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Wednesday, February 13, 2008

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Chair

Mr. Rob Merrifield

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC)): I'll call the meeting to order. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are following up on the creation of a parliamentary budget officer, as provided for in the Federal Accountability Act.

We have with us, from the Library of Parliament, Mr. William R. Young, the parliamentary librarian. You have with you some other guests, whom I would ask you to introduce to the committee. With that, we await your presentation.

First of all, though, I want to apologize, as I know you didn't have a lot of time to prepare. Nonetheless, you're here, and that's great. We appreciate your being here. We have you for our first hour and will open the floor to your presentation to the committee, and then follow it up with a round of questioning.

With that, the floor is yours, sir.

Mr. William R. Young (Parliamentary Librarian, Library of Parliament): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to meet with the committee today and to provide you with a status report on our efforts to establish a parliamentary budget officer within the Library of Parliament.

[Translation]

I have invited Jacques Sabourin, Acting Director General, Parliamentary Information and Research Service,

[English]

and Allan Darling, special advisor on the parliamentary budget officer. I will tell you that Allan was a former deputy secretary to cabinet, deputy secretary of the Treasury Board, and, most recently, he has been working with the World Bank in advising developing nations on their budgetary and fiscal requirements.

We're here today to listen to your advice and recommendations regarding the organization and work of the PBO, and my colleagues will help me answer any questions you may have.

[Translation]

In my efforts to establish the parliamentary budget officer, I have tried to be consistent in following four guiding principles:

1) To implement the law as set out in the Parliament of Canada Act;

2) To provide the non-partisan service to parliamentarians that has been, and continues to be, the hallmark of the Library of Parliament for over 130 years;

3) To strengthen Parliament's institutional capacity to hold government to account—in this case, by giving Parliament access to additional expertise on economic and fiscal issues;

4) To ensure that parliamentarians continue to receive the best possible service from the whole Library.

[English]

It is important to note, above all, that our efforts have been guided by the legislation and our mandate to establish an office that is independent and non-partisan, providing services to both Houses and all parties.

You are all aware that the Library of Parliament plays a unique role in the provision of professional, non-partisan services to members of the House and to senators, and in support of your work. As this work evolves and adapts to change, the library must also evolve if it is to meet its overarching commitment to effectively serve Parliament and you, its clients.

Part of the library's evolution must be integrating the PBO within the organization to provide enhanced advice and analysis on the state of the economy, the nation's finances, and the expenditures of government. Locating the officer within the Library of Parliament means that members of the House and senators can rest assured that the officer will function as their servant, operating within the library's mandated approach and professional ethos in its service to Parliament.

Appointing the officer and creating this capacity allows the library to build on the strong foundations of expertise we already have in place. It avoids duplication of effort or resources and provides generally for economies of scale wherever possible. In short, it provides us with an opportunity to strengthen our services to you.

[Translation]

While some of the functions associated with the officer will enhance the library's ability to do what it already does, there is an important new element—one that provides Parliament with a new dimension and value-added in exercising fully its role in overseeing the government's fiscal plan.

As you know, this means explaining the assumptions underlying that plan and assisting parliamentarians in asking relevant questions relating to the executive's economic and fiscal forecasts.

[English]

I do not think the PBO should provide an alternative fiscal forecast to the one produced by the Department of Finance. Several reputable Canadian forecasting firms already do this, and adding yet another forecast would not improve service to parliamentarians.

I foresee the PBO taking a lead role with parliamentarians to provide a much more strategic approach that would enhance parliamentarian's understanding of the underlying factors affecting fiscal forecasting and the reasons the executive is moving in a particular direction.

I anticipate that the work of the PBO would focus on higher-level analysis that would improve parliamentarians' understanding of alternative public policy options that might influence future government expenditures.

• (1540)

[Translation]

Members are aware of the assistance already provided by the research branch staff during your review of the expenditure estimates tabled by the government. I anticipate the PBO will provide leadership in developing initiatives to tailor the presentation of information on proposed expenditures to better reflect the specific interests of parliamentarians.

Costing proposals of interest to parliamentarians is another role currently performed by the library's research services. With the additional resources available to the PBO, I would anticipate a significant improvement in the transparency and credibility in this area.

[English]

When the PBO function was included in the Parliament of Canada Act, the Treasury Board provided for an annual budget to support the officer, and this currently sits at \$2.7 million. Like any new operation, the PBO requires phasing in, and the library's estimates for 2008-09 include \$1.6 million of the total allocation for the initial implementation of these new services to Parliament.

Under the leadership of the officer we foresee building capacity in two distinct areas. First is an economic and fiscal analysis capacity that will be staffed by experts in economic modelling and fiscal forecasting. This will enable parliamentarians to obtain access to independent analysis of the state of the economy.

The second capacity, expenditure analysis, will provide broader expertise on the government's expenditure program. This will be integrated into our current work for all parliamentary committees and the staff resources that are currently allocated to them. Individual requests from parliamentarians or committees for costing proposals or costing of legislation will be prepared by the PBO, again in cooperation with our current research services staff.

The amended Parliament of Canada Act, subsection 79.1(3), provides that the Governor in Council may select the parliamentary budget officer from a list of three names submitted in confidence by a high level committee formed and chaired by the parliamentary librarian through the leader of the government in the House of Commons.

[Translation]

Based on the interpretation of the PBO mandate and the approach to implementing it that I have outlined for you, a job description for the officer was forwarded for approval and classification to the Privy Council Office in December 2006.

I convened a discussion group in January 2007, whose members were nominated by the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians and represented all parties in both Houses. They assisted greatly in defining the skills and experience that candidates should possess to serve Parliament well and interact effectively with parliamentarians.

[English]

In late July 2007, I received notification that the position had been classified as a GCO-5. This classification is roughly equivalent to an EX-3, normally a director general level in the public service.

Following a competitive bidding process, the library contracted with the executive search firm Ray & Berndtson on August 28, 2007. Led by their senior Ottawa partner, Michelle Richard, they conducted an exhaustive national search process for qualified candidates.

On November 30, 2007, I convened a blue ribbon selection panel committee, which was composed of Maria Barrados, the president of the Public Service Commission; Don Drummond, the senior vice-president and chief economist of the TD Bank; William G. Knight, former commissioner, Financial Consumer Agency of Canada and a nominee of the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians; and Allan Darling, with me here today, who is my special adviser on the PBO project.

As required by the statute, the selection committee reviewed eight of the 24 candidates who had been identified through the preliminary search process. At that time, the committee identified an additional six candidates to be approached for the position. The committee held interviews on December 20, 2007, and on its behalf I forwarded the committee's recommendations to the government House leader on December 21, 2007.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Throughout this process, I have benefited greatly from the comments and advice of the Honourable Peter Milliken, Speaker of the House of Commons, and the Honourable Noël Kinsella, Speaker of the Senate. As you know, they are jointly responsible for the operations of the Library of Parliament under my direction and therefore ultimately for the PBO.

[English]

Your invitation to appear before the committee obviously is a timely one. Selection of the PBO is a decision of the government, and I am currently waiting for the decision.

Thank you. We'd be happy to respond to any questions the committee may have.

I have two additional documents that I would like to have distributed, please. The first is a chronology of planning and implementation activities undertaken by the library to help highlight the steps that we have taken to fulfill our mandate, and the second is a report prepared for me by Ray & Berndtson on the recruitment process for the parliamentary budget officer.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

We will now start our round of questioning. I've had a request to go to five minutes rather than seven minutes on the first round. I seek the committee's will on that.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I hear consensus, so we'll start with Mr. Pacetti. The floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Young, for coming forward. I don't know if we'll have enough time, because it looks like we're probably going to want to get our opinions in and also ask questions. I'm going to try to do a little bit of both.

First of all, we had requested that everybody appear at the same time, and you're here, I think, because you didn't want to be at the same table. So I have a problem with the structure in terms of my interpretation or my understanding that this was going to be an independent parliamentary budgetary office, and I think the word "independent" is missing. That's where I'm having a little bit of difficulty.

Can you help me out on that? Is it supposed to be independent? Is the Library of Parliament not an independent entity and that is why you were uncomfortable sitting at the table with the Finance officials?

Mr. William R. Young: The Library of Parliament reports through the Speaker. It's a parliamentary body. The others report through the executive. They're governmental bodies. As an officer of Parliament, it's more appropriate that I appear on my own. It's not a question of not wanting to do anything.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: The reason I'm getting to that is because you want the parliamentary office to be the sole reporting entity, yet you don't want it to be independent.

