



CANADA

# **Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament**

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EVIDENCE

**Wednesday, June 13, 2007**

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**Co-Chairs**

**The Honourable Marilyn Trenholme Counsell  
Mr. Peter Goldring**

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## Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament

Wednesday, June 13, 2007

•(1305)

[*English*]

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC)):** Ladies and gentlemen, I'm pleased to call to order this meeting of the library committee.

I think it's time that we bring the committee together to discuss our future and our mandate, and to have some input from everybody around the table concerning what we could work together on to improve what we can. I suppose we could organize some common functions.

I'll let the senator have some words too.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**The Joint Co-Chair (Senator for New Brunswick Marilyn Trenholme Counsell):** Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, everyone. I am very pleased that we are meeting after all this time. I hope that, in future, we will have more meetings so that our work can be of use to the Library and to Parliament.

Mr. Co-Chair, I would like to give all the members a chance to state their vision for the committee.

[*English*]

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Excellent.

We will proceed with the first member on the left. What are your interests with the library committee? If you have some ideas or thoughts to add as to the direction this committee could take, please do so.

**Hon. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Lib.):** We should have the meeting with the librarian and listen to the concerns.

It used to be chaired by the parliamentary secretary, I think around 1997.

Sometimes we had a regular meeting with the librarian, so we had some input from the librarian on what we could do.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** With the library. Very good.

And you, sir?

**Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.):** Thank you.

I'm Glen Pearson, a new member of Parliament. I was elected in November.

I expressed interest in this committee because I think the Library of Parliament is an important institution. Also, I think that it is good to work with Senate colleagues on this. So that's why I'm here.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Very good.

Monsieur Plamondon.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ):** I have been a member of this committee for a long time. I have always felt that it was not very useful because we showed up, we chose the chair and vice-chair, and one year later, we received a report on the work that had been done. When things were going badly, the meeting took five minutes and when things were going well, it took two minutes.

However, I think it could be useful if we set ourselves the task of finding ways in which to improve services to parliamentarians. Research has always been done for them in the traditional way. Perhaps there are other ways of doing it that have not been explored. We could see if the interests of parliamentarians would be better served by other ways of operating, especially in a climate of globalization.

With the Internet, each member's office has become a kind of research centre, a library in itself. We have access to data from all around the world. The Library of Parliament has no need to provide this service to us because our parties' research offices can do it. In conjunction with Library of Parliament officials, we could look at ways to offer services to complement those that now exist in every member's office.

Thank you.

•(1310)

[*English*]

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Certainly in this changing world, as you alluded to with the Internet, there are many more things that can be explored as far as what the Library of Parliament is doing, and also how it interrelates and interacts with some of the particular foreign countries.

Very good. Thank you.

Do you have any comments on that?

[*Translation*]

**The Joint Co-Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell):** No. We can continue going round the table.

[English]

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Senator?

**Senator Donald H. Oliver (Nova Scotia):** Thank you.

I've been in the Senate for 17 years, and one of the constant sources of assistance to me has been the Library of Parliament. We have expert researchers in the library, and they do exceptional work. I would say that, given the mandate to review the effectiveness, management, and operation of the Library of Parliament, we should have the librarian and some of the senior officials come before this committee to outline what some of their concerns and problems are.

Following that, I know that in the new Accountability Act there is a new provision designed to empower parliamentarians and parliamentary committees, and there is a new branch being established to provide more service to particularly the public accounts committee and the national finance committee. It might be useful for us to have a report on how that's being developed, because it's new, a product of Bill C-2.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Would this have anything to do with the Ethics Commissioner? Is it under the purview of examination by the Ethics Commissioner?

**Mr. James Robertson (Committee Researcher):** No. It's the parliamentary budget office, which was part of Bill C-2 and which has been established within the Library of Parliament.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Very good.

Thank you, Senator.

Mr. Calkins.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As a new parliamentarian, I've had some opportunity to use the Library of Parliament. I agree with my colleague from the Senate that the service has been excellent.

I think one of the things, though, that would be helpful to me as a member of this committee is if we were to have an opportunity to bring some of the people in from the library just to ask them questions.

I don't know and am not familiar with—and perhaps it's my own issue, because I haven't spent a whole lot of time looking—what the budget is for the library on an annual basis. I'm unaware whether there are any estimates. I don't know how it's funded as a joint venture between the Senate and the House. That would be an educational thing for me to learn a bit about.

