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Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament

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Thursday, November 29, 2007

Co-Chairs

**The Honourable Marilyn Trenholme Counsell
Mr. Blaine Calkins**

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● (1305)

[English]

The Joint Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Denis Robert): Honourable senators, members of Parliament, as one of the co-clerks of the committee, it is my pleasure to chair the election of the co-chair from the Senate. Do I hear motions to that effect?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): I move Senator Trenholme Counsell.

The Joint Clerk (Mr. Denis Robert): It is moved by Ms. Bennett that Senator Trenholme Counsell be co-chair of this committee.

Are there any other motions?

(Motion agreed to)

The Joint Clerk (Mr. Denis Robert): Senator Trenholme Counsell is declared duly elected co-chair of the Standing Joint Committee.

Senator Trenholme Counsell, congratulations.

Ms. Co-Clerk.

[Translation]

The Joint Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Lucile McGregor): Thank you. I will just wait for Mr. Dryden to take his seat.

[English]

I'm now ready to receive motions to elect a joint chair from the House of Commons.

Are there any nominations?

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): I would like to nominate Mr. Calkins, please.

The Joint Clerk (Ms. Lucile McGregor): Thank you.

It has been proposed that Mr. Calkins be elected co-chair of the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament.

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

The Joint Clerk (Ms. Lucile McGregor): Mr. Calkins is declared duly elected co-chair of the standing joint committee.

My colleague and I now invite the two co-chairs to take their places.

The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): I would like to call the Standing Joint Committee of the Library of Parliament to order please.

First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Byrne for nominating me to be the co-chair. I certainly appreciate it. This is my first opportunity as a member of Parliament to serve as a committee chair in an official capacity, and I certainly am looking forward to the challenges and opportunities that will present themselves at this most distinguished committee.

I'd certainly like to congratulate my co-chair from the Senate, as well.

I believe now that the next item of business is the election of vice-chairs.

● (1310)

The Joint Clerk (Ms. Lucile McGregor): Which I preside over, but you can stay where you are.

I would like now to entertain motions for a vice-chair from the House of Commons.

Do I have any nominations?

Hon. Gerry Byrne: I would like to move Ms. Bennett.

The Joint Clerk (Ms. Lucile McGregor): Mr. Byrne moves Ms. Bennett.

Are there any other nominations?

(Motion agreed to)

The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, you should have a document in front of you, the item "routine motions". It's my understanding that these were the routine motions that were adopted at the last rendition of this committee. I would certainly like to entertain any motions to adopt these routine motions.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): I would propose all of the motions.

The Joint Clerk (Ms. Lucile McGregor): All three?

You could just read them quickly into the record.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): We're certainly looking for the first opportunity to have a working meal.

The first motion is on services of analysts from the Library of Parliament: that the committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the joint chairs, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist in its work.

(Motion agreed to)

The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): Now that that's agreed upon, if the analysts would like to take their place here at the table, that would be great.

The second motion is that the joint clerks of the committee be authorized to distribute to the members of the committee only documents that are available in both official languages.

(Motion agreed to)

The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): And, of course, most importantly, the third motion is that the joint clerks of the committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the committee and its subcommittees.

(Motion agreed to)

The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): Perfect.

Is there any further business? Are there any further wishes of the committee to discuss routine motions?

Senator Oliver.

Senator Donald Oliver: It's not a routine motion, but when you come to new business, I would like to raise something.

The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): Thank you, Senator.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, you should also find a document in your package that deals with the first report of the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament.

Is there any discussion on this report? Is there anybody who has any points they would like to raise?

Mr. Louis Plamondon: I propose—

The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): Mr. Plamondon moves to accept the report. Is that correct, sir?

Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Joint Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): Is it agreed that the joint chairs present the report to the Senate and to the House of Commons?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): At this point, I think there are some things we should discuss. Under new business, Ms. Bennett has an item, but I know Mr. Oliver had brought up something earlier in the meeting.

Mr. Oliver, you have the floor.

Senator Donald Oliver: Thank you.

I'm a strong fan of the Library of Parliament, and I'm honoured to serve on this committee.

As you know, when Parliament passed the Accountability Act, one of the new creations in that act was a parliamentary budget officer. This officer will be in the Library of Parliament. I understand that substantial efforts have been made to set up this new bureau.