Mr. William R. Young: It is independent within the library. The library is an independent institution. The library serves members of Parliament from all parties and in both chambers.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: But the Finance officials or the government does not react in that way. It does have to react on a partisan level at certain times. Do we not need information that is non-partisan?

Mr. William R. Young: That's the purpose of the library. We function basically on the same basis as the Clerk of the House of Commons and the Clerk of the Senate, to serve you.

June, who is sitting up at the front of the table, and Alexandre work for the Library of Parliament to provide you with advice in your functions as members of the finance committee. That's the overall aim and role of the Library of Parliament. We do not report to

the government. We are an independent organization designed to help parliamentarians do their job.

• (1550)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: You say here:

I do not think that the PBO should provide an alternative fiscal forecast to the one produced by the Department of Finance.

Mr. William R. Young: Should not.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Should not.

Then do you want the parliamentary budget office to be part of Finance?

Mr. William R. Young: No. What I'm saying is that we should not necessarily build the capacity within the library, because there are forecasting firms that already do this. So what we were going to do was independently contract with the forecasting firms once the officer is in place and the requirement has been determined about the nature of the forecasting. There are different ways of doing this. One would be to contract on a longer-term basis with one firm and another might be to contract with several firms to provide information and data on the areas in which they have expertise.

Allan, do you have anything—

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: I don't mean to interrupt, because our time is limited, but I'm trying to understand the way you envision it.

I want to get my two cents in here too, because when I was chairing the committee we did a lot of work on this. I felt that the independent budgetary experts or consultants were actually quite useful, and they had certain information or a certain take on things that the Finance officials or maybe even the Library of Parliament wouldn't otherwise have. I believe what you just said is the correct approach, so I would have somebody or a group of people involved with the library, but the library should also have a certain amount of budget to contract independent forecasters who have the expertise and are already doing that type of work. That's the way I envision it.

What I still don't understand is how your relationship is...the Library of Parliament and the Finance officials.

Mr. William R. Young: We're independent of the Finance officials.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: No, but how do you envision the parliamentary budget office, the relationship? Because, again, and I'm quoting from your paper:

I do not think that the PBO should provide an alternative fiscal forecast to the one produced by the Department of Finance.

Mr. William R. Young: I'm going to let Allan explain this.

The Chair: We'll allow his answer and then the time will be gone.

Go ahead.

Mr. Allan Darling (Senior Special Advisor, Parliamentary Budget Officer Project, Library of Parliament): Very briefly, the conceptual thinking is that there are many people and many government agencies, including the Bank of Canada and the Department of Finance, who already provide Parliament with fiscal forecasts and the state of the economy. The conception that we have tried to develop, in defining how the PBO should approach the role, is to work at explaining to parliamentarians the underlying assumptions that form the basis for those positions and to point out, in their own view and based on their own independent analysis of the economy, where there are areas that parliamentarians should probe in order to understand better whether there's an alternative interpretation that could be put on the forward projections that are contained in the fiscal documents of the government.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Crête, five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, everyone.

Mr. Young, your presentation contains the following statement:

Your invitation to appear before the committee obviously is a timely one. Selection of the PBO is a decision of the government and I am currently waiting for the decision.

Am I right in thinking that you would welcome a motion from the committee asking that the government appoint this person as quickly as possible so that he or she can be involved in the entire budget process we are heading into and that, given the possibility of an election in the near future, you would like to see this person appointed before that happens?

Mr. William R. Young: I submitted my recommendations to the leader of the government in the House of Commons. That is as far as my responsibility goes. I am waiting, just like you are. That said, if you want to adopt a motion, you can take the initiative and do that.

Mr. Paul Crête: The budget will be tabled on February 26, and the new budget cycle will begin the next day. Do you feel that it would be important for the person to be appointed before the new budget cycle begins? Would that be a proactive and positive decision in your view?

Mr. William R. Young: Yes, if possible. Of course, the role of the Parliamentary Budget Officer is to help you, either by answering your questions or doing analyses for you.

● (1555)

Mr. Paul Crête: Although the officer has not yet been appointed, your document indicates that \$2.7 million has already been set aside in the budget for this purpose. There is probably work already being done.

Could you tell us whether you have examined the validity of the current numbers that the government has made public? For example, in his economic statement last November, the Minister of Finance announced a surplus of approximately \$10.3 billion for this year. Did you verify those numbers, even though the officer has not yet been appointed?

Mr. William R. Young: We already have a division staffed by economists. However, I do not have access to that money right now: the funding is earmarked for next year. We will continue to offer services through our economists and the division.

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Darling or Mr. Sabourin...

Mr. Jacques Sabourin (Acting Director General, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament): To try to answer your question very specifically, I can tell you that no analysis of the type that you are describing has been done for the moment because we do not have the necessary resources. At this point, the resources allocated to committees and individual MP requests are fully mobilized. Moreover, we are not in a position to access data as specialized as what would be available to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. In short, we have not yet begun that type of analysis.

Mr. Paul Crête: Are you confirming to us that if the officer's appointment is considerably delayed, there is a risk that he or she may not really be ready from an operational standpoint to carry out this research even in the upcoming fiscal year? In view of the budget cycle, it would be important for the appointment to take place quickly. Is that right?

Mr. Jacques Sabourin: I think that Mr. Young has answered that question. However, I do not believe that this function can be completely operational within six, seven or eight weeks.

Mr. Paul Crête: Under its current mandate or as part of its preparation for the Parliamentary Budget Officer position, has the Library of Parliament produced any documents that can be made available on the question that I asked, which is the comparison between the government's forecasts and the results of your analysis?

Mr. Jacques Sabourin: To my knowledge, there are no such documents. However, members of Parliament may have made individual requests for analyses of that type from our Parliamentary Information and Research Service. But as you know, these analyses are confidential and are provided only to the member making the request, unless he or she formally agrees to share them.

Mr. Paul Crête: As part of the new officer's duties, will information of this type not be made public and provided to all members?

Mr. Jacques Sabourin: It will depend on the requests that come to us from the committees and the members themselves, I think.

Mr. Paul Crête: Can you take the initiative of saying that the new officer will inform members, by way of general information, halfway through the year of what the surplus is likely to be, for example? In past years, the federal government has systematically underestimated the surplus. This is no secret; it is a proven fact.

Mr. William R. Young: My short answer is that, in my opinion, this is the reason that the PBO position was created.

Mr. Jacques Sabourin: Under the legislation that was passed, the PBO will have much greater access to departmental data than is the case right now. The act is very specific on that.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Monsieur Crête.

We'll now move on to Mr. Del Mastro for five minutes.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Young, I just noted that at the end of your comments you said, "Your invitation to appear before the Committee obviously is a timely one. Selection of the PBO is a decision of the government and I am currently waiting for the decision." That's contrary to my understanding of how the position would be established. My understanding is that this isn't a finance department function and it's not a government function; it's a function independent of the library to put someone in place.

I guess, obviously, the first question I have, and I think it's a relevant question, and I'm not looking to come down on you, is why this is taking so long. I'm looking at the timeline. You indicate in March 2006 that the discussions had started, so it was imminent that this would happen. We had royal assent of the Federal Accountability Act on December 12, 2006. That's 14 months ago.

We sit today with this position not filled. I think that's the relevant question. I have looked at the timing you presented with respect to who you brought in to consider. You brought a search firm in on August 28, 2007, and on November 30, 2007, there was a blue ribbon selection committee composed. But again, that's almost a year after the act received royal assent. Could we have moved a little quicker on this?

• (1600)

Mr. William R. Young: The act received royal assent on, I believe December 10 or December 12. I submitted a job description to the Privy Council Office, which is responsible for classifying this position, 10 days later. At the time I was told I was either the first or second person affected by the Federal Accountability Act to have submitted the job description. I waited until sometime in July, approximately seven months later, to receive word from the Privy Council Office about the level at which this job would be classified.

You have to understand, Mr. Chair, that this is a Governor in Council appointment. It is not my appointment. It is one that is made by the Governor in Council, and at this point the recommending minister is the leader of the government in the House of Commons.

My obligation under the act was to launch the search process. That was done through a bidding process. I received the classification sometime at the beginning of or in mid-July. I had to launch a bidding process for an executive search firm. That firm was in place at the end of August. It took them a little while. The national advertising campaign ads were in *The Globe and Mail* and *La Presse* on, I believe, September 24. In the meantime, they began canvassing people. I believe they spoke to well over 400 individuals in terms of looking for candidates for this position.

So as far as I'm concerned, I moved as expeditiously as one could possibly move in expediting this process.