The other issue I've had as a parliamentarian, and maybe this is my issue and I'll get better with time.... The issue I've had is that I've made several requests to the Library of Parliament, and the work went ahead based on the question I asked. Maybe I wasn't asking the right question, but I wasn't approached for any clarification on the question and I often got an answer to a question I wasn't trying to ask. A bit of intervention might have saved the library researcher and me a lot of time and frustration, on both ends.

Maybe we could review the process by which the library responds to parliamentarians' requests, so that we make sure the question that is asked is the one that's answered. And it might be both ways: that

the parliamentarian has to learn how to ask the right question, and that the library may need to do something in its process to make sure, before it heads off and does a bunch of work, that it has the question in hand that it's supposed to be answering.

•(1315)

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Very good.

Under the element of the discussion of activities for the fall, Senator, one of the considerations, whether because of the new Parliament we have had or the fact that the library was under construction when the Parliament first came in, is that it might be helpful—but we'll be discussing this further—to have new members, or all members, come in to have that kind of interaction with the library personnel themselves.

Thank you.

Mr. Allen.

**Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm not going to rehash the ground. Just being appointed to this committee, I wasn't quite sure what to expect, although as parliamentarians we use the services quite often, especially on the research side.

I would like to have some more framework in terms of what is done at the Library of Parliament, what all the kinds of services are that we are doing, why we're doing some of these services. I think some of the folks at the Library of Parliament could probably give us a better indication of what's working and what's not, and—presumably there's a reason—where some of these services originated and why. What kinds of decisions were made to originate some of these services? Maybe it's time we took a hard look at a review, from a standpoint of whether they are the most cost-effective services, and whether there are others that should be given to us that we probably could use.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Thank you very much.

Mr. Byrne.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.):** Thank you to both co-chairs.

There's no doubt about it, among all parliamentarians, the Library of Parliament is seen, perceived, and understood to be serving parliamentarians exceptionally well. The question, really, is whether this committee is serving the library well. For instance, are there other things we could be examining to ensure that the resources available to it are meeting its expectations and the demands placed upon it?

I think it goes without saying, too, that we should be mindful of not trying to create work where none is really required, or to create a task just for the sake of creating a sense of purpose for the committee itself. It would be extremely helpful for all of us sitting with the committee to get an overview of the library's activities, to seek an examination of whether or not the resources that are currently available to it are actually meeting the expectations placed upon our librarian and his very capable staff.

That would be it, I think. I really don't see a huge amount of required intervention on our part—unless, of course, the librarian himself would note any areas of concern or any issues that he'd like to bring forward to improve or expand the services of the Library of Parliament.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Point well made. Certainly we should be serving the library itself, too, trying to understand if it has sufficient resources for its job and for its position. Very good point.

Senator.

[Translation]

**Senator Jean Lapointe (Québec (Saurel)):** Madam Chairman, Mr. Chairman, my remarks are no reflection on the beauty of the Library of Parliament or the contribution made by its employees. But I have now been on this committee for four years. In my opinion, the committee is absolutely useless in its present form. This is not a judgment on you or on Senator Trenholme Counsell. I am just thinking aloud about the usefulness of the committee as it is now. I think that this joint committee could become a Senate committee or a Commons committee, which would then have a chair who would be paid and would therefore have to justify the salary.

At the moment, we have so few meetings that I forget about them. I no longer remember when we had the last meeting or the one before that.

I have not finished, Mr. Chairman.

• (1320)

[English]

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** One of the points of this discussion is to have input—including your input—into what can be constructively added to make representation and to make the library better for the people it serves. Of course we're looking for suggestions and ideas.

It's my understanding that, historically, the library was brought together from a separate Senate library and a separate House library. There was consensus to bring it together this way.

What we're looking for is input. We value your suggestion on any constructive ideas you may think we would want to discuss and perhaps bring forward.

[Translation]

**Senator Jean Lapointe:** You do not have to follow my suggestions. That is all they are. If you want to hear about the stupid things the committee has done, let me tell you about the colossal farce of the first parliamentary poet laureate. His name escapes me, but we paid him a pittance. He was a very competent man. He used his own money to pay his secretary more than the Library of Parliament Committee paid him each year. I think that the committee could be more dynamic and could look for ways in which to help young people in this country.

[English]

**An hon. member:** Poet Laureate.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Poet Laureate? That may very well be a consideration for discussion.

These are the types of things—

[Translation]

**Senator Jean Lapointe:** Mr. Chairman, maybe this will remain a joint committee. But why does it have unpaid chairs who do not receive compensation like all other committee chairs do? If you and Senator Trenholme Counsell were paid, we might meet more frequently in order for you to justify your position. You are not easy to reach, Mr. Chairman. That is all I can say.

