



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

PROC • NUMBER 039 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, May 29, 2012

—
Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Tuesday, May 29, 2012

• (1135)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): I'd like to call the meeting to order. We have reduced time today because of the votes that just took place.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), under the main estimates for 2012-13, vote 15 under the Privy Council, referred to the committee on Tuesday, February 28, 2012, we have Monsieur Mayrand from Elections Canada with us today.

We are going to try to go with about 40 minutes for each panel—I'm sorry, I'm reducing your time—so at about twenty minutes after the hour we'll finish off this half, and then we'll have the Clerk and the Speaker in for the second half.

Monsieur Mayrand, you have some opening statements. Please go ahead. Introduce the people who are with you, and then we'll get to questions after that and will see how concise we can be today.

Mr. Marc Mayrand (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With me today is Mrs. Helen Bélanger, who is the chief financial officer at Elections Canada, and Mr. Belaineh Deguefé, who is the deputy chief for electoral affairs, responsible for planning, policy, and public affairs.

[Translation]

I am here today to discuss the 2012-13 main estimates for my office, including Elections Canada's priorities for this fiscal year.

Following seven years of minority governments, my office is now working in a new operating environment. The election of a majority government means a fixed election date, with the next general election in October 2015. The agency now has a window of opportunity to pursue longer-term efforts to modernize the electoral process before returning to full election readiness. My office is also focused on some significant external and internal initiatives, such as supporting the readjustment of electoral boundaries, preparing for our upcoming move to Gatineau, and managing the impact of fiscal restraint.

Before I explain our priorities, I would like to provide an overview of the budget authorities under which my office operates, as well as an account of Elections Canada's response to fiscal restraint.

The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer is funded by and operates under two separate budget authorities. The first is an annual parliamentary appropriation, which only covers the salaries for indeterminate positions. For these main estimates, our appropriation

is \$29.5 million, representing the salaries of approximately 360 full-time equivalent employees. It is this component that the committee is considering for approval today.

The second is a statutory authority that draws directly from the Consolidated Revenue Fund. This authority funds all other Elections Canada expenditures. Our projected statutory draw for 2012-13 is \$114.7 million.

• (1140)

[English]

As I outlined in my January 2012 letter to this committee, Elections Canada is reducing its annual operating budget by 8% starting this fiscal year. In making these reductions, we did not include expenditures that fall outside our annual operating budget, namely those related to transfer payments required by statute, the delivery of electoral events, the readjustment of electoral boundaries, and the relocation of Elections Canada's office to Gatineau in 2013.

This left an operating budget of \$94.1 million, which we then reduced by \$7.5 million or 8%. Elections Canada is applying these reductions in four ways.

First, we have reduced the budget available to programs for time-limited initiatives. This budget, only available to programs through a rigorous annual allocation process, is used to renew program infrastructure and carry out initiatives aimed at improving election administration.

Second, programs have been required, through a variety of measures, to achieve efficiencies and absorb maintenance costs for recently delivered information technology applications.

Third, we are extending the timeframe for the development and delivery of various programs and corporate initiatives. For example, we're now planning to conduct a pilot project on Internet voting during the next general election in 2015, rather than in a byelection in 2013.

Finally, the agency is reviewing all programs to ensure that resources are focused on the highest priorities linked to its mandate.

We will await instruction from Treasury Board about how to fully reflect information on my office budget reduction in subsequent estimates reports.

While our proposed reductions apply to statutory expenses, Elections Canada's annual appropriation, which is the one you'll be voting on today, is nevertheless affected by the 2010 budget restraint measures, which required departments to absorb the costs associated with increases in collective agreements. These measures have put pressure on my office's ability within its annual appropriation. This situation has been exacerbated by declining attrition rates.

To the extent that departments are required to continue absorbing these costs in future years, I expect that my office will not be able to manage its salary expenses within its annual appropriation by 2014.

To address this critical situation and in an effort to minimize the impact on the services we provide to electors and political entities, Elections Canada is completing a zero-based budgeting exercise. This exercise will allow my office to review its operations, to identify additional cost savings, prioritize investments, and reallocate financial and human resources.

Elections Canada may nonetheless need to apply the workforce adjustment directive to deal with the projected pressure on its annual appropriations. We'll be in a better position in the fall to provide details in that regard.

I would now like to briefly describe our priorities for this fiscal year.

The 2012–13 report on plans and priorities indicates that Elections Canada would focus on two overarching priorities; these are the electoral boundaries readjustment process and improvements for electors and political entities.

In light of recent events, we have readjusted our plans, to place a major priority on strengthening measures aiming to improve compliance with the procedures and standards applicable on voting days. Our intention is threefold: first, to review the voter registration and voting process based on what transpired in Etobicoke Centre; second, to assess the effectiveness of existing checks and balances; and third, to engage key stakeholders in implementing solutions for the 2015 election. We believe this is critical, regardless of the outcome of the appeal.

[*Translation*]

Let me now turn to the electoral boundaries readjustment. The agency will continue enabling the 10 independent commissions to conduct their work in 2012-13 by providing administrative and technical support. We will also begin the preparatory work required to implement the new boundaries.

As prescribed by the legislation, Elections Canada must be ready to hold a general election using the new boundaries within seven months after the conclusion of the readjustment process, anticipated for fall 2013.

At this time, the process is on track. Commissions are planning to complete their proposals this spring and summer, and to conduct public hearings by the fall. I will continue to update parliamentarians throughout the process.

A second priority for 2012-13 is improvements in services for electors and political entities. With a fixed election date of October 2015, my office has a two-year window of opportunity to

focus on selected improvements before returning to election readiness in 2014-15.

For the 2015 election, our focus is on improving convenience and accessibility for Canadians, while ensuring that the integrity of the electoral process is protected. We are considering options for expanding the use of the voter information card as proof of identity and address, as well as expanding our online voter registration service, which was launched in April.

In addition, we will look at options for establishing new locations to vote by special ballot, such as university and college campuses, and community centres serving electors with disabilities. We are also planning to conduct pilot projects to test Internet voting as well as more efficient voting processes at ordinary and advance polls.