The other thing I think that I was always aware of is that this is a new function. There isn't one like it in the Westminster system of government in any of the countries that follow the same model of government we do, and I was very careful to try to make sure that as a new function, it would work within that system.

Allan Darling may have other comments to make, but basically the delay is because of the seven-month wait.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Okay.

Just for clarification, is it therefore your position that you are going to put forward a name for a Governor in Council selection?

Mr. William R. Young: That was all done in December.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: So that has been done. You have put forward a suggested name for the Governor in Council appointment.

Mr. William R. Young: That was all done in December. The selection committee put forward its recommendations to the government House leader before Parliament adjourned in December.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move on to Monsieur Mulcair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I've listened carefully to what Mr. Young said about the British type of parliamentary system, which he calls the "Westminster system." I am curious to know whether he thinks this PBO position is a difficult fit with the British-style system.

Mr. William R. Young: I believe that it will improve the services provided to parliamentarians. It is an essential new tool available to you to get information. It will give you access to strategic advice relating to your work on the Standing Committee on Finance, for example.

• (1605)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Could you be so kind as to be more explicit about the challenges involved in integrating such a position into a British-style system?

Mr. William R. Young: I will give the floor to Mr. Darling, who has looked into this issue.

[*English*]

Mr. Allan Darling: If I may speak in English, it would be easier for me to explain the concepts.

Essentially, the role of the Library of Parliament is to provide as sound an analytical framework as possible, in response to the needs of parliamentarians to understand the proposals and representations brought before Parliament by the government.

In terms of the parliamentary budget officer, this position represents a capacity to improve the economic analysis or understanding of the forces in the economy that are shaking the outcomes, which in turn will determine the fiscal resources available to the government. I don't think this is a contradiction. It's really improving and providing a better analytical interpretation of what is happening in the economy, so that members have a better understanding of how to interpret the government's representations to them with respect to their economic position and the fiscal numbers.

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: I understand that, but I understood it from the beginning. I found what your colleague, Mr. Young, said to be interesting. He mentioned that integrating such a position into a British-style parliamentary system was a challenge because we would be unique in that regard. The example we are all familiar with is in the U.S., where they have a different governance model.

I am asking you what those challenges were. Are they part of the explanation of why no one has yet been appointed to the position?

Mr. Jacques Sabourin: Mr. Mulcair, if I may, I think that the answer to that is no. As Mr. Young said, the position description was ready some ten days after the legislation was passed. There was no discussion as to whether the role was a good fit or not in a British-style system. We did our homework and checked where there were budget officers. There were no differences of opinion on that.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: In closing, is there anyone at all at this table who can guide the members of this committee, since I assume that the position was created to help us, as Mr. Darling has said? We would really like to have the position filled. Do you have any information at all to share with the members of this committee that could explain why, as of February 13, 2008, there has still not been any result? Have you been given any explanation at all that you can share with us?

Mr. William R. Young: You have the chronology that we have prepared. I think that the representative from the Privy Council Office is scheduled to appear after me. I believe that there is a problem regarding the classification of the position. That was identified by Ray & Berndtson.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Do you mean that it was classified too low in relation to the candidates? Was it because the position did not pay enough for someone of that calibre?

Mr. William R. Young: It is not just a question of pay; it is also a question of status in the system.

Mr. Jacques Sabourin: It was probably expected that the position would be at the level of an assistant deputy minister, but the discussions did not end up there.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: The position is at a level lower than an assistant deputy minister.

[English]

The Chair: I have to call it there, as our time has gone.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Sabourin: It is about equivalent to an EX-3 position, as Mr. Young said earlier in his presentation.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. McKay.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I've been on both sides of the table with this budget. In the previous Parliament we sat on that side of the table, and in this Parliament we're sitting on this side of the table. All of the conversation by all of the parties has been on an independent budgetary office. The emphasis is on "independent" budgetary office.

It wasn't sort of a rehash of whatever Finance lets you see. It was an independent officer of Parliament who would interpret publicly available data, so that members of Parliament would have a compare and contrast exercise with what the Department of Finance said GDP and inflation would be, the nominal GDP, etc. For quite a number of years, both under our government and continuing under this government, the discrepancy between what the predictions were and what the reality turned out to be...it was two very separate things.

Your description of a year and a half of interpretations and consulting with Finance...I can see Finance's sticky little paws all over this. They do not want to have any entity—particularly not an entity from Parliament—disputing what their numbers might be for budgetary purposes.

It seems to me that the way you're interpreting the legislation itself is that you are already subservient to whatever Finance deigns to give you for the purposes of this exercise. Then it gets worse, because instead of being an independent officer of Parliament, you essentially get the government to hire the person and, I assume therefore, fire the person.

You know, this is partisan, but this government seems awfully enthusiastic about firing independent people, so I don't see how this is serving members of Parliament who will want independent advice free of influence from the government.

• (1610)

Mr. William R. Young: To begin with, my job is to implement the act. I did not write the act. As far as the library is concerned, it is an independent institution there to serve you as members. It is not subservient to the Department of Finance.

As far as the role of the parliamentary budget officer vis-à-vis the department, I'll ask Allan to respond.

Mr. Allan Darling: I think your characterization of the role of the parliamentary budget officer is exactly the way we have interpreted how that position should be implemented. I think what's missing is the individual, so that they can begin to get to work on providing the basis for developing independent analysis and advice to parliamentarians on what is happening on the state of the economy.

Hon. John McKay: With the greatest respect, Mr. Darling and Mr. Young, you say in your material here, "I do not think the PBO should provide an alternative fiscal forecast to the one produced by the Department of Finance." And then you go on to say you want to provide a "more strategic approach that would enhance parliamentarians' understanding of the underlying factors...."

Well, with the greatest respect, I thought that was exactly the point of this office, to provide an alternative fiscal forecast.

Mr. Allan Darling: I'd like to comment on that very briefly.

If you were to ask the parliamentary budget officer to table a statement for you on the state of the economy—the GDP—and where it's going, you would add one more set of numbers to the sets of numbers you get from the Department of Finance, the Governor of the Bank of Canada, and from all the other independent forecasters. It's just one more voice.

What we're trying to conceive in interpreting the mandate of this officer is to provide you with underlying explanations of the factors that are influencing the variations, so that you can form your own conclusions about how valid the forecast is.

Hon. John McKay: But that is exactly the point. The Department of Finance gives fiscal forecasts. They are beholden to the Minister of Finance. The Bank of Canada gives monetary forecasts. It uses the same numbers, but it's for monetary purposes.

Parliamentarians were frustrated, both in the last parliament and in this parliament, that there was no independent entity that spoke, if you will, for parliamentarians. And now what we find out is that we're not going to get an alternative voice; we're simply going to get a rehash of the numbers that are already in the public domain—either from independent forecasters, from the Bank of Canada, or from the Department of Finance.

The Chair: I'll allow a very quick answer and then we'll move on.

• (1615)

Mr. Allan Darling: Very briefly, I think with the independence of the officer and the experience of the officer you will have very sound economic analysis and advice, as required under the statute, to provide you with understandings of the state of the economy, the national finances, and the government's expenditure plan. That's the statutory requirement.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Laforest, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you, gentlemen.

I would like to come back to the hiring criteria we spoke of earlier. When you look for candidates, I would imagine you want those candidates to be able to speak both languages in addition to being good with figures. Have you asked whether the requirement is that they speak both languages very well, at the highest level?

Moreover, what were the security requirements? Will that have an impact on existing Library of Parliament employees?

Mr. Jacques Sabourin: The level of language is perfectly in line with what we find for assistant deputy minister positions in the public service.

In addition, our employees already have a high security rating because of the work they do. A few moments ago, I gave you examples of the documents they can generate for you. In fact, those documents are prepared under strictly confidential conditions, and we will apply the same principles and policies to the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: This is a senior official in an already organized structure. Will there be any impact on the classification of existing employees? I would imagine there will be additional costs. Will people have to be reclassified?

Mr. Jacques Sabourin: I do believe that the models we have studied might have an impact on the classification of the most senior

officials, but in my view, this will not have an inflationary impact on specialists in other levels.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Earlier, you said you had entrusted a specialized firm with the selection process. You send out a call for tenders. How many companies submitted bids, and what is the cost of the contract awarded?

Mr. Jacques Sabourin: I don't know how many firms submitted bids, but Mr. Darling can answer that question.

Mr. William R. Young: Six firms submitted bids.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: What was the amount of the contract awarded?

[*English*]

Mr. Allan Darling: To clarify, six national search firms were invited to bid. In the end, we received a proposal from only one. But we had to go through that process.