[English]

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Perhaps that's a consideration to bring forward too.

I suppose there are a number of reasons for infrequent meetings. One of them we wish to discuss here a little later is the timing of the meetings and the difficulty coordinating. There have been several attempts to try to have other meetings, but it's a timing situation that we hope to discuss afterwards.

The other thing is, what issues are we bringing forward? As Mr. Byrne was saying, the purpose is to have meetings that have value and have constructive elements to them, not to have meetings for the sake of having meetings. So if we can agree on a general program, a consensus of what we feel is important to bring forward, then I'm sure regular meetings would be forthcoming.

Yes, Ms. Gallant.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** I see two interpreters here, the people who set up the room, the refreshments, the lady who makes sure our microphones come on, the clerk, and the researchers from the Library of Parliament. What is the cost of conducting one of these meetings?

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** We would have to get the answer on that.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Thank you.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell):** I only have this in English, so I'll read it only in English. From the Parliament of Canada Act I thought I would like to read into the record, and for our discussion, what the responsibilities of the joint committee are outlined as. This is from a report that was written by our previous clerk, Mr. Thomas Hall, January 2006, at the time of his departure from the committee:

The primary responsibilities of the Joint Committee are to assist the two Speakers (1) with the "direction and control of the Library of Parliament and the officers, clerks and servants connected therewith" (subsection 74[1] of the Parliament of Canada Act), (2) with the making of "orders and regulations for the government of the Library, and for the proper expenditure of moneys voted by Parliament for the purchase of books, maps or other articles to be deposited therein" (subsection 74(2), and (3) with the making of regulations defining the official duties of the Parliamentary Librarian, the Associate Parliamentary Librarian and the other officers, clerks and servants of the Library (section 78).

Mr. Hall goes on to mention that this of course would also involve a report at the end of the year.

There are things there that we are not... And the rules of the Senate under 92(2) state:

Except as provided in section (3) below, a standing or special committee may decide to hold an *in camera* meeting to discuss its business only when the agenda deals with any of the following: (a) wages, salaries and other employee benefits; (b) contract negotiations; etc.

That's really a general rule for all Senate committees.

It is clear from the Parliament of Canada Act that this committee was expected to do some work. I think the suggestion has come forth today that, first of all, we hold meetings with the library staff and learn. I think also, Mr. Chairman, that maybe you and I should have a meeting with the Speakers to ascertain their level of support and what they understand of this committee. We really are meant to work with the Speakers, which is part of the uniqueness of this committee. Perhaps it is *the* uniqueness. I don't know whether any other committee is ordered, shall I say, through an act of Parliament to work with the two Speakers.

Except for the time of the appointment of a new librarian and the poet laureate—that was very perfunctory and was just ceremonial, if you will—I don't think we have ever established their need or their feeling about working with us or us with them. I think that needs to be clarified, whether the two Speakers see us an integral role in this whole process, and then, of course, to learn about the library itself.

● (1325)

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** I think that certainly makes a lot of sense to do. Even in receiving this role there is a general feeling, even for myself, as to where things fit together. One thing that is commonly understood is the value in the role that the library plays. I think every parliamentarian has benefited from that.

The challenge here is what can we do to reinforce that, if possible, or to review and try to make suggestions to things that will improve it. That will be the challenge coming up, and to hear from the library itself first on what they can do would probably be a good direction to start in, while trying not to lose sight of the overall responsibility here. This is a very integral part of the parliamentary system that has a strong shared value from both the senators and the members of Parliament.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell):** If I might just add to that, I think if you look at all of our other committees, they take the name and substance of the committee as their mandate and choose to do something that is good for Canada and Canadians. Therefore I think if we are to be in part the guardians of this magnificent library, then it would behoove us not only to do the regulatory things that are listed here but also to be ambassadors, if you will, for the library, not only to our colleagues in the House of Commons and in the Senate but to the greater community. I think either we disband or else we become active and carry this mantle of being members of this committee with pride.

[*Translation*]

**Senator Jean Lapointe:** A month or a month and a half ago, I was selected to be the Liberal party's official arts and culture critic. For me, arts and culture have no party affiliation, and I think that there is a lot that can be done for young people all over the country in collaboration with the Library of Parliament staff. I think that the Library of Parliament could make a fabulous contribution in the arts, whether it be through writing contests, activities conducted through the Internet or other things. To do this, I feel that we have to meet and talk to each other in a spirit of mutual respect.

