also in terms of a report, as you mentioned, such as the planning and priorities report or the performance reports.

We're hoping that today will be the last time we'll have to have this office back for some time. I'll leave that to the committee.

We'll start the questioning with Mr. Preston, for seven minutes.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much for coming today. It's great to see you, and I'm sure the Governor General feels well represented with you here, sir.

Hon. Reg Alcock: She too feels it's a little ironic.

Mr. Joe Preston: If I can get to some good financial questions right at the start, the budgets for 2005-06 and 2004-05 both sit at about \$19 million in total. We realize that when we add travel—I know we can't predict what travel will take place in 2005-06—we come up with some millions more, if we average the last couple of years. A total of about \$35 million will be spent this year.

This Governor General has been our most active, with an awful lot of activity going on in the honours programs and, as you explained, in an awful lot of other areas. Canada is proud of those programs, but I'd like to ask the question again. Over the term of this Governor General, this budget has significantly increased. I don't want to quite use the term "doubled", but it's pretty close. The total overall value, or the total overall amount spent, has increased...let's just leave it that it has increased by a great deal.

Are we doing that much more?

• (1550)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Since she came?

The Chair: Let's just maintain order here. Let's just not have the cross-conversation.

Mr. Preston, continue with your question, please.

Mr. Joe Preston: Since she came, it's improved a lot; over the last year, and even before that, it has been on an upslope and continues to go. Let's talk about what we're getting for what we're spending.

Hon. Reg Alcock: I think it is important to note a couple of things in this regard, though. As Mr. Lauzon and Madam Thibault in particular, who have experience in the federal government, can tell you, sometimes these programs are not as fast moving as one might realize, or not as precise as one might hope.

In fact, some of the awards programs, which added significantly to the cost of the office, were begun under the previous Governor General. I think it was the Caring Canadian one. Each Governor General will select an area they wish to leave their mark on. The previous Governor General was Governor General LeBlanc, and one of his areas was to recognize the volunteer work of Canadians, so he began a program partway through his term that came into full application under this particular Governor General.

There was another area around the National Capital Commission. Frankly, there's an issue here if you wanted to look at it. You should look at the official housing operated by the National Capital Commission, because for political reasons we decide we're not going to invest in these things, and these very important, very beautiful old residences are falling down because we wear the hair shirt. There are some issues here. That situation was occurring at Rideau Hall, so money was put into the renovations and upkeep of Rideau Hall. There's no question about that.

Also, one of the things this Governor General has sought to do is to reach out to Canada, and she has been very active. I think in fairness—and Mr. Preston, we are very respectful of this office—there was concern by the members of the committee who first did this, because there had been a number of stories about what was seen as profligate or expansive spending. I think that's what prompted some of those early concerns.

We have an awful lot of information on that. I think we perhaps misunderstood a piece of that, in that often...the Governor General does not travel internationally without the approval of the government, most often at the request of the government. Her international travel would be to replace the Prime Minister or the Minister of Foreign Affairs, depending on the state occasion that would take her there, so some of that workload increase was a recognition of the unique talent of this Governor General and the

demands of the government at that time, and was driven by decisions outside her direct control.

Nonetheless, in some of the other foreign travel, if you look at the summary table, you will see there is quite a significant drop in travel. I would argue it is a direct result of the concerns expressed by this committee.

Mr. Joe Preston: It's not so much the travel. I really did separate that off on purpose, because that does happen as per occasion, and it needs to happen. Perhaps we could talk about it as a separate issue.

I'm looking more at the budget of the Office of the Governor General—the total, and how much it's grown over a number of years. As we see, the real proposed spending that's part of the Governor General's program piece includes an awful lot of personnel costs. From a full-time equivalent point of view, what has happened over the term of this Governor General? From a full-time equivalent staff point of view, where were we, and where are we now?

Hon. Reg Alcock: Would you like that from the first year in office of this Governor General?

• (1555)

Mr. Joe Preston: That's a good starting point.

Hon. Reg Alcock: It bracketed the 1999-2000 and 2000-01 fiscal years. In the 2000-01 fiscal year, which is the first fiscal year in which she was Governor General, her office budget was \$13.7 million. It grew to a high point of \$19.2 million, and it's just under \$19 million. It says \$19.1 million in the estimates, but remember, there is \$300,000 coming off for ERC.

Actually, when one recognizes that a good portion of that is staff, so that the statutory salary increments and all that are in it, decreasing the operational side still further, the order of magnitude over that period of time would be \$13.7 million to \$19.1 million, or about \$6 million.

Mr. Joe Preston: That's the increase in dollars. My question was on personnel.