The contract—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Sabourin: The amount was \$50,000.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Is that within the standards?

Mr. Jacques Sabourin: Yes, it is. The person whom Mr. Young spoke about earlier—Ms. Richard—did excellent work. In fact, if we looked at the hours she put in and the work she did, I think the contract was a bargain. It could have been much more expensive; in other processes, the cost is often a percentage of the salary that will be paid to the person appointed. In this case, we obtained a fixed price that we consider very reasonable.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll move on to Mr. Wallace for five minutes.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming this afternoon.

I just want to clarify one thing for my colleagues across the way. I understand where their frustration is, but the decision was made in setting this up that instead of loading the budgetary office staffing with a bunch of economists to repeat the forecasting efforts that other independents are able to do, you're just basically going to contract that out and hire that information. Is that correct?

Mr. William R. Young: That's correct.

Mr. Mike Wallace: You mentioned in response to another question that the classification of the job may be—and I'm just saying “may be”—part of the reason that things have not moved as quickly once you made the selection, and there might be a discussion on what that classification should be. Did it affect the quality and quantity of applications to the job?

• (1620)

Mr. William R. Young: It did. What happened was that a lot of people were screening themselves out, based on the classification of the position.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Is that based on what it would pay?

Mr. William R. Young: I think not... Well, that's part of it, obviously. Part of it is also the clout that a classification will give you in any system. For example, this person will be negotiating with people at the highest level in the Department of Finance. If you look at the Ray & Berndtson report, I believe it says in the report to me that from the beginning,

those knowledgeable of the role voiced concern regarding the classification and compensation assigned to the position. It was felt that this may adversely affect the profile and seniority of possible candidates or that individuals could underestimate the importance Government places on the role.

Mr. Mike Wallace: That could be an issue that's being discussed, then—that maybe that position should be reclassified. I appreciate that.

Is it the case that the individuals applying would have known the classification of the job?

Mr. William R. Young: That's correct.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay. My reading of it is that it was in the budget plan for 2006, and part of the job that I foresee for the position, and I want to know how that was presented to the potential candidates and what your view of the role is, is that not only do we deal with the fiscal forecast at budget time—you know, how much surplus we're going to have, what the future of interest rates is, and all that stuff—but also that if one of us came up with a crazy idea and wanted to do something, the office could provide an independent analysis of that program or that idea. Did you foresee that as part of the role of that budgetary office?

Mr. William R. Young: That's in the legislation. The legislation states that the officer will have as one of his functions the costing of proposals by members of Parliament or by committees of Parliament.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Is it broken down as to how much time? Is that a lot of their work, a small part of their work? Do we know that yet?

Mr. William R. Young: Quite frankly, that part of the job is going to be demand-driven, and I don't know whether the budget is adequate or not in that area. I'm perfectly prepared to go back and seek more resources if the costing function is going to take up an undue proportion of the individual's time, given the other responsibilities he or she might have.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Has the library received cash so far in terms of budgetary allocations, even though nobody is in this position as of yet?

Mr. William R. Young: Last year we saw \$250,000 in our supplementary estimates to assist us in setting up the office, but because that did not happen, we returned that money. It lapsed, and we have funded all the activities related to setting up this office internally.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Do you have an actual office location for such an office?

Mr. William R. Young: Currently most of the library staff are housed at 50 O'Connor. I sent a letter to the deputy minister of public works as soon as the officer was included in the Parliament of Canada Act, and we currently are going to be getting additional space there for this.

Mr. Mike Wallace: If it happens to get reclassified, will it require a whole new round of applications and search?

Mr. William R. Young: I don't believe so. I will let Mr. Darling explain, as he's been in charge of the selection process.

Mr. Allan Darling: I think the search process was very thorough, and it canvassed the community of people who would have the skills and ability to undertake this function. Changing the classification wouldn't change that pool of candidates.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have six minutes left, and I'm going to split it in the last round between the Liberals and the Conservatives.

Go ahead, Mr. Pacetti.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to get two points in, and again I want to get to the structure, but before that I want to address Mr. Darling's points, both when I asked him the question and when Mr. McKay asked a question.

Again, I see this as being totally independent, but I see the parliamentary budget office preparing fiscal forecasts and, along with that, some economic analysis.

Mr. Allan Darling: If that is where the committee indicates to the officer they wish him to undertake endeavours, I think that is consistent with the act, because he does respond to requests from committees.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: But it's not just about economic analysis, because we can get that from—

Mr. Allan Darling: No, it can be a study of anything.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: We're looking at fiscal forecasts; that's key.

Mr. Young, I think you mentioned it, but did you interpret the act to say that it was independent, or how did that come about?

● (1625)

Mr. William R. Young: The library is independent.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: I understand that, but in terms of legislative authority, who does the top person at the Library of Parliament answer to, the Speaker?

Mr. William R. Young: I am responsible to the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Speaker of the Senate.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: So wouldn't you think a position such as this would have been under the responsibility of the Speaker of the House?

Mr. William R. Young: Well, he is.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Who would have interpreted it that it had to go through...? I'm not familiar with the act. Does it say in the act that the House leader decides?

Mr. William R. Young: Yes, it does.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: With respect to structure, in your paper you discuss two levels I'm not familiar with: EX-3 and GCQ-5. What is the difference in salary?

Mr. Allan Darling: An EX-3 is paid \$5,000 more annually than a GCQ-5.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: And the range would be...?

Mr. Allan Darling: I don't have the ranges, but those in the GCQ classification, because it's a Q classification, are not eligible for performance pay on top of the base salary.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Are we talking \$100,000, \$200,000, \$2 million?

Mr. Allan Darling: A GCQ-5 could go to \$145,000, approximately, but you will have PCO people who are....

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: In respect of structure, on the \$2.7 million, what will we do with what remains? If we allocated \$200,000, what would we do with the remaining \$2.5 million?

Mr. Allan Darling: We anticipate a staff allocation that would take about two-thirds of that budget. Out of the balance, we also have a budget for engaging consulting and expert services.

The Chair: Thank you.

The final word on this round will be Mr. Dykstra's, for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McKay made some interesting observations about the finance department's hands and where they might be. I don't know, when he was parliamentary secretary, they might've been in places they shouldn't have been. I certainly don't want to let that go without a response.

I'll simply ask any one of the three gentlemen to confirm that the process he went through, although lengthy, was as independent as possible.

Mr. William R. Young: Absolutely. There has been no discussion of the appointment process with the Department of Finance or with anyone at any political level. With respect to notification of individuals at the political level, I will tell you that House leaders of every party, in both chambers, received a letter from me, indicating where I was in the staffing process and volunteering Mr. Darling or me to meet with those people if there were any questions.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thank you.

I might have a bit of time. I turn it over to my colleague, Mr. Menzies.

Mr. Ted Menzies (MacLeod, CPC): Thank you.

I can see this role expanding as we speak. In our pre-budget consultations we have groups and individuals that come to us to ask that their project be included in the next budget. They will say to us, "Well, it's only going to cost \$10 million; those are the numbers we have."

Will we have the opportunity, time permitting, to see if the estimate is anywhere near accurate?

Mr. William R. Young: I don't want to anticipate too much how the individual is going to define the role. Quite frankly, if I were he or she and I were confronted with the pre-budget consultations that I know you folks undertake, I would volunteer to come before the committee to discuss with you exactly what your needs are. You have two analysts sitting here who are dealing with this issue.

My view is that the budget officer should be value-added to the service you already have—to augment that service, not to duplicate

it. This is partly internal, but it also has to do with cooperating with you as a committee and individual members to find the best way to support you in your work.

• (1630)

Mr. Ted Menzies: That's a great note to end on.

The Chair: Thank you. It sounds like good wisdom for that individual, whenever he or she gets through it.

We will now suspend the meeting as we bring forward the Treasury Board Secretariat, the Privy Council Office, and the Department of Finance. If the present witnesses would retreat and the others would come forward, we'll pick the meeting up from there.

•

_____ (Pause) _____

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The Chair: Seeing the witnesses there, we will call the meeting back to order and I would ask the members to take their seats.

We have with us Joe Wild, executive director of the Treasury Board Secretariat.

I understand that you will be doing a presentation, and you have your resource people beside you who you will introduce.

We will open the floor up to your presentation, and to questions and answers after that.

The floor is yours.

Mr. Joe Wild (Executive Director, Strategic Policy, Corporate Priorities, Planning and Policy Renewal Sector, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before beginning my remarks, I'll quickly introduce my colleagues who are at the table. Marc O'Sullivan is the acting assistant secretary to the cabinet for senior personnel and special projects with the Privy Council Office; and Katharine Rechico is with the Department of Finance, as is Benoit Robidoux. They're here primarily to assist in any technical questions that might come up around the specifics of some of the mandate.