These pilot projects require timely parliamentary approval. I will keep parliamentarians updated through the House and Senate committees responsible for electoral matters, prior to seeking approval.

I will also continue to engage key stakeholders, including the Advisory Committee of Political Parties, as these initiatives evolve.

In the case of political entities, we are pursuing our initiatives to reduce the administrative burden and improve our services to them. These initiatives include e-filing capabilities, more efficient maintenance of registration information, and improved access to demographic data by polling division.

As Elections Canada implements measures related to fiscal restraint, it remains committed to offering career development opportunities and improving succession planning.

Lastly, we are preparing to move to a new facility in Gatineau and consolidate all Elections Canada offices in one location. This move is scheduled to occur in summer 2013.

In concluding, I would like to touch on a few other matters of interest to the committee.

First, I would like to thank the committee for its comprehensive consideration of my 2010 recommendations for legislative change. I look forward to the government's response to your report.

Second, I plan to invite the committee to Elections Canada's headquarters in the fall. This will be an occasion to provide you with an update on our key initiatives.

• (1145)

[*English*]

Finally, I would like to follow up on my previous appearance before this committee regarding the so-called robocalls affair.

During my appearance on March 29, I informed the committee that we had at that time received over 800 complaints regarding alleged fraudulent calls made during the 41st general election. The total as of this week is now over 1,100 complaints. However, the number of new complaints is declining considerably.

I also indicated during my last appearance that I would provide you with a report at the end of the fiscal year. I would like to speak briefly to the nature and scope of that report, which is not dependent on the progress or outcome of the investigation.

The purpose of this report will be to suggest improvements to the Canada Elections Act in order to deal with a number of issues relating to new technologies and social media, as well as to all political entities that communicate with electors during a general election. Among other things, it will address issues such as voter contacts, either through automated or live calls, and whether, and if so to what extent, these communications need to be regulated.

As for the investigation, I can confirm that it is ongoing and remains a priority for the commissioner. However, until the investigation has been concluded, I am not in a position to provide additional information to the committee.

I remain mindful that the committee had previously asked that I appear in June to provide a follow-up on this matter. While I am available, if the committee so wishes, I believe an appearance at this time would be premature, as it is unlikely that I will be in a position to provide any additional information on the investigation.

On this, Mr. Chair, I would like to thank you. My colleagues and I would be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you. Thank you very much for your statement.

We will go to questioning. We'll go five-minute rounds and then four-minute rounds, and see if we can do it all in half an hour.

Mr. Reid, go ahead.

• (1150)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you.

Just to be clear, you said you'd report before the end of this fiscal year. You mean then you'll report to us by March 31, 2013?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: I had wanted to inquire about something that came up in the news on Saturday. This relates to your expenditures. Some documents received via the Access to Information Act indicate that Elections Canada has been engaged through an intermediary in doing telephone contact with voters for the purpose of boosting voter turnout. Specifically, \$50,000 was given to the Assembly of First Nations during the last election to set up call centres, reading from prepared scripts that Elections Canada had provided. This was designed to boost aboriginal voter participation.

Let me ask, first of all, would you be able to make available to us copies of those scripts, so we can find out exactly what was said to the voters?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Sure. No problem.

Mr. Scott Reid: I assume as well.... Normally, when a government department or an agency gives money to a private organization, there's a requirement that they submit a report at the end of that to show how they've fulfilled the agreement. I'd be grateful if you could submit that to us as well, so we can take a look at how this contract was fulfilled. Can you do that for us?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Sure.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. Now, the next question I have is, is this the only voter contact that Elections Canada farmed out to another organization in the last election, or indeed in the last several elections? This is part of the five-year program you had set up since 2005, or seven years, I guess. Are there any other cases where other organizations were used to provide such contact?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: As a point of clarification, these were not voter contacts. This was a contract to reach out to band leaders across the country and inform them about the opportunities for their members to vote in their community.

Mr. Scott Reid: Am I correct then that this may have been misreported, that what's in the article may not reflect the fact? Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Certainly it was not voter contact. It was contact with band leaders, and we used the AFN to reach out to band leaders to facilitate awareness about the voting options and processes in their community.

Mr. Scott Reid: So the scripts then are scripts that the AFN would use to talk to band leaders, as opposed to speaking to individual voters. Is that correct?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: I see. All right. I guess we'll have a chance to look at that in more detail.

I asked a question about any other such contracts with any other organizations. Is this one with the AFN the only one of this type, or was there anything else?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: There was a similar contract with the AFN in a previous election. I'm not aware of whether there were any others.

Would you know?

Mr. Belaineh Deguefé (Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Policy, Planning and Public Affairs, Elections Canada): We have also worked with the National Association of Friendship Centres to provide them with information they can supply to the members they serve. That's more of an information program related to indicating where and how to vote.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's also an aboriginal initiative. Were there initiatives directed at any groups other than aboriginals?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Not that I'm aware of.

Mr. Scott Reid: All right. I guess I would ask the same question about submitting to us the scripts of the material for the friendship centres, as well. If you could do that, we'd be most appreciative.

I think that's everything I have, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: You have a minute, if someone wants it.

We'll go to Mr. Kerr, for one minute.

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Thank you very much.

I had a number of questions I was going to try to get in later.

You referenced pilot projects and changing the one from 2013 to 2015. Of course you'll bring all the pilot projects back here for approval. I understand that. Could you expand on why there's a focus on 2015? I might have missed something in your explanation.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: One aspect of this is that we just came out of a general election, which has an impact on projects that were on the drawing board. The other thing is that in light of financial constraints, we need to spread out our expenditures in those areas. Again, we think that 2015 is more reasonable.

On these pilot projects, there are two we're looking at right now. There may be others, but there are two that we'll definitely bring to the attention of this committee. One is on I-Voting. The other one is on voting operations at the polls. How do we organize work? What procedures are in place? How can we become more efficient and provide better service to electors, be more consistent in the application of the legislation, and generally provide a more trustworthy result in all the processes?