Hon. Reg Alcock: I understand that—the details on FTEs.

Why don't you pull that together?

Mr. Preston, I'll give that information if I can in this cycle. If not, I'll—

Mr. Joe Preston: Certainly. We all know that as departments grow, that's truly where the cost is. If people come on board to fill a function, then they're there and will always fill the time to complete the day.

Hon. Reg Alcock: That's a very important point.

Mr. Joe Preston: You talked about the expenditure review program in 2005. You're talking about having to take another \$300,000 off what's sitting on the table in front of us now. Where do you expect to be able to find \$300,000?

Hon. Reg Alcock: In 2005-06 the estimates will be further reduced by an additional \$300,000 because of the expenditure review commitment. Efficiencies will be realized through the following: modifying the format of some honours investiture ceremonies to reduce per capita costs and reduce staff overtime costs—there will be \$120,000 savings in that area; limiting the amount of hospitality offered to the community groups—sandwiches are getting smaller; non-government organizations of which the Governor General is patron, for a \$70,000 saving; reducing the promotion of honours activities, for roughly \$100,000 savings; and reducing costs of travel for Caring Canadian Award advisory committee meetings, through the use of teleconferencing, for about a \$10,000 savings.

Mr. Joe Preston: Since you're able to be that specific with me on the reduction for the \$300,000, I'll ask the next question, figuring you'll probably know this too, then.

As we've grown from \$13.7 million in 2001 to \$19 million now, we've increased costs and increased full-time equivalents—and hopefully I'll still get that one—but does anything ever go away? You've mentioned that previous Governors General add things and then they stay. I think in most things we start to find things that are redundant. I'm not saying there's a technological advantage to the Governor General through any automation thing; I'm not sure that's there.

Hon. Reg Alcock: First of all, I think that's an excellent question. It's a question that should be asked of every single department and agency that comes before you, because I think government does have a difficulty.... It's fun and easy to start something; it's difficult to shut something down.

That, in fact, is at the heart of the expenditure review process. That's why we put these limits on and challenge each manager to look at their portfolios and say, where can you let go of things that are no longer serving a need, do things more efficiently by innovating, and cycle those services back into the areas where you need programming?

On the bigger question of whether we should have this awards program or that awards program, I don't think those questions would be determined by the manager—in this case the Governor General's office—but it would be fair to say there has not been a reduction in the awards programs. It's because I think these are programs that are well received and very positively received by Canadians.

The other thing is that the more aggressive the Governor General is in promoting these things, of course, the more people apply. If a Canadian approaches the office, they get treated with respect, and that respect and time costs money. It's like the employment programs of the PSC.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Preston, you're out of time.

Madame Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I ask you to excuse me for being a few minutes late. I thank you all for coming, Mr. Alcock, Ms. MacKenzie and Ms.... Unfortunately I cannot see your name.

[*English*]

Hon. Reg Alcock: Even if you can, you can't pronounce it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I shall try: Ms. Vreeswijk.

[*English*]

Hon. Reg Alcock: Wow, I'm impressed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I have friends from Holland which helps a little bit.

The last time that representatives of the Governor General's office came before us, I asked the question Mr. Preston had just put: Are these costs sometimes diminishing? What is the reason for such a high increase? In light of that incredible increase, on what basis are you doing your review? We have been told about the large number of visits and other activities. I do not question the constitutional mandate or other responsibilities of the Governor General. Neither does the Bloc Québécois. However, considering that she is the Head of State and that she should set an example, what steps will her office take to reduce its spendings and work differently, as the government is asking them to do, for this year and the years to come? I do not believe it is my role to tell you how to do it. I wouldn't dare presume that it is my place to tell you.

I am going to give you an example. As Members of Parliament, the 308 of us have received in our offices a kit on Parliament and the Library of Parliament containing videotapes and DVDs. This is excellent. We have a lot of tools at our disposal to inform Canadians.

Let us explore the activities of the office. The Office of the Governor General considers essential that people take part in some activities. It costs up to \$5 million. For instance, there are several honours and awards programs. It is a very good thing to honour people. Some of my constituents have received such honours. They certainly deserve it, but they left Rimouski to be honoured in Vancouver. Wasn't it possible to have the ceremony held in Quebec or in the Maritimes for people from the Maritimes? I certainly would wish to know how you could do things differently. Instead of sending a group of twelve or thirteen people to those ceremonies, maybe we could just send five or six. Those persons would understand that this in no way diminishes the honours, but that it takes into consideration taxpayers' money and particularly taxes paid by Quebeckers. I would like to know how you are going to re-assess your activities and present us a spending reduction plan that will still allow the Governor General to carry out her responsibilities.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Hon. Reg Alcock: If I may ask, Madame Thibault, I need some clarification on the second part, the issue of the expenditure reduction plan. That is in fact what, in response to the ERC requirement, which was to identify—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: What does ERC mean?