I'm going to quickly go through some brief opening remarks just to help set some context for the members of the committee.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your invitation to appear before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance to discuss the implementation of the Federal Accountability Act and especially the implementation of a Parliamentary Budget Officer position.

[*English*]

As lead for the overall implementation of the act, I propose to update the committee on the overall progress that has been made by the government.

•(1635)

[Translation]

As you know, the Federal Accountability Act amended 46 existing statutes and created two new ones. Some of these changes came into force at royal assent on December 12, 2006, while others were subject to coming-into-force dates set out in the act or established by order in council.

[English]

The introduction of Bill C-2 was accompanied by the federal accountability action plan, which organized the various elements of the Federal Accountability Act along 14 themes and set out as well related policy initiatives. I will now provide some details on the highlights of the government's progress in implementing the act and action plan along those themes.

With respect to reforming the financing of political parties, this element has been fully implemented. The relevant statutory amendments came into force on January 1, 2007. These measures are currently being administered by the Chief Electoral Officer.

With respect to banning secret donations to political candidates, this element has been fully implemented. The final statutory amendments came into force on July 9, 2007. These measures are currently being administered by the Chief Electoral Officer and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

With regard to strengthening the role of the Ethics Commissioner, this element has been fully implemented. The new Conflict of Interest Act came into force on July 9, 2007. On that date, Ms. Mary Dawson was appointed to the new position of Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

With regard to making qualified government appointments, statutory amendments to provide parliamentarians with more say in the appointment of agents of Parliament, to revise the process for appointing returning officers under the Canada Elections Act, to provide for the creation of a public appointments commission, and to remove entitlements to priority appointments within the public service for ministerial staffers, these have all come into force.

With respect to cleaning up government polling and advertising, most of the items under this heading have been implemented, including statutory and policy changes and contract regulations that came into effect on June 7, 2007.

With regard to providing real protection for whistle-blowers, the amended Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act was brought into force and operational as of April 15, 2007. Appointments have been made to both the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner and the public servants disclosure tribunal.

In terms of strengthening the access to information legislation, all of the statutory amendments under this element have been brought into force. The Access to Information Act has been expanded to include 69 additional institutions, which comprise agents of Parliament, several foundations created under federal statute, seven additional parent crown corporations, and all subsidiary crown corporations.

With respect to strengthening the power of the Auditor General, all of the statutory elements under this element have been brought into force. Regulations are also being developed in order to support the Auditor General's authority to inquire into the use of funds under federal funding agreements.

With regard to strengthening auditing and accountability within departments, deputy heads have been designated as accounting officers under the Financial Administration Act. Statutory amendments have been made regarding the governing structure of crown corporations, and a new offence has been created for fraud involving public moneys.

In terms of creating and establishing a director of public prosecutions, the office of the director has been created and it is operational. An acting director has been appointed, pending a permanent appointment to this position. It has been that way since the act received royal assent on December 12, 2006.

We have also ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption. That convention was ratified on October 2, 2007.

In terms of cleaning up procurement of government contracts, several items under this element have been completed, including the incorporation of an overarching statement of principle on procurement in the Financial Administration Act and the adoption of a new code of conduct for procurement on September 19. A procurement ombudsman designate has been appointed. Draft regulations were posted in the *Canada Gazette* on December 22, 2007.

In terms of toughening the Lobbyists Registration Act, the government has developed proposed regulations for the coming into force of the Lobbying Act. The consultations on those regulations are now closed. The regulations are going through the process of being finalized in order to be brought forward for deliberation by the Governor in Council.

With regard to the establishment of a parliamentary budget authority, as you know, this item remains to be fully implemented. The Federal Accountability Act established within the Library of Parliament the position of parliamentary budget officer. The new officer will provide research and objective analysis to the Senate and House of Commons concerning the state of the nation's finances, the estimates of the government, and trends in the national economy. The parliamentary librarian, under whose responsibility the selection process of the parliamentary budget authority falls, has highlighted current progress made on the matter.

[Translation]

There has been a lot of work done in the last year on the Federal Accountability Act, and I want to assure this committee that, across government, we continue our hard work to implement this important piece of legislation.

[English]

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my opening remarks. I'd be pleased to answer any questions committee members may have.

I understand that Mr. O'Sullivan has a few brief remarks.

•(1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan (Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet, Senior Personnel and Special Projects Secretariat, Privy Council Office): Thank you.

As the parliamentary librarian said earlier, the appointment suggested by the selection committee that directed the process has been submitted to government. The government knows the name of the person in question, and is holding discussions with that person in an effort to settle everything so that the appointment can proceed quickly. We hope that the appointment can be made soon. That is where we are now.

I would also be very happy to take your questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we'll move to Mr. Pacetti, and we will allow five minutes.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: I think after those opening remarks we can all go home.

For a government that doesn't like much government, there seem to be a lot of extra positions. But as to the one we're interested in, all of a sudden, it seems that Mr. O'Sullivan has answered the question. That person can be hired imminently, just by coincidence. So I'm not sure if I have to ask questions or if we just wait until Monday and see what happens.

But the fact that I have a couple of minutes....

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: I guess you heard some of the testimony of Mr. Young regarding the Library of Parliament. In terms of the structure, in terms of whether this is going to be an independent parliamentary office answerable only to Parliament—this question is for Mr. Wild—is that what's going to happen, or did we make a mistake in adopting this particular position and putting it into the Federal Accountability Act?

Mr. Joe Wild: Under the Federal Accountability Act the amendments to the Parliament of Canada Act clearly establish the office of the parliamentary budget officer within the Library of Parliament. The Library of Parliament is an institution of Parliament, and as such, it is independent of the executive. It is overseen by the Board of Internal Economy and through the Speakers of the two Houses. So certainly, from the government's perspective, this is an independent office.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: I understand that you've engaged—or I think it was the Library of Parliament that did, that's not even clear—an independent firm to conduct the work of finding somebody. What happens afterwards? Who takes care of hiring him? Is it going to be the government or is it going to be the Speaker of the House?

Mr. Joe Wild: Well, with respect to the appointment process, Mr. O'Sullivan would be in the best position to answer.

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: The legislation sets out that the appointment of the parliamentary budget officer is made by the Governor in Council, so by cabinet, by the Commissioner of the

Great Seal. So that's a position that's done at the pleasure of the government.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Again, because we have limited time—I don't mean to interrupt you—does that not contradict what Mr. Wild just said?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: No, because there are many positions within Parliament. Parliamentary officers are appointed by the Governor in Council, starting with the Clerk of the Senate, the Clerk of the House of Commons, the Usher of the Black Rod, the deputy clerk, the Sergeant-at-Arms, the clerk assistant, the law clerk, parliamentary counsel, and the parliamentary librarian, as well as the associate parliamentary librarian.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Those are all orders in council.

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: Those are all appointed by the Governor in Council, yes.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Okay, so what's the next step now? Are we going to give the green light for the Library of Parliament to hire this person, or do we have to wait? I'm still not clear on that.

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: The recommendation has been made by the selection committee to the government, and the government is proceeding with that appointment. As I said, there have been discussions with the candidate on issues of remuneration and classification of the position. Those discussions are not yet completed, but we're hopeful—

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: When do you foresee those discussions being completed?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: Well, we're trying to complete them as soon as we can.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: But is there a timeframe?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: We'd like to get this done in the next couple of weeks, before the end of the month.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Okay.

Just quickly, Ms. Rechico and Mr. Robidoux, has there been any input from the Department of Finance regarding this position?

Mr. Benoit Robidoux (General Director, Assistant Deputy Minister's Office, Economic and Fiscal Policy Branch, Department of Finance): Do you mean regarding the process?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: I mean both on the process and on what the parliamentary budget officer is going to do in the role.

Mr. Benoit Robidoux: There hasn't been, not on the process and not on what he's going to do, no.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: So what input did you have in this whole process?

Mr. Benoit Robidoux: Well, this was an item in Budget 2006. It was put in the framework in the “other items” part of the act, and our work stopped there.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: And there was no other input given by Finance through the other department.

Mr. Benoit Robidoux: No.

Ms. Katharine Rechico (Chief, Expenditure Analysis and Forecasting, Fiscal Policy Division, Economic and Fiscal Policy Branch, Department of Finance): Just on that, I am aware that the search firm did contact the Department of Finance, at least one person in Finance, to discuss the characteristics that would be needed in such a person, as might be expected of an executive search firm. It would look to the Department of Finance as a guide to the type of person you might require.