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Comartin, for five minutes.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Mayrand, for being here.

As a result of an NDP motion several months ago in the House to address some of the concerns in your report with regard to the authority of your office to review political parties, to oversee them, and to deal with voter contact and some of the voter suppression issues we saw in the last election, Parliament passed a resolution calling on the government to address those issues within six months.

Have your offices been contacted by the government for any input as to the types of remedies, the types of legislation or regulations that could be put in place to address some of those issues?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Not to my knowledge at this point.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Would you expect that you would be consulted before legislation of that nature would be coming forward?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: I would certainly like to be.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Mayrand, with regard to the estimates, the main estimates have a figure, with regard to the regulation of electoral activities, of some \$46 million. But in your report, your figure for the same item is \$38 million. Could you explain the discrepancy of \$8 million between those two figures?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Which report are you referring to?

Mr. Joe Comartin: I'm sorry. It came out of your office. It's "Table 2—Planning Summary Table". This is the projected spending for 2012-13. Your figure is \$38,675,000. The government figure is in excess of \$46 million in the main estimates.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: You're talking about the regulation of electoral activities.

Mr. Joe Comartin: It is the regulation of electoral activities.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: That's a reflection of the reduction in the vote subsidy, which was not included in the main estimates at the time because the act was not in force. It's now reflected in the RPP,

and it shows a reduction of \$7.9 million or so as a result of the reduction in the vote subsidies.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Based on that projection, the actual expected expenditure this year—what's in the main estimates—will be less by \$7.9 million.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Can you give me a quick overview of where those cuts occurred in your office?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: It occurs across the organization. There's a fair amount that's coming from IT—IT infrastructure and IT efficiencies. There's about \$2 million in that area where we have reduced our expenditures.

The remainder of the amount comes from various efficiencies across programs, as well as a reduction in services. For example, in international affairs, we've stopped providing bilateral technical assistance to various countries. In the field of political entities, we will no longer be offering training sessions across the country. That will be offset by some tutorials online, but we will not be in a position to continue offering service face to face.

It's these types of efficiencies. Again, we've tried to keep the reduction of services to a strict bare minimum.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Given the outcome of the decision in Etobicoke, one of the conclusions I came to was that we don't have enough staff when we run the elections, and we don't have staff who are well enough trained to deal with the particular issue the court found they were confronted with on May 2. How are we going to be able to cope with that if we're reducing budgetary items?

• (1200)

Mr. Marc Mayrand: As I indicated earlier, the budget and the reduction won't apply to election delivery. The budget for election delivery is not affected by the proposed cuts.

Mr. Joe Comartin: But you're not augmenting your budget in that regard either, are you?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: At this point, no, but it's something we have to look at. Most of the costs will be in relation to the delivery of the election.

As I said, we need to do a rigorous analysis of how we can improve process and procedure at voting places, and there will be a cost to that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Garneau, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm interested in where the cost associated with running the Commissioner of Elections Canada is identified as a program activity. Under what does that come?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: It would come under program activity number two, regulation of electoral activities.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you.

Given the fact that, as you pointed out, there are a large number of investigations that potentially will occur—you mentioned the number has gone from 800 to 1,100—it seems to me that those costs could be increasing in ways you may not know about right now.

We're told that the commissioner gets whatever funding he requires to do his investigations. What happens when all that money is used up?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: There are two distinctions to make. As part of the operating budget, the ongoing budget of the organization, there's a budgetary envelope of slightly less than \$2 million for the commissioner's office. That keeps the core team in place.

In addition, the commissioner, for any particular investigation, may need additional funds, depending on the circumstances, and that's funded through the statutory authority outside of the ongoing budget. If he needs a few more investigators, that will be paid out by the statutory authority, and it will be shown in the supplementary estimates.

Mr. Marc Garneau: So that would appear in supplementary estimates.

Okay. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

You said that the operating budget of \$94.1 million was then reduced by \$7.5 million, and that you found four ways to apply those reductions of roughly 8%.

You also talked about achieving efficiencies. The government is constantly telling us that most of the reductions across government are linked to efficiencies. I would like to know, then, what your calculation of that number is, in terms of the four methods you are using to cut costs by 8%. How much of that percentage is linked to efficiencies?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: It's around \$2.5 million, but we had to reduce costs by \$7 million. The biggest chunk of those reductions are on the IT side, as we have made considerable efforts to use our resources more efficiently.

We have also applied this rule: any additional costs arising from these new initiatives must be counterbalanced by cost reductions elsewhere.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you.

You also mentioned challenges. Yes, the 2010 budget restraint measures do require departments to absorb the costs associated with increases in collective agreements, and the declining attrition rate has exacerbated that.

Do you believe you can meet that challenge? If not, will you have to tell the government that it's not working?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: As we speak, the numbers need some tweaking because of all the changes in recent months. We expect to have a deficit as of 2014. So we have a year to get ready.

Of course, we are hoping that attrition will help us. However, it's not always employees in non-essential positions who end up leaving. So we will likely fall short on the attrition side. That is why we initiated the zero-based budgeting exercise, so we could reallocate resources while safeguarding Elections Canada's essential programs. Whether it is the commissioner's office, political financing or the administration of elections, program sustainability is crucial regardless of the restraint measures.

• (1205)

[*English*]

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you.

I think we're all concerned with low voter turnout, and you mentioned that you have initiatives to try to create a greater awareness and encourage Canadians to vote. Have your measures succeeded in accordance with your expenditures?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: The main program that comes to mind is student vote. We did an evaluation. All participants—professors, parents, and students—found it extremely useful. They all said it increased their knowledge of our democracy and had an effect on their intention to vote in the future.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kerr.

Mr. Greg Kerr: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mayrand, you mentioned some additional costs and supplements. Do you expect a fair amount of pressure in going through that process this year?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: One thing that could appear in the supplementary estimates would be a by-election call. That would be an additional pressure that would have to be addressed by supplementary estimates.

Mr. Greg Kerr: That's beyond your control?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Exactly. That's why we don't provide for them in the budget.

Mr. Greg Kerr: We hope there aren't a lot of by-elections.

