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BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

Thursday, December 12, 2019

• (1235)

[Translation]

The Honourable Anthony Rota (Speaker of the House of Commons): Order. Welcome, everyone.

[English]

I don't want everybody to think that we will have only 25-minute meetings from now on. This will not be the norm. This is not a precedent.

In light of what's happened, we will end at about one o'clock. We'll try to make it as quick as possible.

If it's okay, with your unanimous consent, we'll go straight to item three. Do we have your consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Perfect.

We'll start with Madame Labrecque-Riel.

To the witnesses, I just want to remind you that we are under time constraints. We would ask you to be as concise as possible. We have to end at one o'clock, unfortunately.

As I'm sure you have a lot of details, I'll stop and let you start.

[Translation]

Ms. Colette Labrecque-Riel (Clerk Assistant and Director General, International and Interparliamentary Affairs, House of Commons): Mr. Chair, members of the Board of Internal Economy, good afternoon.

I am here to present a funding request for a minor reorganization I've undertaken at the International and Interparliamentary Affairs Directorate.

[English]

Some time ago, I decided to do an analysis of the workload of my team and discovered that the working conditions were not optimal. The IIA directorate, international and interparliamentary affairs, is a joint Senate and House directorate. I have Senate employees and House employees on my team. We deliver services for parliamentary associations, Speakers' exchanges, protocol and conferences. We currently have 54 FTE employees—12 Senate and 42 House.

We did an analysis in terms of the working conditions. I felt obliged to present a reorganization restructuring.

[Translation]

The analysis on which I based my recommendation showed that we had too many competing operational needs. Overtime was on the rise, sick leave usage was high, and we had low usage of annual leave. There was also a very high turnover rate.

I therefore initiated a minor reorganization of my team. We have reassigned internal resources, and we need one more employee to respond to operational needs and pressure. As I said earlier, we serve both the Senate and the House. I've included the numbers. The Senate share of the cost is 30%, and the House share is 70%.

[English]

Essentially, here is the bottom line for the House of Commons for this additional FTE. It was piloted on my team, and I have found very encouraging results since April: Overtime is down; sick leave is down; annual leave is up in terms of their ability to take it.

So that is the request before you—the approval of one FTE.

[Translation]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Rodriguez, do you have any questions?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I imagine the hiring has brought down overtime, as you said. Reduced overtime means reduced costs. Does that help somewhat?

Ms. Colette Labrecque-Riel: Yes, I expect it will. Cost reduction was one of my main objectives. We will see cost recovery, especially when it comes to international conferences. As you know, the Joint Interparliamentary Council comes here from time to time to seek funding approval for major international conferences. On average, these conferences cost more than \$1 million. For these conferences, an amount is always set aside for overtime. My objective is to reduce this amount. After one or two conferences, I will already have recovered the funds to cover this individual's salary.

• (1240)

[*English*]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Julian, you have a question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (House Leader of the New Democratic Party): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I support this additional funding, which is around \$96,000. The most striking argument that prompts me to support this request is that employees worked almost 3,000 hours of overtime, but only managed to get 200 hours of annual leave. That means there's a problem. People are increasingly required to work overtime. We can see here that they were unable to take their annual leave. As a result, more and more sick leave hours are being used.

We manage financial resources here, sure, but we also manage human resources. It seems there is a work overload here. The responsible thing for us to do is add a few more human resources to balance things out a little more in this area.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Were you expecting a response? Was that simply a comment?

We will now move on to Ms. DeBellefeuille.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Whip of the Bloc Québécois): Ms. Labrecque-Riel, I'd like to congratulate you for your high-quality brief. When I looked it over to prepare for the meeting, I found that your needs were well documented. I saw that you took care to stay within your financial and performance parameters, and that you were also sensitive to the conditions of those working on your teams.

Could you explain to us what impact a new managerial position will have on reducing employee overtime?

Ms. Colette Labrecque-Riel: Basically, adding a manager would allow the entire management team to keep a closer eye on the workload of the directorate's 54 employees—55 if you accept our request. I have a team whose workload is increasing. If no one is monitoring that and a manager cannot reassign the work, people do overtime. Managers are unable to monitor the work and redistribute the workload. Having another manager meant that we could do that monitoring and redistribution. As I said earlier, the pilot project has been going since April, and we've already seen very tangible results.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you. You will have our support. I very much agree with your request.

[*English*]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chief Opposition Whip): Thank you very much.