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock: It's the expenditure review committee.

There was a request that departments re-evaluate up to 5% of their total budget. If you look at the year-over-year change in the funding for this office on the budget that they manage—and it's important to note that it's the budget they manage—it shows in the year-over-year a reduction of \$121,000, in that summary document we provided for you. It's gone from \$19,181,000 in 2004-05 to \$19,060,000.

The first thing to realize about that number is that also accommodated in it are the staff increments we would have given this year, as well as year-over-year wage settlements. Inflationary operating costs have all been accommodated with that. The overall envelope's gone down.

In addition to that, we asked them to do exactly what we asked every other government department to do: to look in their portfolio and identify 5% of their activities for reallocation. They did go in—in some ways, I think, in line with what you were saying—and looked at how they operated the format of the investiture ceremonies, and they were able to change them to save staff overtime and save \$120,000, and so on.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Chairman of the Treasury Board, allow me to interrupt you.

I shall read it and try to understand it fully.

When we were told in January, I think, by the Office of the Governor General how you intended to reach the reduction target requested in this Committee's motion—which was also passed by the House of Commons—of course, we were sent...

•(1605)

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock: Oh, I'm sorry—

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I wish to conclude my sentence.

We were told that some programs and purchases would have to be cancelled, that the Office would have to cut here and there. I must tell you that I was about to cry.

I wish to know how we are going to prove to Canadians that we can do things differently and that we could save money that we might be able to use for very different purposes on behalf of Quebeckers and other Canadians?

I would like you to give me very concrete examples that anyone will understand rather than mere figures.

Tell me how you will act differently. You are telling me that in 2003-04, the costs of support given by other departments to the Governor General was \$17 million and that they had been reduced to \$12 million. There has been less support to the Office. This is a huge decrease.

What has been done inside the Office? If costs could be reduced so much inside other departments, why couldn't you succeed as well within your own organization?

I would like you to give me some concrete examples.

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock: I can give you three categories of that. The document you are referencing here is the support provided by the other departments that support that. The very largest reduction you will note is in the travel and ceremonial events that the Governor General is participating in at the request of DFAIT, which has gone from \$4.5 million to \$500,000. That's where a large chunk of that major reduction would be found.

The vote that was taken in the House to reduce \$417,000 in the last quarter of last year was accommodated in a number of ways, none of them easy. The communication activities for the promotion of the honours programs were reduced. An exhibit that had been planned and budgeted for Rideau Hall was cancelled.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I saw it and I read it, Mr. Alcock.

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock: The annual Rideau Hall winter celebration for parliamentarians and diplomatic corps, etc., was cancelled. The format of the Bravery and Order of Canada investiture—

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Mr. Alcock, I have the document and I read it. In the years to come, how will you succeed in doing the same exercise while continuing to honour people but in a different way? I believe that it could be done differently.

So let us start with this question: Can we do things differently, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock: Yes, and that's exactly what I've been saying to you. I think you may be confusing two things: the actions and response to the cut that was ordered by the House last year; then for this year and subsequent years, the ERC, which has been going into various activities and looking for ways to deliver them more efficiently. That's an ongoing and forward... Remember, they're carrying forward that entire reduction and continuing to do it.

There has not been...and if the committee wishes to say they should eliminate the Order of Canada and other things, this is something they will have to deal with. That was the question Mr. Preston asked: have you eliminated a program as opposed to looking at how you operate programs? No, and I said that in response to Mr. Preston.

What they have done—this is not with the \$417,000, not in the other departments, it's within the Governor General's own portfolio—is go through the format of the honours committees, limited hospitality, reduced promotion, and reduced cost of travel in order to accommodate that 5% operational reduction that was part of the ERC responsibility.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister and Madam Thibault.

Hon. Reg Alcock: They worked hard to do it.

The Chair: You have seven minutes, Mr. Boshcoff, and Mr. Martin will follow.

Mr. Boshcoff.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

When the cut first passed through the House of Commons, after being proposed here, the reaction to that non-availability of additional funds seemed to me to be rather strange. It was, well, in that case we will eliminate some pretty high-profile—and what we as Canadians would think of as fundamental—programs. Do you not think that response could have been handled better, to begin with?