You mentioned the cost settled in the independent commissions—\$6.9 million. Would you anticipate that being the full cost of the boundaries?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: The full cost of boundaries, which spans more than two years, is \$12.2 million—\$6.9 this year, and about \$4 million the year after. And we spent a bit in the previous year to get ready to launch the commission this year.

Mr. Greg Kerr: So it's a multi-year budget impact.

How does this compare with your previous experience in boundary redistribution, cost-wise?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Since it happens only every ten years, I won't talk of my experience. It's basically the same amount in constant dollars, so we've been careful to be rigorous. Of course, the facilities costs have increased significantly since 2004. But we were able to absorb that through a reduction in other expenditures.

Mr. Greg Kerr: I shouldn't have been suggesting you were actually there, but I'm sure you studied it pretty carefully. I appreciate that.

Could I ask about your relocation to Gatineau? I know that's a fairly expensive process. Can you give us a bit of detail on what it encompasses or what you expect?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: This is a multi-year project. The total cost as per class-D estimates from the Department of Public Works is around \$19 million, and \$12 million of those costs will be incurred this year. The reason it has been added to our budget is that the decision to build the building was made prior to budgetary restraint. In addition, our main office is being decommissioned as of 2014. Another factor is that we're now spread out through seven offices around Ottawa. That's not really efficient, so going to Gatineau will leave only two buildings, one main office, where all workers will be located. There is also the warehouse here in Ottawa.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Greg Kerr: Okay.

Just further on that, the decommissioning is the main building, but you actually have to shut down or get out of other buildings as well—a lot of moves.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Yes. Our office has gone long past its due date, I can assure you.

Mr. Greg Kerr: Okay.

That's good. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: There are about 30 seconds left, Mr. Lukiwski, if you want them.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Okay.

I would like a quick comment from you, Monsieur Mayrand, if I could. Right now we're talking about the permanent voters list, and it's always been a bit of a controversy. As you know, obviously, on T4 slips, or I should say on income tax returns, right now it's a voluntary mechanism where if people want their names added to the permanent voters list, they can voluntarily check off a box. Would you like to see that strengthened? In other words, would you like to see that mandatory? Would that help?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: I guess the short answer is that it would help, because currently about 82% or 83% of taxpayers tick that box. That leaves aside 15% to 17% of them. There are other sources, but this is our main source.

On whether it should be mandatory, that's an issue that probably requires a little further thought. As you know, there are other regimes in the world where there is mandatory registration.

• (1210)

The Chair: Madam Turmel, four minutes, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your wonderful presentation.

I would like some information about the budget for the next election. How much more will you need, percentage-wise, to make sure what happened in Etobicoke-Centre doesn't happen again?

There are also budget cuts to training that will affect the next budget.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Which cuts do you mean?

Ms. Nycole Turmel: I mean the cuts to training provided to political parties on the new rules, since there will no longer be any subsidies. What are you going to do? Will you need a bigger percentage for the next election?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Obviously, we haven't figured out the budget for the next election yet. Far too many things could happen in the interim. As I mentioned, a new priority recently came to light with everything that happened in Etobicoke-Centre. We have to revisit the processes for recruitment, training and procedural compliance at the polling station level. We will be undertaking that exercise in the next few months. If the committee accepts our invitation to visit our headquarters in September, I will be able to give you more details at that time.

Whatever a more in-depth examination reveals will determine how we satisfy the need to implement a quality control measure in real time.

An election lasts one day. We hire 230,000 people and there are no do-overs. Often, that is the first and only day when these people work. So we are going to have to find some way of handling this. Implementing quality control measures throughout election day is likely to be expensive. We are going to consider the situation carefully, do our analysis and come up with proposals in due course.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: You touched on the issue of students and their apathy when it comes to election day. What is done about that? It's a fact that, during the last election, a lot of students, in universities especially, did not have time to go to the polling station and produce the necessary proof because the election was during their exam period.

Where will you focus your efforts to ensure that voting is easier for students?

You also mentioned that you have 360 indeterminate employees, but you did not mention casual or term staff. Do you have a budget for such employees? How many do you have?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: To answer your second question, we have somewhere around 140 staff who are either casual or term. They are paid under statutory authority not through parliamentary votes.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: So they aren't affected by the cuts.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Some of them may have been affected by the \$7.5-million reduction. They already know.

As for young people, all kinds of initiatives have been proposed in order to strengthen and improve the information provided to them. More specifically, one initiative we are considering for the 2015 election is to set up polls on university and college campuses across the country so students can vote by special ballot. That is one major initiative to make voting more accessible to them.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Is my time up?

[English]

The Chair: You have nine seconds left.

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: I would very much like to know whether the cuts had an impact on casual and term staff or just permanent employees. I would like to have that information.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We have very little time left. Mr. Williamson, you can have one question, asked and answered in one minute.

Mr. Comartin, I will do the same thing for you, or for someone else here.

Go ahead, Mr. Williamson.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Good day. It's good to see you again, Mr. Mayrand. I salute you for the deficit reduction measures you have taken.

You said, "We will be considering options for expanding the use of the voter information card as proof of identity and address." What is that?

•(1215)

Mr. Marc Mayrand: We did that in the last general election in seniors homes, for example, as well as on reserves across the country. We also introduced it for students residing on campus. In all cases, these are defined electors living in a limited, very restricted area.

It was very successful for seniors, who often have issues establishing their identity and address. In that case, we allowed the voter information card to be used in combination with another piece of identification in order to meet the requirements of the legislation. Many seniors don't drive any more and they don't have a driver's licence. In many cases they don't have many documents left with them. They are maintained by family members.

Mr. John Williamson: You are not proposing any kind of national identification card, then?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: That's another discussion. That's not part of what is being proposed.

Mr. John Williamson: I just want to make sure I close that one right away.

The Chair: Madam Latendresse, you have a minute to have a question asked and answered, if we could, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Thank you. I will be brief.

Still on the topic of voter turnout and students, I know that some pilot projects were in place during the 2011 election, in certain campus polling stations.