• (1645)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Okay, but you gave no details in terms of what the job would entail and what interaction there would be between the parliamentary budget officer and the Department of Finance.

Ms. Katharine Rechico: That's correct. There was no interaction at all that way.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Okay.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Okay, I'll wait.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Monsieur Crête, and I believe you're going to share your time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: An acting director of public prosecutions was appointed.

Mr. Wild, in point 10 of your brief, you state: "An acting director has been appointed, pending a permanent appointment to this position."

Is it because the act allowed an acting appointment there, but did not allow the appointment of an acting Parliamentary Budget Officer, or is it because the government chose to appoint an acting director in that case but not in this one?

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Wild: In terms of the director of public prosecutions, it's a specific statutory provision. The act that created the office of the director of public prosecutions contemplated that there would be an acting appointment because the specific process to select the candidate who would fill the position for the seven-year term.... It's a very complicated search process that involves a number of stages.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Would something have prevented the appointment of an acting Parliamentary Budget Officer, when we know full well that the acting appointment would last only until such time as a permanent appointment was made? Could the government have done that?

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Wild: There's nothing in the statutory authorities around the parliamentary budget officer to appoint somebody on an interim

basis. There is a specific process set out in the act as to how the selection is to work.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: So there is a specific statutory provision for appointing an acting director of public prosecutions, but not for the appointment of an acting Parliamentary Budget Officer?

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Wild: That's right.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: But would the fact that there is no specific provision authorizing it prevent the government from making that appointment on an interim basis? The intent of Parliament was not necessarily to prohibit the practice, because had it wished to prohibit the practice, that would have been expressly stated in the act. So could the government have chosen to appoint an acting Parliamentary Budget Officer?

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Wild: Mr. O'Sullivan can speak to that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: Appointments made by the governor in council must be based on legislation. The position in question must have been established by enabling legislation, and this gives the governor in council authority. That is an authority Parliament delegates to the governor in council. Thus, in the absence of a specific legislative provision, such appointments cannot be made.

Mr. Paul Crête: At the Business Development Bank of Canada, acting appointments were made repeatedly for almost two years. I have seen the appointment notices. Appointments were extended by six-month periods, until permanent appointments could be made.

Could the same thing have been done for the Parliamentary Budget Officer?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: Those options are provided for in the enabling legislation. With an organization like the Business Development Bank of Canada, the legislation provides for the possibility of extending terms and appointing people on an acting basis, for example.

This requires a legislative provision that we did not have in this case.

Mr. Paul Crête: Thank you.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Crête put a question to the other group of witnesses. He was told that the purpose of the Parliamentary Budget Officer position was to deal with the issue of the significant gap observed each year between budgetary forecasts and real figures. That is what I understood. I don't know whether you were there.

Over the past 10 years, we have been told that the gap between initial budget projections and the final real figures amounts to over \$10 billion.

[English]

Mr. Joe Wild: I can't speak to the motivation of the government in creating the position. What I can speak to is that Parliament, in passing the Federal Accountability Act, established a clear mandate for the parliamentary budget officer. That mandate certainly includes the possibility

[Translation]

of providing the Senate and House of Commons independently with analyses of Canada's financial situation, government budget projections, and national economic trends.

• (1650)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. We will now move to Mr. Del Mastro.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wild, you are the executive director of strategic policy at the Treasury Board Secretariat, correct?

Mr. Joe Wild: Yes, I am.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Wonderful. It's very timely that you're here today because I'm looking at your handout, specifically point one where it says, "Reforming the financing of political parties". You indicate that this element has been fully implemented.

Mr. Joe Wild: Correct.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: I was part of a committee that worked on former Bill C-2, the Federal Accountability Act. I subbed on that committee on several occasions, and contrary to my understanding, if what you say is true, if it's fully implemented, can you please tell me how there is a political party that is having a "sky is the limit" fundraiser this evening, with auctions, where you can bid as much as you want and you can take corporate or business cheques and you can pay as much as you want to golf with the Right Honourable Paul Martin? You can pay as much money as you want for lunch with Scott Brison. You can pay as much money as you want to go to a hockey game with Ken Dryden—

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: A point of order. Come on. This is ridiculous.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: I have a valid question here, Mr. Chair, because this witness has indicated—

The Chair: Order. Order.

Mr. Del Mastro, I think you made your point on the question.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: My question, Mr. Wild, is given these facts, how can this be fully implemented? That is not consistent with the Accountability Act. How can it be that this is fully implemented—

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: A point of order.

Mr. Del Mastro: —and that fundraiser is going on this evening?

The Chair: Mr. Del Mastro, let's allow an answer to the question.

Mr. Joe Wild: The provisions of the Federal Accountability Act that amend the Canada Elections Act are completely in force. The Chief Electoral Officer is responsible for the enforcement of that act.

Any issues around who is or who is not complying with that act would ultimately have to be raised with the Chief Electoral Officer.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: So a "sky is the limit" fundraiser taking corporate cheques would be inconsistent with the Accountability Act?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: A point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Del Mastro, I think the question was asked.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Chairman, I have a point of order.

The Chair: I'm not going to listen to the point of order. He asked the question and I've ruled on the question. That's enough of that kind of line....

I think you have an answer to that question. If you have any further questions, go ahead.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: I'll pass on my time to Mr. Wallace.

The Chair: Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On the topic of the length of time it took for the classification of this particular position, is that the norm? Would you say you could have done better, or was it difficult because it was brand new? Could you give me some sense of that?

The previous speaker told us it took seven months. I don't know, but that might be what it takes when a new position is created.

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: No, that's not the norm. That's longer than it normally takes.

This case is particularly challenging because of two main issues. On the one hand there was a desire to have this position classified at the most senior level possible. It's an important position and function and you would want it to be as senior as possible.

On the other hand it fits within an existing structure. Under the legislation the parliamentary budget officer is an officer of the Library of Parliament, so this person answers to the parliamentary librarian. That tells you something about where it's placed in terms of classification. With classification you don't look at one position independently; you look at it in relation to other positions within that organization. There was a bit of a ceiling that we were dealing with in terms of classification of the parliamentary librarian position.

We considered the possibility of completely disregarding the relativity with other positions and just classifying it at the level we thought was right. But there are nine other Governor in Council positions within Parliament, and if we did away with relativity for the purposes of this position, then we could imagine that the nine other positions would ask to be reclassified as well. People expect to be reclassified upwards, not downwards. We would have had an impact on nine positions, which may not be a good idea from the perspective of taxpayers.

In light of those two competing pressures, we came up with a classification of one level below the level of the parliamentary librarian. Because of the function of the budget officer, we thought it was important to give it an additional level of independence that is not subject to performance pay; that is, the Governor in Council won't be determining performance pay for that position. It was put in a range called the GCQ range—"Q", as in quasi-judicial function—in order to afford it that level of independence.

It ended up being classified at the level of GCQ-5, which is just below the equivalent for the parliamentary librarian, who is a GC-6.

• (1655)

Mr. Mike Wallace: Do you get to see the short list of candidates? Were you satisfied that regardless of this classification there were good quality candidates who applied for this position?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: The selection process was run by the Library of Parliament. We were not directly involved. We were aware of how it was progressing through informal discussions with the people involved. We were told there was a difficulty in terms of concern about the salary level. We were aware of that concern.

But in the end we were told that the selection committee, in its communications with the responsible minister, was quite satisfied with the candidate they proposed as being eminently qualified for the position.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move on to Monsieur Mulcair, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being here today.

I have a question for Mr. O'Sullivan. After you realized how difficult it was to attract candidates, given the level you had established, did you consider changing the level of your assessment? Did you have no doubts about the process as it was implemented the first time around? That was implemented in 2006. We are now in 2008, and no candidate has been hired yet. Perhaps the established level should be reviewed.

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: We have asked ourselves that question more than once, and have discussed it at length. We have rethought the approach, but at the end of the day, the relative level with other senior parliamentary positions cannot be discounted.

The easy answer would be to raise the position by one or two grades even if that costs more, because the cost would not be huge. However, we have to consider future repercussions on other positions. If doing that results in raising the classification of nine other positions, we have caused a problem.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: I have 30 years' experience in public administration. I listened to Mr. Wild carefully earlier, and I liked what I heard. Mr. Wild said he couldn't speak to the motivation of the government in creating the position, but that there was now a Federal Accountability Act in force, establishing the will of Parliament. That is very respectful. In my career, I have been president of an organization, elected official and minister. I have experienced both sides of the coin. Frankly, I find that your answer actually dispenses with—in the most literal sense of the word—the will of Parliament.