Hon. Reg Alcock: This is a political debate. I participated in this debate in the House. I think the problem was created by that cut in the last quarter. It looks like a percentage cut over the whole budget; it looks small. When you cut in the last quarter, you don't have easy mechanisms to reduce things, other than discretionary or single-event items. There were a lot of angry feelings from people—not just from the Governor General's office, but from all over the place. Things were said that weren't helpful.

The reality is that a big chunk of your costs are staff. Even if you decided to lay them off, you wouldn't receive any savings in that last quarter. The savings you're going to receive are those things that you can literally cancel in a three-month period. So to achieve \$417,000 worth of savings, it's just the reality.

•(1610)

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: This may be one operation that doesn't necessarily have an auditor, comptroller, or systems like that. Who handles these kinds of functions? Who sets priorities and determines whether or not you're getting your best value for accommodations, travel, and those types of things? Does somebody provide oversight for that operation?

Hon. Reg Alcock: The Auditor General of Canada audits the Office of the Governor General.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: So of all the operations in the whole of the government, we should assume that this office is under scrutiny as tight as any other, because it comes directly from the Auditor General?

Hon. Reg Alcock: It would have the same scrutiny as any program overseen by the Auditor General, although there's a very interesting question here for us to talk about in my role as Treasury Board president.

I'll come back and do that another time.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Let me give you the example of two sets of advance people going to one municipality for one visit, as opposed to one person doing all the work. It shouldn't be a very onerous job—going around with the police chief, and some security people, and the hotel manager. When you see this, you wonder what kind of operation can afford to do this and whether it's really necessary.

We saw the European tour planned with a large entourage of advance people. Those of us who have to make our own bookings can understand the protocol, the security, even the need to be diplomatically correct. But we can also see many clear opportunities to cut costs without damaging any of the core operations.

Hon. Reg Alcock: That's a legitimate observation. This is a management issue. With all government organizations—not just the Governor General's, but the Auditor General's as well—we've said, look at your portfolio. We've advised them to set a target of

examining about 5% of their operation, to analyze it in that context every single year, and to challenge themselves constantly to see if there are ways to do certain things better.

The only difference between what you have said and what I would argue is this: we tell them to reduce their expenditures, but we don't tell them how. We don't say, stop that person from going on that pre-site visit. We say, you go in and look, and you find what you need to do.

Since we started this process, the Governor General's office has gone in and looked at the format of their honours investiture ceremonies and said, oh, if we did it this way instead of that way, we could actually reduce overtime and save money. Through that kind of exercise, they've saved....

It shows here in the ERC as \$300,000. But look at your own office budget. The costs you're paying have gone up this year over last year. The staff were awarded a salary increase. They've accommodated all that within this envelope. They accommodated all that additional expense and actually reduced their expenditures by some \$400,000. I think it's quite an impressive accomplishment, frankly.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Let's look at the managerial aspects of this. If the Governor General's office gets, say, 1,000 or 5,000 requests a year for appearances, does the budget determine how many will be responded to, or are they all responded to and the budget adjusted to accommodate the need in the supplemental requests?

•(1615)

Hon. Reg Alcock: Oh, no. Let me divide this piece into two parts, because I think there's an additional aspect to the previous question, which JoAnn will deal with in a minute.

There's a certain predictability to some of the programs. You know roughly how many visitors you're going to get in a year, and if the numbers go up substantially, then you'll want to increase in that area. Take an example of a state funeral or something, where there are additional unexpected costs—and that's where you see this table that shows costs incurred by the departments—if Foreign Affairs or Defence asks the Governor General to go some place to represent them at some event, then they would incur those additional costs. That's why we put together that overview table, to try to capture that.

Did I miss something on that other...?

Ms. JoAnn MacKenzie (Director General, Corporate Services, Office of the Governor General): I will go back and clarify, if I may, the reference to sending out two advance teams. In that particular case—and it is very much for that particular event—that trip undertaken by the Governor General involved four communities. Some of the events along the way had changed, so it was very necessary for us to send out another team, but it is not typical at all of the way we do business.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: That is reassuring.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boshcoff. Your time is up.

We will now have Mr. Martin, for seven minutes, followed by Mr. Lauzon, and then I'll get Mr. Szabo a couple of questions, and Mr. Godbout a question or two. We're going to have to move it along.

Mr. Martin, go ahead, please.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be brief.

Thank you, Minister, and other witnesses, for being here.

I first want to say that I'm very grateful for how detailed and comprehensive this breakdown is. Part of the irritation we have felt in trying to learn the whole cost of operating the Office of the Governor General has been that it's like pulling teeth. Even though we were commenting on the budget of the office, it was very difficult to find everything laid out in this way, so I do find that really useful.