Did you observe a higher turnout among younger voters in the pilot project locations?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: There weren't any pilot projects at the federal level. Some provinces have initiated them on a more or less large scale. But that was not done federally.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Do you have any statistics showing better voter turnout in the provinces?

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Not off the top of my head. I will be meeting with most of my colleagues in July. That will no doubt be a topic of discussion. I know that most of my colleagues are looking at repeating and expanding that experience during the next election.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: All right, thank you.

Sorry, but we have run out of time.

Mr. Mayrand, thank you for your invitation to come visit you this fall. That will still be easy while you are in downtown Ottawa, but I see you are moving to Gatineau, so I will get more exercise when we walk over to see Elections Canada in 2014.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: Or maybe after.

The Chair: Thank you for coming today. Thank you for helping us with the estimates.

Mr. Marc Mayrand: I trust you will discuss the question of my future appearance in June.

The Chair: The committee will have that discussion. Thank you very much.

We will suspend for a couple of minutes and put our next panel in place.

•(1215)

(Pause)

•(1220)

The Chair: We will call the meeting back to order.

We're still looking at estimates, and we have a new panel of guests with us. We have Speaker Scheer with us today. Great to have you here, sir.

Madam O'Brien, always good to have you.

Mark Watters, is this your first appearance on estimates at our committee?

Mr. Mark G. Watters (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): I've been before, sir, for supplementaries.

The Chair: Excellent. Great to have you back. I see a lot of help in the benches behind you, should you need it, but I know neither of you, of course, will ever need it.

Let's go ahead. You have an opening statement, Speaker Scheer, and we'll then get to questions by members.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Speaker of the House of Commons): Thank you very much, Mr. Preston. It's a pleasure to be here today.

[Translation]

It is a pleasure to be here before you again, this time to present the House of Commons main estimates for 2012-13.

[English]

The main estimates total \$445,935,033 for this fiscal year. This represents an increase of approximately \$4.2 million or 0.97% over fiscal year 2011-12. As you would expect, all items included in the main estimates were presented to you, and approved by the Board of Internal Economy on November 28, 2011. The House administration conducted a stringent review of requirements in preparation for these main estimates prior to presenting them to the board.

[Translation]

For reference purposes, you have received a document outlining the year-over-year changes from fiscal year 2011-12 to fiscal year 2012-13.

I will now go over the increases, nil increases and reductions with you according to three major themes: budgets for members, House officers and presiding officers; House administration; and employee benefit plans.

• (1225)

[English]

To begin, let's go over the board's decisions with regard to the budgets for members, House officers, and presiding officers. As you may recall, last fiscal year the board decided to continue adopting the restraints introduced in the 2010 federal budget. As such, members' office budgets, including supplements as well as House officers' and presiding officers' budgets, remained at the 2009-10 levels.

[Translation]

For the current fiscal year, budgets for members, House officers and presiding officers have seen increases in some areas and decreases in others.

[English]

The board approved permanent funding of over \$3 million via the main estimates for 2012-13 and subsequent years to reflect contributions to the retiring allowances and retirement compensation arrangements accounts for members of Parliament. The MPRA and the RCA are non-discretionary statutory accounts. The MPRA account is established to provide pension benefits to eligible members of Parliament who contributed to the plan. The RCA account is established to provide for benefits with respect to pension credits accrued by members of Parliament that are not payable out of the MPRA account.

The cost to the House of Commons for contributions to members' pension plans is determined and managed by Treasury Board based on actuarial calculations. As per the Treasury Board policy with respect to members' pension accounts, regular actuarial reviews are conducted by the Chief Actuary of the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions to assess these accounts and adjust contributions as needed. Some of the factors taken into account during reviews include increases to the salaries of members, the likelihood of members retiring, the rate of return on the retirement

accounts, the number of pensioners, and longevity improvement factors.

[Translation]

Next, the board approved permanent funding of \$1.3 million via the main estimates for 2012-13 and subsequent years to offset rising travel costs under the Travel Points System.

As you know, the Travel Points System ensures that all members have access to the same travel resources regardless of their constituency's location. Each fiscal year, members are allocated 64 travel points. Transportation costs for these trips are charged to a House administration central budget.

[English]

Travel under the travel point system is a non-discretionary statutory expense, as per the Parliament of Canada Act, which states in subsection 63.(1):

For each session of Parliament, there shall be allowed to every member of each House of Parliament such actual moving, transportation, travel and telecommunication expenses as that House may, by order, prescribe.

Previous budgets were not sufficient to cover rising travel costs. In the past, a portion of the in-year operating surplus from other budgets within the statutory funding envelope was used to offset the shortfalls related to the travel point system. These surplus funds are no longer available. The cost of travel, and in particular air travel, has increased in recent years due to a number of factors beyond our control. The additional funding for the travel point system addresses these increased costs.

A budget increase of \$1.2 million was approved to cover additional requirements for other personnel costs for members' and House officers' employees. Other personnel costs are a non-discretionary expenditure for which the employer is responsible. They include such elements as lump-sum vacation pay, severance pay, termination benefits, and maternity and parental leave. In this case, the budget increase is required because of an increase in payments related to the number of maternity and parental leave claims, termination and severance pay, as well as lump-sum vacation pay.

The board also approved additional permanent funding of \$828,000 to align the funding for members' office budgets and members' travel status expenses account allocations with the budget allocations that are provided to members. Over the years, members' office budgets and members' travel status expenses account allocations did not match the funding requested through the main estimates because allocations were higher than the funding. Recent budgetary restraint measures have left these budgets virtually unchanged since 2009-2010, which has resulted in budgetary constraints.

Moving on to the revised elector supplement allocations, the board approved permanent funding of \$452,000 via the main estimates for 2012-2013. In subsequent years the revised elector supplement allocation is based on the final number of electors published by the Chief Electoral Officer. Members who represent densely populated constituencies receive an elector supplement that remains in effect for the duration of a Parliament. This graduated supplement is added to the basic budget when there are at least 70,000 electors on the final list of electors for the constituency.