Certainly, as members of Parliament and senators, we want to ensure the health and safety of people who are working for us. I think we have to recognize the strain that has been put on this group. However, again, in the last Board of Internal Economy, we had this discussion about there having been an increase of 60% or so in the activities of associations in the last number of years. Is there any cap in place? As the whip, I can tell you that members of Parlia-

ment do like to travel internationally, and obviously they've done that more and more over the last number of years.

While we do have to support that function, is there any cost control on that other side to prevent the growth rate from being 33% or 27% a year? Obviously, if the travel is happening, we need to have support staff, but what are we doing to ensure that this number doesn't just continue to increase exponentially year over year?

Ms. Colette Labrecque-Riel: I'm not so sure that I have the magic solution in terms of where the cap is. I can say that this request does not stem only from associations. There is a direct link with associations in the sense that there's a strong connection to my request with international conferences that we host, but the outgoing association activities are not the big issue here. It really stems from the protocol team, who are responsible for the immediate delivery of protocol services on the Hill. With regard to the two buildings, the delivery of these types of events in two buildings is much more complex for these individuals. Until I piloted this new structure, the international conferences used to be the responsibility of the same team. As they're delivering these protocol activities on the Hill on a very immediate and reactive basis, they're unable to do the long-term and medium-term planning for these conferences other than doing it on evenings and weekends.

I do take your point. I know that the council will be looking at these things once it ramps up again, probably in February, for associations' outgoing activities, but this request is really for all of my business lines, not just for associations.

• (1245)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Very good. Are there any other questions?

I sense that there is agreement on this item. Agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Anthony Rota: We'll move on to the next item. We'll go on to number 4.

[*Translation*]

We will now move to item 4, legal and legislative services to members of Parliament. Presenting today are Philippe Dufresne, Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, and Daniel Paquette, chief financial officer.

Mr. Philippe Dufresne (Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the Board of Internal Economy.

This is a funding request for the provision of legal and legislation services to members of Parliament. We offer these services to all members of Parliament so they can carry out all of their parliamentary functions, including drafting of private members' bills and amendments. We provide legal advice and representation to opposition MPs as managers, and in relation to their role in their riding. There have been major changes in the legal and legislative context for members of Parliament, which has led them to request additional support.

There are three major changes. The first is that we now have 10% more members of Parliament. That has resulted in a matching 10% rise in our workload and in requests for advice and representation.

[English]

We have dealt with that 10% increase through the addition of four positions that have been risk-managed by the House administration, representing a 13% increase in the team.

Two other major changes have occurred since 2015, one on the legislative side and another on the legal side.

On the legislative side, we have seen a significant increase in the number of messages and amendments from the Senate following the adoption of bills by the House. In the 41st Parliament we had two messages, and in the 42nd Parliament we had 32, so 16 times as many.

That increase has resulted in delays, longer timelines for the preparation of private members' bills by my office, and longer timelines for the preparation of amendments. In terms of the time and potentially the quality of the services, that touches on one of the fundamental roles of members of Parliament. We would like to see that delay reduced. It's now at 48 sitting days for the preparation of a private member's bill, and we would like to bring that back to 30 sitting days, which it was before, if not fewer.

On the legal side, the last Parliament saw the adoption of four acts that bring in new legal obligations on members and on the institution, so these are quite significant. They are Bill C-58, on proactive disclosure; Bill C-65, on health and safety and the prevention of harassment and violence; Bill C-81, on accessibility; and Bill C-86, on pay equity.

These bills have brought, or will bring, with them obligations in terms of all aspects of members' work, and they will bring in complaint mechanisms that will require legal advice and legal representation.

[Translation]

To address this change, we are first asking the Board of Internal Economy to stabilize funding for the four positions added and managed by the House Administration. We're also requesting funding for three additional positions, bringing the total to seven: four legal and three non-legal positions. This would help us to cope with the new context.

[English]

This would allow us to reduce the timelines and to provide more proactive services to members, and it would allow members to meet the new legal obligations, since 2015.

[Translation]

I can now answer your questions.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Rodriguez, you have the floor.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I have a short question about procedure. We have 12 minutes left, and I'd like to know what items should be discussed and adopted so that these people can function. What do we need to do before adjourning?

Hon. Anthony Rota: Items four and five are the most pressing.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Items four and five, you say?

Hon. Anthony Rota: Yes. We're now on item four. If it pleases the committee, we will finish up item four.

Are there any questions about Mr. Dufresne's presentation?

Mr. Julian, you have the floor.