But I would also say that it's not quite true to say the budget has gone up from \$13.7 million to \$19.2 million. If we go back to the office of the previous Governor General, the final year of the previous Governor General's term was still \$11.5 million.

Hon. Reg Alcock: I have it at \$11.7 million.

Mr. Pat Martin: Excuse me, it was \$11.7 million to \$19.2 million. I believe, Minister, you said \$13.7 million as the first year of the—

Hon. Reg Alcock: Yes, I did go from the 2001—

Mr. Pat Martin: Yes. So that's roughly an increase of 40%.

Now, we know the agonizing process undertaken to roll back the Governor General's spending by 2%, by \$417,000. What was the process by which the spending incrementally increased by 40% in a period of time? When every other government department and institution was being cut and hacked and slashed and gutted, this institution was incrementally creeping up year to year to year, 40% in the same period of time. How did that happen? Did they just start spending more money? Did they come to Treasury Board and say, "I want more money"? Certainly no oversight committee was ever engaged in commenting on these increases.

How did you let that get past you?

Hon. Reg Alcock: Mr. Martin, there are two aspects to this question. I think your question about what occurred in each one of those years would require a level of detail that would probably take more time than your question.... Why don't we undertake to provide you or the committee with a note on that? It's easy to track back and say, this year this happened and that happened. Let's undertake to do that.

Mr. Pat Martin: Right. Obviously it went up incrementally. It didn't snap from \$13.7 million to \$19.2 million.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Exactly. I suspect we'll find that there were specific decisions taken along the way.

You ask another question, though, that I think is an important one. If you recall when we did the investigation of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, we asked the Auditor General why she didn't catch that, since she was the auditor of record. Her response was that it was below the level of materiality. She wasn't being fancy. She said the reality is that government has \$180 billion. We had these little units of \$10 million or \$15 million, and we just have not had the systems in place that are rigorous enough to capture that and provide those controls. That's exactly what we're trying to do now.

Mr. Pat Martin: I can understand that.

Hon. Reg Alcock: You're right, I don't think this received the kind of scrutiny that perhaps it should have.

• (1620)

Mr. Pat Martin: No, because we almost fell off our chairs when we saw 40% compared to everything else being cut back.

Does the Governor General pay income tax on her \$114,000?

Hon. Reg Alcock: No, she doesn't.

Mr. Pat Martin: This is one thing that the royal family did to try to save their skins in Great Britain. They voluntarily agreed to start that.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Mr. Martin, the royal family does indeed own considerably greater property and has considerably greater wealth—

Mr. Pat Martin: I understand. I'm only asking a simple question and I'm glad to get such a forthright answer.

You started with an interesting point of history that went back to Cromwell's time, when the Crown was barred from entering Parliament or the House of Commons. Taking that to the inverse, is it also true that the Governor General is not supposed to leave the country without being in the company of a minister so that there can be no doubt who is representing the country of Canada when she travels internationally?

I'm almost out of time, so a simple yes or no.

Ms. JoAnn MacKenzie: Typically when she's travelling, yes, she does.

Hon. Reg Alcock: "Typically" was her comment. If they're travelling at the request of the government to represent the government, yes.

Mr. Pat Martin: We're often told that the foreign affairs department needs the Governor General to make trips because the ministers are so busy. They can't go on all these trips, so we dispatch the Governor General off on a circumpolar tour, etc. If a minister has to go anyway, isn't that argument a little bit.... Why do we need her at all to go along if the minister is already taking this tour abroad?

Hon. Reg Alcock: Well, it may be something that we are not as okay with now, given the way we see the world today, but in fact the Governor General is the head of state, and often heads of states go to meet with heads of states, because other heads of state will not necessarily meet with a minister, for protocol reasons.

Mr. Pat Martin: We're being careful to make sure that she is not representing the Government of Canada by taking a minister along with her.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Yes.

Mr. Pat Martin: Well, I'm not...maybe I'll just leave that there.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Why don't we ask Foreign Affairs Canada to provide a more detailed response?

Mr. Pat Martin: It's an interesting Foreign Affairs question.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Actually, I'd like to know myself.

Mr. Pat Martin: All right, fair enough. I can appreciate that then.

Do I have any time left?

The Chair: You have one minute, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: I would simply say that your comment was that the Governor General's budget grew because this Governor General truly reached out to Canada, and I don't deny that. I like the work she did in the north. I think it was wonderful, a real commitment to northern Canada, etc.

My question would be, who asked her to go? Can the Governor General of Canada, be it anyone, simply wake up with a notion one day and say, "I think I'm going to really get to know Inuit people and get Inuit people to know us", and embark on a whole new program that may cost \$1 million, or whatever? Do they have that kind of latitude? Is it that easy?