[Translation]

The official electoral list published following the May 2011 general election shows that 60 constituencies are eligible for either a new or a revised elector supplement.

Now, I would like to go over a few reductions to the budgets for members, House officers and presiding officers.

[English]

There's been a decrease of \$76,000 in salaries for House officers due to the reduction in the number of recognized parties following the general election on May 2, 2011. This amount also includes an adjustment to the annual motor vehicle allowance for the Speaker and the Leader of the Official Opposition, in accordance with the Parliament of Canada Act. House officers' budgets were also reduced by \$3.8 million. The budgets were established for all parties based on the results of the May 2, 2011 general election, in accordance with the formula approved by the Board of Internal Economy.

Next I would like to go over a few items relating to the House administration.

• (1230)

In February 2011 the board approved temporary funding of \$786,000 for fiscal year 2011-2012 and nearly \$4 million for fiscal year 2012-2013 for the 127th General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU, to be held in Quebec City in October 2012. That amounts to a total of nearly \$4.8 million in funding, which is shared under the usual 30-70 cost-sharing arrangement between the Senate and the House of Commons. The board also approved the carryover of any remaining funds from fiscal year 2011-2012 to fiscal year 2012-2013. The IPU General Assembly is the main statutory body that expresses the views of the Inter-Parliamentary Union on parliamentary and political issues. It meets twice a year, in the spring and fall, and brings together more than 1,500 parliamentary delegates to study international problems and recommend actions.

[Translation]

It is quite the honour to be a host nation, as the political, economic and cultural benefits of hosting an IPU Assembly are significant. For Canada, it will serve to underscore our long-standing commitment to the principles of parliamentary democracy, help reinforce bilateral and multilateral partnerships, and showcase Canada's rich cultural heritage and diversity. The Parliament of Canada has previously hosted IPU assemblies in 1925, 1965 and 1985.

[English]

In December 2010 the board approved permanent salary funding of \$18,000 required for the House of Commons page program for fiscal year 2010-2011 and subsequent years. The increase in the annual allocation for pages is needed to ensure that the program remains competitive and capable of attracting the most qualified candidates from all regions of the country. The annual page compensation will increase by \$468, from \$12,890 to \$13,358, an amount equal to the average increases in tuition at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University. A review of this provision will take place at the end of fiscal year 2015-2016. For 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, the decision was made to fund the increase internally.

Going back to December 2010 again, the board approved temporary funding of \$98,000 for fiscal 2011-2012 to implement the occupational health and safety and workplace safety and insurance claims management system, as well as permanent funding of \$45,000 for fiscal year 2012-2013 and subsequent years for the support and maintenance of the system. During 2011-2012 the project team completed the request-for-proposal process and retained the required resources to develop the system with the temporary funding of \$53,000.

[Translation]

The deployment of the Occupational Health and Safety/Workplace Safety and Insurance Claims Management System will take place during the 2012-13 fiscal year. The last item under the House administration theme is the Members' Financial Portal. There is a reduction of \$220 thousand for fiscal year 2012-13 for that item.

[English]

Again, back in December 2010 the board approved temporary funding of \$299,000 for fiscal year 2011-12 to implement the first phase of the members' financial portal, as well as permanent funding of \$79,000 for fiscal year 2012-13 and subsequent years for one full-time equivalent position.

The first phase of the members' financial portal was developed and launched by the House administration accounting officers in the fall of 2011. The pilot portion was initiated at the beginning of March 2012 with ten participating members. The intention is to progressively deploy the first phase of the financial portal to all members in the coming months.

The last item I'd like to discuss is employee benefit plans. EBPs are a non-discretionary statutory expenditure that applies to salary expenditures. For fiscal year 2012-13 the Treasury Board Secretariat has adjusted the annual rate for employer EBP contributions from 18% to 17.6%. That amounts to a reduction of more than \$1.1 million for the current fiscal year. EBP contributions include the following costs to the employer: the public service superannuation plan; CPP and QPP; death benefits; and employment insurance accounts.

This concludes the overview of the House of Commons' main estimates for 2012-13. I believe these main estimates aptly represent the House of Commons' commitment to sound resource management.

[*Translation*]

The clerk and I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to a five-minute round to start.

Mr. Lukiwski.

• (1235)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Speaker, for being here.

I have a question that is not covered in your opening remarks. You may be somewhat reticent to comment on it, but it's certainly been a favourite subject of this committee, so I'll ask your indulgence. If you can give some feedback I would appreciate it. It deals with security services.

It's been long felt by this committee that we should combine security forces between the Senate and the House of Commons, but that is not really an issue, unfortunately, this committee can deal with. It's an issue that's dealt with by the Board of Internal Economy, which you chair. So I won't ask you to comment on what kind of a study you may be undertaking with regard to security services, but I will ask you that if there were combined security forces between the House of Commons and the Senate, what savings would you anticipate as a result of such a move? Have you got any kind of estimate of an approximate saving that you might be able to share with this committee on that hypothetical basis?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Sir, you're asking a politician to answer a hypothetical.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: As the Speaker, I thought you were beyond the politics of it all.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I would start by saying that, as I mentioned and as the clerk mentioned when I appeared before you for the supplementary estimates, there is an acknowledgement of the need to look at combining the security forces on the Hill. To that end, the Board of Internal Economy has struck a security subcommittee, which will be any day now meeting with our Senate counterparts to start to develop that initiative to proceed down that route.

In terms of proposed cost savings, I imagine that would be one of the first things the joint committee would look at, at exactly how much that dollar amount would be. I don't know if Mark can put a dollar amount at this point, but just knowing that there would be some reductions in redundancies and overlaps, we anticipate that there could be some cost savings, and of course not just the cost savings but a more efficient delivery of service.

When you're dealing with the Hill, if you count everybody, the three or four different policing entities from Wellington to inside,

with the rationalizing of some of that, ultimately, the expectation would be more efficient delivery service as well.