One of the things this new bureau will do is assist committees both in the Senate and in the House of Commons with the estimates

and financial documents. It seems to me that it would be extremely important for us to have some involvement and some say in its development, since it will impact directly on the work of both the House of Commons and the Senate.

I think it would be wonderful if we could call the librarian and other senior officials before this committee to give an accounting of how things are proceeding, when it can be up and running, its mandate, how they interpret its mandate, and how it can help us do our work as parliamentarians.

I would like to open that up for discussion. It's something I would like to see.

• (1315)

The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): Senator, are you proposing a short study on this particular topic, or just one meeting?

Senator Donald Oliver: I think it could begin with a briefing from the librarian and senior officials as to how far along they've come in establishing this new and very significant bureau.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): Certainly. Is there anybody else who would like to...?

Ms. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes, that was exactly along the lines of my remarks. I think that, as the senator has said, this is a very exciting thing that a lot of us have hoped for for a long time. In terms of the ongoing job we have as parliamentarians, in terms of estimates and performance reports and all of those things, sometimes we just don't have the time to be able to do this properly.

I love this committee and I think it's a different kind of committee, because we almost form an advisory committee to the parliamentary library. It's not an oversight kind of committee. It tends to be a committee that's been much more forward-looking and really is making sure that Parliament can hold government to account when government has way more resources than Parliament ever will. It means we actually have to have the library respond to what we need as parliamentarians and as committees.

So I support the senator's suggestion that the parliamentary librarian come with other officials and give us an overview of what the library is doing—I think there have been some exciting changes—and what his vision and direction is, including this very important new appointment of the parliamentary budget officer that has come from the Accountability Act.

Senator Donald Oliver: The parliamentary budget officer is empowering parliamentarians.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): I thank you very much, Ms. Bennett.

You had something to add, Senator?

The Joint Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): I just wanted to speak to this meeting.

As I'm sure a number of you have, and perhaps all of you, I read the history of this committee. It's always good to just go back for a moment on history.

The first meeting of this committee was on June 27, 1850, and the first meeting after Confederation was on April 14, 1871. So we have a very long history to uphold, honour, and advance. The committee has functioned continuously, with the exception of the period from 1986 to 1991, when it failed to meet, and it was reinstituted in 1991.

I know, of course, that the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, was very active on this committee during the period of 2002 to 2003, I believe, one of the most active periods in the time of the committee.

At our last meeting, at the one and only meeting in the first session of the 39th Parliament, there was a decision taken—I don't know whether it was recorded—that we would ask Mr. Young and whomever else he might like to bring with him to come before the committee and to discuss the work of this committee's relationship to the library or vice versa, however would be the proper way of putting it. He's very open. In fact, I spoke to him recently. He's looking forward to that opportunity. In view of the request that has just now been made, I think he would be more than willing to include that in the presentation.

Senator Lapointe was very anxious that we have a meeting, hopefully more than just a few minutes in length, where we could indeed discuss the committee and what we should be doing and what we could do for the betterment of the library and the betterment of Parliament and Canadians.

Most certainly, I know that Mr. Young would gladly include that in the outline for his presentation.

• (1320)

The Joint Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): Thank you.

Mr. Byrne.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Chair, I can say with my tongue firmly planted in my cheek that “exciting” is not something I would normally call the Library of Parliament committee, although it has been described that way. However, I think we all share a certain amount of passion for what the Library of Parliament provides us as parliamentarians.

I think in the last Parliament we did talk a little bit about getting for the committee more of a broad overview of the activities of the library, so that we as a committee can become more actively aware of exactly the roles they play and actually be able to respond to changing times and changing mandates for the library and for its staff, and for the resources they require.

One of the things that I would like the committee to consider is a general review of the overall resourcing of the library, not just for the budgetary officer or the office but for the library generally.

If you actually go through some of the main estimates documents and the budgeting for the Parliament of Canada, both houses respectively have seen relatively substantial resource increases for the provision of services to both the senators and the members.

I don't really recall seeing a whole lot of attention paid to resourcing for the Library of Parliament, especially in light of the fact that some of the demands that have been placed on the library and its research staff and other functions have indeed been increasing. The demands by parliamentarians in both houses, I

understand, have increased over the course of time, yet resources have not.