Hon. Reg Alcock: I'm going to take a stab at this, because I don't have the precise answer. I'm going to suggest it's this way. Each Governor General is asked to define the areas in which they wish to focus, and should they wish to take on activities that incur greater cost, they would come back to the government and request the funds, and the funds would be either granted or denied. So the control would always be with the representative of the taxpayer to do it.

Mr. Pat Martin: That sort of answers my first question as to how these budgets increase.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Exactly, and that's why I'm saying I suspect when we go through these increases in detail, we'll find that there are a number of those kinds of decisions there—and we'll get that information for you.

Mr. Pat Martin: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Lauzon, and possibly Mr. Poilievre, if he's left a little time.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to all, especially the president of Treasury Board.

Since I have only four minutes, I'll try to speak quickly.

I represent the riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, and when I'm out talking to my constituents, the issue that comes up the most is the Governor General's expenditures. I've represented that county for nine months, and that has been the issue. It's up there with same-sex marriage and the sponsorship scandal, as we speak.

As you mentioned, Mr. Alcock, I was in management with the public service. We always had to make cuts in the last quarter of the year, but we didn't cut out client service. That was the last thing we cut out.

Now, the Governor General, when she was asked to make those cuts, cancelled outreach programs to encourage Canadians to nominate their fellow citizens; research and preparatory work on a Rideau Hall educational exhibition; public winter celebrations; professional training courses for staff; and adjustments to the format of bravery awards and the Order of Canada. That's not the kind of thing that resonates with the Canadian public, and it just goes against what we're trying to do.

I notice in your projections for 2005-06 that we're going to increase from 180 person-years to 185, and all five of those are in administration. Why would we not...? It's pretty hard for me to explain to the people in my riding who are on minimum wage, making less than \$300 a week, that the Governor General has 180 staff, but it's going to go up to 185 staff.

We have to get this right. We believe in the Governor General, but let's be reasonable. We have people out there paying too much tax, or having problems making ends meet.

How do I answer my constituents about this? I'm really at wit's end, to be honest with you.

● (1625)

Hon. Reg Alcock: We're just trying to reference this number...

Mr. Guy Lauzon: You're going from 180 person-years to, this year, 185.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Yes, I understand.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: And they're all in administration.

The Chair: Mr. Szabo, order, please. You'll have your chance.

Please continue, Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: They're all in administration. I mean, you don't put service in administration.

Ms. JoAnn MacKenzie: I'm going to address this by first of all saying that I think that was a catch in our planning summary document, that we were really preparing on the fly.

That is a planned amount, and we have not—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Why would you put it in administration? What about client service?

Ms. JoAnn MacKenzie: But it has.... Please hear me out.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: We're not letting kids skate on the rink of the Governor General's residence, and we're putting—

Ms. JoAnn MacKenzie: No, sir, we did not cancel that event. The reference to activities that were going to be cancelled came out at the beginning, when we first heard about the cuts and thought about how we might have to carry out our reductions. In the end, we did not have to carry out the reductions in that way. And we've already spoken to that.

With regard to the planned increase, I would say that I would have to go back and visit that. I think these are projected increases that have not been vetted yet.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: You would make my job so much easier if, first of all, you wouldn't have.... And if you would reduce by at least by five person-years, it would be a heck of a lot easier for me to explain to my constituents.

Ms. JoAnn MacKenzie: I suspect it will be a straight line, sir.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: A reduction would be even more favourable.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Yes, but you know, we should staff to the levels we need in order to deliver the product we need to deliver.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: But not in administration, sir.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Yes in administration, Mr. Lauzon, yes in administration, right throughout this government. Frankly, we've cut administrative capacity so badly that we've ended up in the kinds of situations we're already concerned about.

In fact, one of the things we're going to be doing—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: It took 41 FTEs to do your administration last year, and this year it's going to take 46? That doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense.

Hon. Reg Alcock: —is providing a little bit of internal audit now so we can provide some levels of control.

So I'm sorry, I simply reject this sense that we cut administration. We've done that for two decades, and we've hurt the work of the federal Government of Canada—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: You used 41 person-years last year, and you need 46.

Hon. Reg Alcock: —because we haven't provided for the proper administrative controls. We are going to fix that. This sense that you should just cut it willy-nilly is just completely irresponsible.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre, you can use two minutes.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): What I find irresponsible—

Hon. Reg Alcock: “Completely” irresponsible.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: —is that the minister came before this committee two days ago and said that his government's decision to move the Tourism Commission out to the west coast was not politically motivated.