It's early days yet, so I wouldn't want to put too many specifics down, but the two committees do plan on meeting to start to work on this.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I can't remember, quite frankly, but do you have at your fingertips the cost for the services that we're currently paying? How much do we pay for security services on the House of Commons side, and how much are the security costs on the Senate side?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Do we have that with us?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien (Clerk of the House of Commons): We don't have that, Mr. Chairman, but we can certainly make that available in a written response at a later date.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'd appreciate it, and I think this committee would also appreciate it if you have any updates after the Board of Internal Economy completes its study. I realize that information is confidential until you choose to release it, but I think the committee would certainly appreciate any information updates that you could give us on that.

With that, Chair, I know that my colleague Mr. Williamson has a number of questions. If I may, I'll cede the rest of my time to Mr. Williamson.

The Chair: He has a minute and a half of your time.

Mr. John Williamson: I'd like to talk about the flight passes, Speaker and Clerk, if you could indulge me. As a new member, I was first of all quite surprised at some of the cost that I was initially incurring to get home from Ottawa. I spoke to several people and eventually was able to use the flight passes. It's a great initiative, and I'm curious to know how the uptake has been. Is this an issue you're trying to press onto other members as well? If so, what kinds of cost savings do you expect from that? I notice your costs are going up. I suspect if members were to move to flight passes, costs would decline greatly.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I can ask Mark to talk about the specific uptake at this point, but I can tell you that the board did spend a considerable amount of time to identify savings in travel as part of the strategic operating review. Is that as of now? Ultimately, with full implementation of what the board has approved and for your edification, we are moving toward a system whereby flight passes will be the norm. Right now, it's possible, but we're moving to a situation where to go from the constituency to Ottawa, that will be the norm. It's anticipated that will result in \$5 million in savings.

• (1240)

Mr. John Williamson: Am I done?

The Chair: Yes. That was your minute and a half. We'll get you back, I hope.

Madame Groguhé.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation. The researchers provided us with a document. On page 1 is a table on the main estimates and it lists a total appropriations amount of \$445,935,000. There is a difference in the third part.

Could you provide more detail on the reason for the difference?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: We don't have that document.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Okay.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: It's a reference document for members.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: But the same information appears on page 2 of your document.

Could you provide some detail on the reason behind that difference, beyond what it says on page 2? Is it possible to get some further information? Will it be the same for all subsequent years?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: On page 2 of which document? Forgive me, but I'm not sure which document you're referring to?

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Page 2 of your presentation.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: So you are referring to the increase of \$4 million.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Yes. Basically, to what do you attribute that increase? Will it be recurring every year?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No, it will not be recurring every year. Furthermore, there will be reductions resulting from the strategic review that we undertook and that members were told about. That isn't reflected in the main estimates, but it will appear in the supplementary estimates and the main estimates for the next three fiscal years.

I will ask my colleague Mr. Watters to give you more details on that.

Mr. Mark G. Watters: Thank you kindly, Mr. Chair.

As the clerk said, under the supplementary estimates, we will be reducing House budgets in the years ahead, in accordance with the program endorsed by the BIE, the Board of Internal Economy. The program takes into account the estimates over the next three years. Basically, the increases you see here will be more or less cancelled out in the future, by reductions of roughly \$30 million a year, and that is as of the third year of program implementation.

So it is accurate to say that there would have been standing year-over-year increases in the neighbourhood of \$4 million, but those increases will decrease under the strategic review program conducted at the House.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: And you anticipate \$30 million a year for the next three years? Is that right?

Mr. Mark G. Watters: As of the end of the third year, the reductions will be in the range of \$30 million, and that's for each year.

We are giving ourselves three years to put the program in place, and the reductions will gradually amount to \$30 million as of the third year.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Do I still have some time?

[*English*]

The Chair: Sure. We took a little time with the paperwork.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: You talk about sound resource management, which sounds like a good idea. But at the same time, will the resources set out in the main estimates allow House Administration to run as effectively as possible?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I believe so, Mr. Chair.

When it comes to approaching the reductions strategically, we plan to look at methods and practices that may be outdated. For instance, we are interested in using technology in a more strategic way, one that would enable us to provide members with the same level of service or better, without requiring the involvement of further human resources for a transaction.

I would say that the financial portal recently announced by the Speaker in a press release builds on that idea. It's an opportunity to establish similar ways of doing business. I am very hopeful that it will enable us to maintain our strategic approach and reach our objectives, while delivering the reductions promised further to the strategic review.

• (1245)

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Merci.

Monsieur Garneau, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Chair, I don't have any questions for the Speaker or the Clerk.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Williamson, here is your time back. Four minutes, please.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you.

I'm curious. You expect savings of \$5 million, yet you've requested \$1.3 million, if I'm reading that correctly, in additional funding. Why the up before you go down?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: There have been increased costs, and not every member is on the travel point system up to this point. As I mentioned in my speech, previously there had been surpluses used in other accounts to cover shortfalls. We've gone away from that system, partly because those surpluses in those other accounts aren't there any more. It will go up to reflect the increased costs for the last little bit, and then start to go down as the flight passes are implemented.

Mr. John Williamson: Is that something you're planning to make mandatory?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Yes.

Mr. John Williamson: What about spouses? They're not currently available for spouses, as I understand it.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Right. I'm not sure how the board addressed that, but I think Mark knows a little more about it.

Mr. Mark G. Watters: The thinking was that the spouses would not be allowed to use the flight passes because the flight passes have to be bought in booklets of ten. Members are responsible if those ten segments are not used. In a way, to protect members from unnecessary expense, it was decided by the BOIE at the time that flight passes would only be applicable to members for regular travel to regular points back and forth between Ottawa and the constituency, because there was a high likelihood that the full ten segments would be able to be used. Spousal travel is sometimes less predictable, and therefore it's probably best if a flight pass would not be purchased for the time being.

We're still definitely open to studying that question further. We're only dipping our toes in the water of flight passes with this initiative. Should utilization prove that the full flight passes could be used, there would be no reason we wouldn't want to extend it to spouses, but for the time being it is restricted to members.