You say that it would be an easy answer, because in your opinion the relativity among those positions cannot be discounted. I believe that the will of Parliament was very clear—Parliament wanted a Parliamentary Budget Officer. Parliament wanted someone at the highest level. It doesn't matter whether the Gentlemen Usher of the Black Rod would like his position to be reclassified thereafter.

I believe that the will of Parliament is clearly not what we have now—we want someone to help elected members. We asked for it, and Parliament voted for it. The NDP has been asking for it for years. I feel very frustrated, and I feel the will of Parliament is being frustrated as well, because you have decided—your word, not mine—that the relativity cannot be discounted. Your bureaucratic administrative ruling cannot be circumvented. In 2006, we passed legislation that would help us, but we don't have what we wanted yet because your regulations cannot be circumvented.

Isn't that paradoxical? With those rules, are you not in fact setting yourself above the elected members here?

• (1700)

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: With due respect, Mr. Chairman, our position is perfectly in compliance with the provisions of the act. The act provides that the Parliamentary Budget Officer must be an employee of the Library of Parliament. If Parliament wished to establish a position similar to those of other parliamentary officers, that is to say, a completely independent position with an independent office outside existing structures, we would have had our orders and the position would have been clear. However, since the act provides that the Parliamentary Budget Officer must be an employee of the Library of Parliament, that means the Parliamentary Budget Officer would be part of the framework governing parliamentary employees. This is not a decision made by the government, but an inherent aspect of the parliamentary structure.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Chairman, I would like to come back to what Mr. Young said earlier. Mr. Young is also an employee of the Library of Parliament. An act must be interpreted within a given context. Senior government officials are telling us that their interpretation of the act as passed by Parliament has frustrated the clear will of Parliament to have a Parliamentary Budget Officer. After seven months, there has been no success in finding someone who meets the requirements established. At that point, those engaged in the process might, with a measure of modesty, come to the conclusion that the requirements are perhaps too high and should perhaps be reviewed. There is no legal impediment to putting the parliamentary budget officer's position at the same level as that of Mr. Young. They are both, strictly speaking, employees of the Library of Parliament, are they not?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: With regard to the hierarchical aspect of the position, in other words, whether it is a position that comes under the parliamentary librarian or not, the level in our view is based on the wording of the act, in that the Parliamentary Budget Officer must be a member of the Library of Parliament and the Parliament of Canada Act provides for the position of parliamentary librarian. In our view, there is a hierarchy provided for in the Parliament of Canada Act. This is not simply a factor of the Federal Accountability Act provisions, but a factor of the existing framework provided for in the Parliament of Canada Act.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I have always found that the role of the senior government official was to find solutions. It seems to me that each time we found a solution, different problems arose.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Pacetti.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Wild, I may not have thanked you. Thank you, not just Mr. Wild but also Mr. O'Sullivan, and also the Department of Finance officials, for appearing. I know it was last-second, so I appreciate it.

Just quickly, in terms of the budget to be allocated for this, is it going to come out of the Treasury Board budget, Mr. Wild?

Mr. Joe Wild: No, the budget for the parliamentary budget officer would be housed within the budget of the Library of Parliament, which I understand is determined by the Board of Internal Economy.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Correct.

Mr. Joe Wild: Ultimately, after the board determines what it thinks is appropriate, it provides that to the Speaker. The Speaker then provides that to the President of the Treasury Board, who then tables it as part of the estimates before Parliament, for Parliament to vote on.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: It'll be in the envelope for Parliament. So the follow-up will be there.

Once the appointment is made, will Treasury Board's involvement be over?

Mr. Joe Wild: Other than responding to requests from the parliamentary budget officer for information, as set out in the act, there will be no involvement of Treasury Board. The only involvement, really, of Treasury Board at that point would be what it does for all of Parliament, that is, simply being the conduit for tabling the budgetary requests through the estimates process—and that's it.

The only ongoing role beyond what is envisioned by this is the same as that set out for all departments, which is to respond in a timely manner to any requests from the parliamentary budget officer for information relating to the economy or finances of the country.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Okay.

Mr. O'Sullivan, once the nomination is made, will there be any input from PCO?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: No, once the appointment is made, our role will be completed.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Will there be an order in council that will be renewable after three, four or five years? Is there anything...?

• (1705)

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: It's a maximum of a five-year term for that position, and it's renewable. Yes, it is.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Thank you.

A question for all three of the departments is whether any conditions were imposed on the parliamentary budgetary office, in terms of saying, well, this is how it's going to work. Was anything put forward?

Are there any conditions, in terms of how you and the Treasury Board view it, Mr. Wild?

Mr. Joe Wild: There are no conditions outside of whatever is framed within the legislation; Treasury Board has not imposed any conditions. The legislation sets the mandate and limits of the authorities for the parliamentary budget officer. The government, and Treasury Board, certainly, will be respecting those limits set by the legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Ms. Rechico and Mr. Robidoux, did Parliament say that it wanted the office of Parliament to be directed in that fashion?

Mr. Benoît Robidoux: It comes to the same thing, because the process in line with the legislation in force. It is an order of Parliament.

[*English*]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. O'Sullivan, I get the feeling that part of the problem in naming a person is that you haven't been able to set your conditions, that you haven't been able to tell the person who is to be nominated, "Listen, we want to make sure you don't embarrass the government." Is that part of the conditions and part of the delay by your department? If you look around the table, I think that's the feeling we're getting.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: So one of the conditions before you hire the person is, don't embarrass the government.

The Chair: That question might be out of order, but a quick answer, please.

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: The answer is no.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: It's the same question to all three.

The Chair: We'll move on now.

Mr. Crête.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm done.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to continue on the subject of classification. If the committee believes that the classification was unsatisfactory and should be changed, that would mean that any request or recommendation to that effect would have to be submitted to the speakers of both houses—the Speaker of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Commons—who would then have to determine whether the current classification did in fact need to be reconsidered.

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: Since the issue was one of relativity, I imagine the question consists in determining whether the Parliamentary Budget Officer could report directly to the Clerk, or to the speakers of the two houses, rather than to the parliamentary librarian.

Mr. Paul Crête: Given the problems of recruiting someone suitable, perhaps the position should be given a level equivalent to that of independent parliamentary officers, at least to guarantee the remuneration. I just want to see whether, under the current act—because you are remaining within the framework of the act—a recommendation to that effect could theoretically be taken up by the speakers of the two chambers, and if the two speakers could decide to raise the classification of the PBO position to solve the problem. But do you believe that the act would necessarily have to be amended?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: In fact, the pay level for the position has not been established by Parliament. Under the act, the Parliamentary Budget Officer receives the pay and benefits established by the governor in council. That is established as the appointment order is issued.

Mr. Paul Crête: There is a contradiction there. These people have established that a higher pay scale needs to be offered to attract the right person. So why was that decision not made?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: A higher pay scale is still a possibility. The governor in council has broad discretionary authority in this.

Mr. Paul Crête: Earlier, you talked about taking the relativity principle into account. Yet the governor in council can decide that the salary must be a given amount, regardless of the relativity principle.

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: The only reservation I would express on that would be regarding the Parliament of Canada Act provisions governing the parliamentary librarian position, since the subordinate reporting relationship is required. When we received the position description, we discussed required qualifications and other considerations with people from the parliamentary librarian's office. From the very start, it was agreed that the person in question would report to the parliamentary librarian.

• (1710)

Mr. Paul Crête: We have often seen deputy ministers being paid more than their ministers, even if the minister was the boss.

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: And there are crown corporations in which the vice-presidents are paid more than the CEO.

Mr. Paul Crête: What restrictions will the Parliamentary Budget Officer face in obtaining information from the government? Will he have authority to obtain any information he asks department officials for? Will confidentiality measures be applied? I would like to know what legislative or regulatory framework will govern that issue.

[English]

Mr. Joe Wild: There are limits on what the parliamentary budget officer can request. They have to request information that's within the mandate, so that's the first limit. They can only ask for what would actually relate to the discharge of the mandate.

The second limit is that it must be for financial or economic data in the possession of the department. But that data cannot include personal information as defined under the Access to Information Act, or confidences of the Queen's Privy Council. That information is out altogether.