That said, I make it clear that the position of chairman does not interest me even if it were paid. I do not have what it takes. I am not a lawyer by training; for any of you who do not know, I am an artist.

Being an artist is my calling, being a senator is my job. I am making this clear for anyone who thinks I want the position. I would not accept it, whatever the remuneration. But I would like to contribute to young people's art and culture in this country, from coast to coast. I think that the Library of Parliament would be the most beautiful vehicle imaginable for that.

Thank you. My apologies for taking more time than necessary.

[*English*]

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** That's fine.

I think we're ready to move on to the second element of business here that we've been discussing, which is activities for the fall session.

Would it be best to leave this to be drawn up, some of the ideas that we've been suggesting, or are there other suggestions around the table of activities that we could plan for the fall session?

One of the thoughts was, of course, as I mentioned before, having the parliamentarians, when the fall session starts, so that they can be introduced to the librarians, to see how they can interact with the library and utilize the services of it or what other activities we could plan. That would be more on a social basis, with the dual purpose of introducing the people who can help explain the role of the library, but also, at the same time, it would be wonderful to see the example of modern renovation, the beautiful renovation job that has been done on the library itself.

Mr. Calkins.

● (1330)

**Mr. Blaine Calkins:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to say for the record, I've served on municipal councils, and so on, and have a bit of experience at that level. Every municipality that I'm aware of that has a library has a library board that oversees the operations of the library and the direction of the library.

I know that responsibility is somewhat different from this library. However, I don't think this committee could seriously consider disbanding or dissolving and leaving basically no oversight to the Library of Parliament. I just wanted to get that on the record.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Thank you very much.

Mr. Byrne.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** I'd like to propose that in the fall, when we return, we could ask the parliamentary staff, the library staff, to assemble a series of briefing materials for distribution to committee members on the mandate, the role, the organizational chart, and the services offered by the Library of Parliament, and maybe have the librarian and the directors of the various branches within the library come before the committee just to give a broad overview of the activities within each of their branches. That may stimulate some aspects or some discussions about further activities that could flow from that.

I think committee members need to be armed with some knowledge about the background of Parliament and what currently is available. Then, from that, it may lead into more specific questions and activities.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** So the suggestion would be, for the first meeting, to have them appear and bring some documents and information on the library.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** Just very broad-based and descriptive in nature, not at this time meant for in-depth analysis like line items in a budget or anything like that; just basically giving a very broad overview of Parliament, its branches, its services, and an opportunity to ask about certain key issues or aspects that could be the subject of further discussion.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Very good.

Senator Oliver.

**Senator Donald H. Oliver:** I just want to say that the Senate starts at 1:30 and it's 1:30 now. I'm on duty, so I have to leave. I'm sorry.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell):** I believe we have really put our opinions on the table well. I don't sense any dissent about going forward constructively and actively with a purpose, a plan, and regular meetings. Perhaps they don't have to be every week, but they should have a regularity that we all know about, expect, prepare for, and attend. That's my impression. It's been very good.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** There are two things I have notes on. First is that we seek a time between 12:30 and 1:30 on Thursdays to meet in September. If that's in accordance with most of your schedules and it seems to be in order, I seek agreement on a motion to that effect.

[*Translation*]

**Senator Jean Lapointe:** It could start at noon, and we could have lunch.

•(1335)

**The Joint Co-Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell):** Yes.

**Senator Jean Lapointe:** Considering what the committee costs, there has to be a way of serving some sandwiches or a light meal. Then we could meet between noon and 1 p.m. or 1:30 p.m. It would be easier because on Thursdays, the Senate begins sitting at 1:30 p.m.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell):** The other committees finish at 12:30 p.m.

**Senator Jean Lapointe:** We could even start at 11:30 a.m. If there is a lunch, that is not a problem. Then we could meet until 1 p.m.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell):** Fine, we will get that organized.

[*English*]

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** The sandwiches are a drawing card.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Senator Marilyn Trenholme Counsell):** Obviously, we know that.

[*Translation*]

Maybe the next time.

[*English*]

**Mr. Glen Pearson:** I so move what you said, Mr. Chair, about meeting at whatever time you work out on Thursdays.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Thank you very much.

The second thing is that we ask the clerks and the analyst to prepare a work plan for the committee's consideration in September.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Joint Co-Chair (Mr. Peter Goldring):** Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.







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