Mr. John Williamson: I would urge you to allow members to opt in if they choose. As you said, they—and not the House of Commons and ultimately not taxpayers—are responsible for them if they are not used. It's one more avenue that could be used to save taxpayers additional money, because there are a lot of young members in the House whose families travel with them frequently.

I have another question. It's geared towards the Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, if there were a case in which moneys were spent inappropriately and that question were referred to the BOIE and the BOIE agreed with that—if mail, for example, were improperly used—what would be the sanction after that? Would it go back to the House of Commons? How would the BOIE resolve that? Or would it come to this committee?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: With my short experience on the board—I've been on it for only about a year—I would say that the board looks at each situation and takes appropriate action that it deems necessary in each case.

Mr. John Williamson: And for a new member, what might that be? Educate me.

• (1250)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: In the cases I'm aware of, there has been a combination of actions or specifically costs have been recouped for items that violated the regulation or rule, and in other cases they have worked with the party or the caucus officials to take further steps to ensure that there would be no further violations.

Mr. John Williamson: Is there any public sanction?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: No. Things that come before the board are treated in a confidential manner.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you.

The Chair: Madam Latendresse.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: I would like to pick up on something we talked about earlier, an increase. You said in your presentation that there was a \$3-million increase in the main

estimates for the Members of Parliament Retiring Allowances and Retirement Compensation Arrangements accounts.

Is that due to the fact that, following the last election, an abnormally high number of members retired?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Yes, precisely.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: To some extent, then, that will be permanent, because those individuals will be retired for a rather long time.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Yes.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: I want to make sure I understood correctly. The Retirement Compensation Arrangements or RCA is equivalent to the pension, but for members who do not qualify for the pension. So they receive a lump sum in the form of compensation, because they haven't accumulated enough years of service.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Yes, it is when they haven't accumulated the minimum number required.

I will let the Chief Financial Officer answer that, since he is more comfortable with figures than I am.

Mr. Mark G. Watters: Thank you, Madam Clerk, Mr. Speaker.

How it works is Revenue Canada sets out certain limits on the pension that a person can receive, that can be paid to an individual. When you exceed those limits, basically a separate pension plan is created. The funding for those two accounts provides members with their total pension. So funds are allocated to the pension plan itself and other funds are allocated to a supplemental pension plan, if you will, or a separate one. It has to do with Revenue Canada's maximum limits.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: That answers my question. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Turmel, you have two minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: I actually have a question about employee benefit plans.

You said the employer's contribution rate will decrease from 18% to 17.6%. I have some serious questions about that. Every pension fund in Canada is increasing. The death benefit and the employment insurance fund are running deficits in most places. And yet you are reducing the employer's contributions. I would like to know how you came to that number.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Those figures are from Treasury Board. They did not come from the Board of Internal Economy; it was the government's decision, specifically Treasury Board's. Bear in mind that House employees' collective agreement is similar to that of government employees.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: I will keep the rest of my comments for Treasury Board.

[English]

The Chair: You still have a minute if you....

Mr. Joe Comartin: I have two quick points again on that document the analyst prepared. You have two figures I'm not quite clear on. One is rentals of \$12 million a year. I assume that's rental property, as opposed to rental equipment—or is it a combination?

Mr. Mark G. Watters: That pertains principally to leases. Rentals are not necessarily rental property, but any leases that we would have on equipment—photocopiers, office equipment, and those types of things.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Do we lease any properties?

Mr. Mark G. Watters: Yes, we do.

Mr. Joe Comartin: We do? Which ones?

Mr. Mark G. Watters: We do, but those leases are administered through Public Works and Government Services Canada, so they wouldn't be reflected in the main estimates of the House. Those would be in the main estimates of that particular department. But these would be rental payments that are paid for members or for House administration, for equipment, furniture, and those types of things.

•(1255)

The Chair: We have Mr. Zimmer for four minutes, please.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): I'll take a lot less than that.

On the topic of reduction and efficiencies, we've talked about security forces, but we also see a little white bus that goes around this place. I just wanted to know if there are any thoughts about combining the service and reducing redundancies. Little things like that can have a cost. Certainly we don't want to promote just painting it green. What we would like to do is combine the service, because often it drives around here empty. So I just wanted to know the thoughts on that, and what the savings would be by reducing that service or making it more efficient.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I can say that as the board underwent its strategic and operating review to find the savings, the clerks management team of the House of Commons administration really did look at everything. At this point, there may not be specific plans that would go down to the detail of how many buses are going where, but certainly overall objectives have been assigned to each different department with the hopes of finding some savings. As it's fully implemented, I think you'll see some of these efficiencies found in every area around the House.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Williamson talked about flight passes. My family flies very rarely, actually. I mean, there are six of us. It would

definitely be well utilized by families like ours. I guess the thing we would like to see is that instead of being prevented from using it, allow it as an option, especially for those with bigger families. I know you have the same kind of family. It would be a nice option for us, anyway. So just make a note of that.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I appreciate that. As Mark said, we want to make sure that members are protected, that they don't find themselves in a situation where, at the end of the calendar year, they thought they were going to use them and didn't, and they're on the hook for the obligation for that. At this point, we are very interested. I think it's safe to say the board is very interested in them. In fact some members of the board are quite keen on them. We can monitor it as it goes and see how it works for members, and how much money it's saving. Certainly if we're able to expand it to other family members in a way that protects individual members while still achieving the savings, I think it's safe to say we'd be open to it.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Absolutely. Thank you.

That's all I have.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We are pretty much at our time, so we will thank our guests today. Thank you for the great information you were able to share with us.

We will ask the committee a couple of questions.

Shall vote 15 under the Privy Council carry?

PRIVY COUNCIL
Chief Electoral Officer
Vote 15—Program expenditures.....\$29,501,000

(Vote 15 agreed to)

The Chair: Shall vote 5 under Parliament carry?

PARLIAMENT
House of Commons
Vote 5—Program expenditures.....\$290,904,000

(Vote 5 agreed to)

The Chair: Shall the chair report these votes to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed

The Chair: Thank you very much. That being done, the meeting is adjourned.

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:
Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En cas de non-livraison,
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and
Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the
following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les
Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à
l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>