I have a quote here from his industry minister, who said, on February 24: “Well, for me it's a done deal because politically I have to deliver it or I'm toast, and you can quote me on that”. Well, I just did. Is he lying?

Hon. Reg Alcock: I'm sorry, we're discussing the portfolio for the Governor General—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Can you answer the question?

The Chair: Mr. Minister, as you know, when a minister is here before a committee, great latitude in questioning is allowed. That's traditional, I would say.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: And you have great latitude in answering it, which you're not exercising.

Hon. Reg Alcock: I'm prepared to talk about that. It was the Minister of Industry, you said?

• (1630)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: That's right.

Hon. Reg Alcock: That's Minister Emerson, the Minister of Industry for the Government of Canada. He's from the province of British Columbia, and has long been an advocate for his province. He has picked up on a policy decision that was made by the Prime Minister of this country in response to the recognition that British Columbia has a very active and strong presence in tourism. He believes the resources of the Government of Canada can be delivered from any point in Canada, particularly in an environment or at the time in the development of this country when we have the tools that allow us to provide services from almost anywhere in the country.

Now I'd like to answer the question but—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, can I get in? He's clearly not answering the question.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: The other day you said this was not a political decision. You said it was a business decision. You said it was based on serving the public, when in fact your own minister said, “politically I have to deliver it or I'm toast”. In fact it wasn't a business decision; it wasn't about serving the public; it was about delivering the pork to your political ministers, wasn't it?

The Chair: Make it a very short answer, please.

Hon. Reg Alcock: It's difficult to give a short answer to a complex question. I might give an incorrect answer, and you certainly wouldn't want that, Mr. Benoit. Frankly, you've asked me to be as detailed and forthright as I can on these important public questions.

The fact is the minister was responding to—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Was your minister lying?

Hon. Reg Alcock: Mr. Benoit, would you like me to answer the question?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Thank you.

The Minister of Industry is not the minister responsible. He was responding to a policy decision that was made by the Prime Minister and the government. His local reactions...his local politics is something he would know better than I and have to manage. The decision was not taken by the minister, but by the government.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister, and Mr. Poilievre.

We'll split the next five minutes between the two Liberal members.

Mr. Szabo, go ahead.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Thank you.

Just on Mr. Lauzon's point, I note that the number of information management personnel is going from 11 to 15, but the actual personnel costs are only going up by \$4,000, even though there are four more people. So you have to look at both. It may very well be that you're getting a turnover of high-paid personnel, etc., and getting better value from trainees, interns, and whatever.

We are going to have a new Governor General, I understand, maybe in October. On the Governor General prior to the current one, I'm not sure I remember what his objective was, but I do know he was quite ill during his last couple of years, and that probably impacted on the dollars spent. So I'd like to make sure we normalize the fact that we had an unusual circumstance.

But it raises the question that if we get a new Governor General in October and they don't have the same vision of travelling in Canada, I would expect a pretty substantial change in this budget if they want to spend more time here and have people come to them, as it were.

Is there variability in the Governor General's operating expenses that would reflect a difference in philosophy?

Hon. Reg Alcock: You have to think about that in two ways. On the core budget, there will still be 200,000 people visiting, and there will still be honour ceremonies that will be operated, and all that sort of thing. So that level of activity will be maintained, and it will incrementally grow in alignment with other cost increases. But should the next Governor General take a different approach to some of the outreach activities, I think you would expect a decrease.

Mr. Paul Szabo: As to my only other question, I think it's important for all of us to understand who decides what our Governor General's functionality should be, at least as a core function. I understand there's some variability, but there are certain things that should happen. There are certain degrees. For instance, when they travel there has to be certain security, and a number of different things. They have to stay in the best accommodations, reflective of their diplomatic status.

Has anybody figured out what a Governor General would actually cost who did nothing but the absolutely basic functions, so we could get an idea of the variability in cost of a GG, depending on their outlook as to how they would serve in that role?

• (1635)

Hon. Reg Alcock: I don't know, Mr. Szabo, if there is a generic model for a Governor General. I don't know that there's a quick or easy answer to that.

It would be the same for some of the other cost items we've had, as you will know from other conversations we've had. For instance, it would be the same thing for the Prime Minister—mainly those two, I don't know about the Supreme Court justice. Where the RCMP are involved in providing security, they won't even release the exact extent of that. They'll give you the *grosso modo* number, but exactly how it gets applied in sections or something they won't talk about for security reasons. The Governor General exercises no discretion over that. This is a decision that's made by the security forces in response to their assessment of threat.