• (1250)

Mr. Peter Julian: I have only one question. I'd like to know whether we should adopt item five today.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Yes, item five is key because it concerns the budget. We need it to continue our work.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

Especially in the context of a minority Parliament, getting the legislation right is of primary importance. We've seen the cost of getting legislation wrong and of court challenges that ultimately cost taxpayers millions of dollars, so I do support this particular expenditure because of that.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I understand that the four additional positions are currently paid for out of the carry-forward for the House administration, so you're asking for those four to come into your budget line, plus an additional three.

Do we know how much money that will then free up for House administration, and do we know what that will then be allocated to?

Hon. Anthony Rota: Mr. Dufresne and Mr. Paquette.

Mr. Daniel Paquette (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): When we look at the carry-forward, usually we look at some of the priorities we have, various projects that are going to be in-year activities. Since the money is not guaranteed from year to year, we try to make sure we don't use it for a permanent pressure of that nature so that we're looking forward.

Some of it does go into some life-cycling of our assets and some of the other projects that come forward to support the members, so it's not usually determined ahead of time.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Thank you.

Are there any other questions? Are we all in agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Anthony Rota: On number five, proposed 2020-21 main estimates, we have, as the presenters, Daniel Paquette, chief financial officer; and Elaine Valiquette, senior director in financial planning, resource management and corporate policies.

Monsieur Paquette.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Paquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I am here today to present the proposed 2020-21 main estimates and seek the approval of the board. These estimates summarize all the associated items previously approved by the board, including the two submissions that we just heard today.

What we are asking for is the acceptance of the proposed amount of \$516.4 million for main estimates for the House, which represents a 2.6% increase compared to the main estimates in previous years.

[Translation]

The House's main estimates include both voted and statutory expenditures. The voted portion is estimated to be \$360 million, and the statutory, \$156.3 million. Overall, the items previously approved are increases to the legislative aspect of operating budgets for members of Parliament and House officers, as well as allowances.

[English]

One item that is new for this year is the adjustment included for \$1.7 million for House officers. This is the amount, given the revised party representation in the House, for the additional recognized party after the last general election.

Some of the key initiatives that we've highlighted before are the support of \$2.5 million for the HR advisory service for members, which was approved by the board last February, and two of the assemblies that were also approved during the year that are going to happen in the fiscal year, for \$1.3 million.

[Translation]

In closing, it is recommended that the Board approve the proposed 2020-21 Main Estimates for the House of Commons in the amount of \$516.4 million. This funding is allocated between two programs, \$310.6 million for the members and House officers program and \$205.8 million for the House administration program.

[English]

We are ready for questions.

[Translation]

Hon. Anthony Rota: Thank you.

[English]

Are there any questions?

Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I have two questions. One is regarding the Office of the Clerk. It does appear, just looking at the numbers themselves from 2019-20 to 2020-21, that there is a significant reduction in the internal audit funding. Maybe you could just address this and assure us that the internal auditing is not being cut and that maybe there is a reorganization there.

Then, I would also ask about a similar reduction in the office of the deputy clerk, year over year. It looks like a 20% reduction in the office of the deputy clerk, procedure. Could you explain that reduction as well? What is the reason for that?

• (1255)

Hon. Anthony Rota: Monsieur Paquette.

Mr. Daniel Paquette: Yes, there were reorganizations in the organization to make sure that the various work is properly aligned. When it comes to the internal audit, we used to have the planning function that was under the chief internal audit. That has now been transferred under our deputy clerk for the administration, so there has been no reduction in the actual capacity from that perspective. For the procedural, it's the press gallery that was transferred, also under the deputy clerk, administration, so there has been—

Mr. Mark Strahl: That's all the power.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Daniel Paquette: That's right.

Mr. Michel Patrice (Deputy Clerk, Administration, House of Commons): It's the secretariat, the press gallery secretariat.

Mr. Daniel Paquette: Yes, sorry. A little precision....

Hon. Anthony Rota: Are there any other questions? Are we all in agreement? Good.

Now we have an in camera meeting. I don't know if we have enough time. Shall we proceed to in camera, or do we want to postpone it until the next meeting?

Hon. Mark Holland (Chief Government Whip): Mr. Chair, I think it's an important item. My suggestion would be to put it off until the next meeting.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Yes, I think we want to take the time. We don't want to rush through it. Okay, we'll postpone the in camera meeting until next time. Is everybody in agreement?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Hon. Anthony Rota: Okay. We're adjourned. Thank you very much.

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