There is another set of information that the parliamentary budget officer can request and see, but they are under an obligation to not

disclose it unless the disclosure is necessary for the discharge of the mandate. That's information government has obtained in confidence from a foreign government or a provincial government; information that would be injurious to federal-provincial affairs; information relating to trade secrets that would harm the economic position of the Government of Canada; or information that is commercial, confidential, or received from third parties.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête: If arbitration becomes necessary, who will be responsible for it? If the Parliamentary Budget Officer wants some item of information but the department does not want to give it to him, who decides the issue? Will the Parliamentary Budget Officer have the right or the opportunity to file an appeal in such cases?

[English]

The Chair: This will be the final question and answer.

Mr. Joe Wild: The act doesn't set out an appeal mechanism or anything like that. It prescribes a limit on the authorities of the parliamentary budget officer to obtain information. It is ultimately a question between the department that has been asked to give the information and the parliamentary budget officer as to whether or not the information being requested falls under the information that is not to be provided from the two categories I mentioned: personal information and cabinet confidences.

On the other body of information I was talking about, the parliamentary budget officer can receive it but simply isn't in a position to disclose it unless the disclosure is necessary for the discharge of the mandate. He is just meant to treat it in a confidential manner.

Ultimately, it's going to be a discussion between those two parties. If there's disagreement, if the parliamentary budget officer wanted to insist on receiving the information, because it is a law it could go through lawyers or to the Federal Court, to get the interpretation of a judge.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move on to Mr. Menzies.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I want to compliment you, Mr. Wild, on your written submission to us. It's very concise and very precise—we don't always get that precise a presentation given to us—and it's quite factual. We appreciate it.

Something we haven't talked enough about here today, and I'll be very brief, Mr. Chair, is the value of what we're talking about here. We and Canadians have been waiting a long time to see a number of the things that are implemented in this.

The one that strikes me as very apropos today is strengthening the powers of the Auditor General, and the one that our chairman and I would agree on is that we can now audit the books of the Canadian Wheat Board.

I think it's so important today. Let me just put an example of why in front of you. One farmer in my riding, because of the actions of the Canadian Wheat Board today, has lost access to something in the neighbourhood of \$20 million to \$25 million. I will be quite interested to see the Auditor General's view of what the Canadian Wheat Board did today, actually withdrawing from absolutely the highest recorded wheat markets in the world that these farmers have ever seen. They withdrew from selling it, and their mandate is simply to sell it.

Having said that, it's great to see some of the things we've put in the Accountability Act. The one question I have, to end up, is this.

In item 10, creating a director of public prosecutions, you suggest that there's an acting director in place. When would we expect to have a permanent one?

•(1715)

Mr. Joe Wild: I'll ask Mr. Sullivan to address the question of the appointment of a permanent director.

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: The process is a very lengthy one that's set out in the bill. It involves a committee, which is established and which went through a long series of names, and there are consultations required with parliamentarians. The next step will be to submit....There is a name—it's been whittled down to one name—and the process it has to go through, in terms of a nominee appearing before a parliamentary committee, is the next step. So we'll be proceeding with—

Mr. Ted Menzies: So it is functioning as we speak; we're just waiting for a permanent director.

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: Yes.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Thank you.

The Chair: We have one other name on the list.

Monsieur Mulcair, I'll allow you to go five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I know that my colleague from the Bloc Québécois has already raised this issue, that I would still like to come back to a different aspect of classification, to the level of bilingualism required. I would also like to ask Mr. O'Sullivan whether the term “subordinate” appears anywhere in the wording of the legislation passed by the Parliament of Canada.

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: No, the word “subordinate” does not appear in the legislation.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: In my view, it would have made things easier.

You have assigned level GCQ-5 to this. Level 5 is the level of the parliamentary librarian, and level 6 is the level of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Is that correct?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: No, it's the opposite. The Parliamentary Budget Officer would be at level 5, and the parliamentary librarian is at level 6.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Could you tell me whether level 6 is equivalent to the level of a deputy minister?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: Level 6 is the level of an assistant deputy minister, with a pay scale ranging between \$134,000 and \$157,700.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Do you know the bilingualism level required for the parliamentary librarian position?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: I cannot remember at the moment. The language requirements for people appointed by the governor in council are not set in the same way as the language requirements for the public service as a whole. When the selection criteria are stated and the positions are announced, the government establishes language requirements, in other words, whether a certain level of bilingualism is preferable or required.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: What did you suggest for the Parliamentary Budget Officer?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: Unfortunately, I cannot tell you that.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: What are the language requirements for the Parliamentary Budget Officer?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: I don't know, because the Library of Parliament has assumed responsibility for the process.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: I will put the question very clearly: will the person who is soon to be appointed—you did give us that hint—be able to speak French if he or she appears before the committee?

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: Yes.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: That is part of the requirements.

Mr. Marc O'Sullivan: I don't know whether that was part of the requirements, but...

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: But the answer is yes. That's fine.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We have a little bit more time and we have one more questioner.

Monsieur Laforest, the floor is yours for a couple of quick questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My comments are in line with the question my colleague Mr. Crête asked earlier.

The new incumbent to the PBO position will have to provide a variety of analyses on the status of public finances to members of Parliament and to a variety of House of Commons committees. I imagine he will have to deal with public accounts, the Department of Finance, Treasury Board Secretariat and Treasury Board, where he will glean information in order to produce those analyses.

Mr. Crête wanted to know who would act as arbitrator in the event of problems or disputes. You responded that at present there was no arbitration process. I find that saying at the outset that there will be no arbitration mechanism is a somewhat dysfunctional approach. Given the amounts and the scope of the structures involved—an annual budget of \$250 billion and many budget items—something is bound to go wrong at some point. The Auditor General often encounters those snags.

So what will the Parliamentary Budget Officer do in order to discharge his or her task?

• (1720)

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Wild: I think there are a couple things. One is that the parliamentary budget officer ultimately works for parliamentarians. From the perspective of public servants, we take very seriously inquiries from the officers of Parliament, whether they're from analysts in the library today or from the parliamentary budget officer. I think part of our role as public servants is to be very respectful of those requests when we receive them. I think we treat them in a timely manner and as efficiently as we can, in responding to them.

But in the event that for some reason there were some kind of a conflict, the parliamentary budget officer would have recourse through a political avenue to raise his or her concerns with the adequacy of response that he or she was receiving from the department with the member of Parliament or the committee of Parliament that has asked the parliamentary budget officer to pursue the matter. Then that committee or that member has certain tools available, through the political process and the procedures of Parliament, to put pressure upon the government if they feel things are not going the way they should be.

So I wouldn't say there's absolutely nothing there at the end of the day. I think what's there are all of the procedures and everything else this place has, and I think it has fairly significant tools to ensure that it gets answers from government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Let me give you an example. In presenting one of her reports last year, the Auditor General told the public accounts committee that she had not been given access to some figures and documents by Treasury Board. I don't remember the exact topic, but she did at least have the power to say in her report that she had not had such access. We asked questions, and learned about it.

Will the Parliamentary Budget Officer have the opportunity to produce similar annual reports, so that any barriers he or she encounters can be mentioned? I believe this would make the process even more transparent, and transparency is something parliamentarians will need.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Wild: I don't see any limit, in the legislation, on the parliamentary budget officer's ability to go back to whoever has made the request and to investigate something and report back an issue that the officer is having with obtaining the necessary information from a government department.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you for coming in. Thank you for the job you do. We look forward to the appointment of the parliamentary budget officer.

With that, I want to thank the members for their questions, and we would call this meeting....

There's a point of order.

Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Lib.): I did table a motion with the clerk on Monday. I believe it's been circulated. I believe the clerk has received it. I was wondering if we could consider that at this time.

The Chair: No, we won't. You have circulated it—that's true—but it hasn't had the 36 hours necessary according to the standing order of the committee. The ruling is 36 hours from the time the committee receives it. Actually, I checked with the previous clerk to make sure that was the case, and the clerk said that was the practice of this committee, and that is the way I interpret the rules of order. So that will be taken at the next meeting.

Hon. Garth Turner: Could I ask the clerk for an interpretation? This was submitted to you at three on February 11. That's 48 hours ago.

The Chair: The clerk can't circulate anything unless it's in two official languages. It will be done at 8 o'clock tomorrow. That's my ruling.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Just a point of clarification, Mr. Chair, we have folks sitting here.

The Chair: Yes, we do. They can be dismissed, for sure.

This one is over. I've ruled on it.

That's a point of order, right?

Hon. Garth Turner: Can we have some more clarity?

Surely we have five minutes, and we can kick this around so at least it's a little clearer to the members of the committee.

The Chair: There's only one way, Mr. Turner, that I'll accept any more discussion on this, and that's if there's unanimous consent to consider it.

I don't hear it.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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