I think it's a really important function for the Library of Parliament committee to ensure that resourcing for the library matches the expectations that we as parliamentarians put on it. So I'd like to consider that as an agenda item.

As part of it, you mentioned that a short study could be conducted on the parliamentary budget office. Maybe what we could do is consider a further study or a larger study on resourcing within the library itself.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): Thank you, Mr. Byrne.

Is there anybody else who would like to speak to this?

Ms. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Before we decide on studies or whatever, I think probably after we have the overview from the parliamentary librarian we'll have a better idea of where we want to go in terms of short studies or long studies.

I would suggest that if it were possible to do before we break, to have the overview, and then we could think about it and see what kinds of studies we want.

There are many other things we were working on in terms of resources, in terms of dreaming in technicolor, keeping people up to date, allowing researchers sabbaticals. There are a lot of things that other parliaments are able to do, and certainly we were very impressed at the C2D2 conference with John Pullinger, the librarian from London, as well as with Soledad Ferreiro from Chile, who presented in terms of the very forward-looking approaches their libraries have been able to take when they have the support of parliamentarians.

Let's let the parliamentary librarian come and we'll see where that takes us.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): I would just like to bring to the attention of the committee that in the last meeting, on June 13, Mr. Byrne did bring forward a motion and it was agreed upon:

That the Committee invite senior managers from the Library of Parliament for a briefing session on the Library's activities, services, and key issues; and that background documentation be provided (e.g. the Library's mandate, role, organization chart, etc.).

We certainly never had an opportunity to fulfill the intention of that motion. I wonder if that would adequately cover the spirit of the discussion that's here before us. I don't know if it actually does, because I think what Senator Oliver has brought forward is to go a little bit beyond that. So perhaps we could append that to the motion.

I don't know, Mr. Byrne, if you wanted to bring your motion forward again with a friendly amendment from Senator Oliver that would include the issues that he wants to have discussed here. I believe they are consistent with what Ms. Bennett wants. I think we would probably have consensus around the table.

• (1325)

Hon. Gerry Byrne: I think you're right, Mr. Co-Chair. The intent was just to have a broad-based overview of the library, and I think Senator Oliver would like to delve into some specifics on a particular aspect of the library, which is the creation of the parliamentary budgeting office.

So, Senator, if you'd agree—

Senator Donald Oliver: I'd agree.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: —we could have a short course of introduction to the library and its people, its services, its mandate, as well as some discussion about where he, senior staff of the library, and others feel they would like to see improvements or potential for growth or expansion.

The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): Certainly. Then the motion, as you had it with an amendment coming forward, was that somebody, after that overview is presented, would present on the parliamentary budget officer. Is that correct, Senator Oliver?

If we could have somebody move that motion—

Senator Donald Oliver: I so move.

The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): Thank you, Senator.

Is there any further discussion?

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

The Joint Co-Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell): If I may, I think we should bear in mind that this may well take two meetings in order to have an adequate discussion of the initial part of the motion, to which Mr. Young has addressed his work plan and preparation for this meeting that they are ready to hold with us, and

the second. I don't think we should be surprised if in the end we need two meetings to deal with these two things adequately.

To the researchers, Mr. Young may decide that is indeed what he wants to do, what he and his staff and you would like to do, in order to do it adequately. Otherwise we may just find ourselves rushing through the agenda without the proper discussion that I'm sure all members would wish to have.

The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): Mr. Byrne.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: With the motion now passed, could we leave it to the discussion between the two co-chairs to liaise with the librarian to come to a resolution as to a schedule that meets his requirements for preparation and our zest to get to the bottom of all this?

The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): I certainly think that sounds like a reasonable suggestion.

Is there any other business?

I think we've resolved that, then. I will gladly discuss that with my co-chair here, and we will come up with a schedule that works for all parties involved and get back to—

Hon. Gerry Byrne: So the next meeting will be to the call of the co-chairs?

The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Blaine Calkins): I believe that once we know that, we would have to call a meeting.

Is there any other business to be discussed?

There is a motion to adjourn by Mr. Allen.

Thank you very much. We're adjourned.

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