It's an interesting question academically, but it would take some work. There are constitutional responsibilities. For example, if there's no Speech from the Throne, there's reduction in activity in that particular area, because there's a great ceremonial response to that. In the year when we don't have one it would be less.

The level of international activity, as you see from this chart, puts a fair degree of cost for some of the reasons you mentioned, the style and accommodation of others travelling with. The Governor General, I think, also carries a bit of an additional weight in this sense: We're going to send veterans to a particular memorial ceremony, and the veterans are going to go whether the Governor General goes or not. If she rides on the plane, is it her activity or is it the veterans' activity? But it gets put against her salary.

There are some elements of this that I think one needs to examine.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Chairman, what I'd like to recommend then is that the next time we have a visit I would like to receive, and I think all members would like to receive, an analysis or summary of the activities that are going to happen and those that would happen in the prior year, which will help us to understand how we would expect the numbers to move.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Some of that would depend on who the new Governor General is. Yes, I think in the same way, I think Mr. Martin made a very legitimate request for knowing what constitutes these out-of-scope increases. I suspect if the increases, Mr. Martin, were within the range of salary increments, you wouldn't be asking the question. When you see variances that move outside of that, I think it's incumbent upon us to supply the information.

The Chair: Thank you.

I know the time is up, but Mr. Godbout wants a short time for a couple of questions. Maybe we could allow that, and then we'll end the session.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Would Mr. Sauvageau have a question...? Okay. Mr. Sauvageau is expressing his deep support for the Governor General.

The Chair: Mr. Godbout, a minute or two, please.

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Thank you for the documentation. I think that horizontal picture is starting to answer questions we had. I think Mr. Martin mentioned that, and I agree. Coming back to the travel aspects, because I know that was questioned in my riding too, many of these functions are either billed or paid by National Defence or Foreign Affairs. When the Governor General travels outside the country, under which guidelines would she follow? If it's a Foreign Affairs trip, would that be under Foreign Affairs guidelines? I'm a bit preoccupied by what we referred to as the entourage that's been criticized in the past. How can we address that specific issue?

Hon. Reg Alcock: I think the issue has been addressed, frankly, through the concerns that were raised, actually, by Canadians of what they perceived to be a style that was outside of what they would expect, and through the work of this committee in questioning that.

I think normally when the Governor General travels, certainly the style of accommodation would be fitting for a head of state. I think other members of the entourage would be determined by the needs of that particular trip: taking veterans over to commemorate a particular event; or, as was done in a couple of those very trips that were criticized, taking parliamentarians. It was a group of special Canadians that included....

All I'm saying is that I think the rigour that this committee has brought to this has been helpful in focusing people's minds on these questions, and I think the Governor General and her office should be commended for taking it very seriously.

I want to say, Mr. Martin, I very much appreciate your comments, because the office has worked hard to be as forthcoming as they can in providing information to you that allows you to get the answers to your questions.

Mr. Preston, we will get that information to you that we have endeavoured to do.

• (1640)

The Chair: I have one final short question.

Mr. Marc Godbout: The committee is appreciative that you take the time to come and see us, because the only oversight is the Auditor General. The problem is that the Auditor General does her job after the fact. Basically, budget-wise, we seem to be the committee that could possibly do something about over-expenditure. Because of the process, this committee doesn't have any choice, Mr. Chair, but to do so. I'd like the Governor General to understand that. It's not necessarily that we're nitpicking on small items, but there are concerns there and I think this is the only place, unless I'm wrong, where they can be raised.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Mr. Godbout, I want to assure you and make this point. Despite the unique nature of this office, the Governor General is not required to apply some of the internal operational controls and planning modules, etc., that other departments are. They are doing exactly that. They are acting as though those do apply to them. With the issue of RPPs and DPRs, because they don't have a requirement there, they've taken the step of actually creating an annual report, which will be tabled and made available on their website on May 16.

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much, everyone.

Hon. Reg Alcock: It's always nice to represent good work.

The Chair: Mr. Minister, we look forward to the information that you have agreed to supply. We look forward to the report in May. We will examine that and do appreciate you all coming today. Thank you very much.

We'll suspend for just a couple of minutes while we—

Hon. Reg Alcock: Mr. Chairman, if I may simply thank the committee members?

The Chair: Mr. Minister, one final, short comment.

Hon. Reg Alcock: I want to commend this committee, as I have every time I've come here, for taking the time and paying attention. This is incredibly important work. You've set a model for the rest of the House. It's important that we do this.

I would like to point out that all this fine work was done by administrators, Mr. Lauzon. Thank you.

The Chair: We'll suspend.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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