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**Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills
and Social Development and the Status of
Persons with Disabilities**

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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we will continue our study on the operation and financial support allocated by the Enabling Accessibility Fund for small and major projects.

I want to welcome our two witnesses here today from the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development. We have Karen Jackson, the senior assistant deputy minister of the income security and social development branch.

Karen, welcome today. It's good to see you back.

We also have Laura Oleson, who is the acting director general, office for disability issues.

Just before we get started, I want to let people know I have to run over to the House to do a speech, in which case I'll ask Mr. Lessard to step in. I will be back afterwards to continue on with the meeting. I'm going to leave it at that.

Karen, I know you have some opening remarks, so we'll have you get started, and then, as usual, the committee will go around the room and ask questions.

Karen, welcome again. Thank you for being here and taking time out of your busy schedule. The floor is yours.

Ms. Karen Jackson (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Security and Social Development Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am pleased to be here today, and as the chair indicates, I am here with my colleague Laura Oleson. We are ready to answer questions on the operations and financial support allocated by the Enabling Accessibility Fund, but if I could, perhaps I'll just start by way of background.

People with disabilities in Canada are indeed a diverse group. Some people are born with disabilities; others develop them later in life. Disability can be permanent. It can be temporary. It can be episodic. Disability really is the result of a complex interaction of health conditions, personal factors, and environmental factors.

We know, from Statistics Canada's 2006 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, that 4.4 million Canadians, or 14.3% of the population, have a disability, with most of them, in fact, reporting a

physical disability. In 2001 only 3.6 million Canadians, or 12.4%, reported having a disability. So what we have is an upward trend, one that is not surprising, however, as rates of disabilities do increase with age. We are all aware of the aging population of our country.

Previous Speeches from the Throne and budget 2007 have committed the government to increasing accessibility in the economic and social participation of Canadians, including those who live with disabilities. Canada has further demonstrated this commitment by being one of the first countries to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on March 30, 2007. I would note, by way of information, that over the coming weeks the Government of Canada will be seeking the views of Canadians, particularly those of the disability community, in order to reach that decision on ratification of that signature.

Before I turn to the operations of the Enabling Accessibility Fund, I would just briefly mention a number of other initiatives of the Government of Canada that do support people with disabilities. We have the working income tax benefit, for example, which includes in it a disability supplement. We have the registered disability savings plan, which was, as well, announced in budget 2007.

•(1110)

[Translation]

More recently, as part of the Economic Action Plan, Budget 2009 enhanced the Working Income Tax Benefit, the WITB. Budget 2009 also provided for the Government of Canada to invest \$20 million in each of two years to improve the accessibility of federal buildings and \$75 million over two years for the construction of social housing for people with disabilities.

These investments are in addition to the more than \$9 billion that the Government of Canada spends on disability-related programs and services each year, including: the Opportunities Fund, Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities with provincial governments, the Disability Tax Credit, and the Canada Pension Plan Disability benefit, to name a few.

HRSDC research and analysis reveals that Canadians with disabilities continue to encounter barriers that limit their community activities and prevent them from being employed. Inaccessible transportation and buildings, inadequate support and aids, and social and employer attitudes all create barriers to employment and interfere with social participation. Solutions can be as obvious as a ramp or an accessible elevator, but these solutions are often too costly for a small business or for a community-based organization.

In 2007, the Federal Budget announced \$45 million over three years to help all Canadians, regardless of physical ability, participate fully in their communities. The Enabling Accessibility Fund, or EAF, was created to construct or renovate permanent structures and to support small projects that would make facilities fully accessible to all people of varying abilities across Canada. Approved projects were to have strong ties to and support from the communities they serve.

The EAF supports the Government of Canada's overarching goals of enhanced social inclusion, increased opportunities, and participation of Canadians. The objective of the EAF is to promote vibrant communities in which all can contribute and participate, regardless of physical ability, by making buildings, facilities, vehicles, information and communication more accessible for people with varying abilities.

[English]

With the Enabling Accessibility Fund, the Government of Canada decided to take a balanced approach that includes support for large-scale models of accessibility and for smaller-scale retrofitting projects in communities across the country to make incremental improvements in accessibility.

Therefore, budget 2007 proposed that projects under the EAF could include participatory ability centres that offer programs to individuals of varying physical abilities. In Canada, there are at present only a limited number of such existing ability centres. These multi-purpose centres range in approach from those that use a rehabilitation or medical model, which focuses on the health implications of disability or injury, at one end of the spectrum to a participation model that emphasizes the social and labour market integration needs of people at the other. Ability centres serve as focal points for a community, strengthening and supporting the integration and participation of individuals and families.

Consistent with the budget 2007 announcement and respectful of federal-provincial-territorial roles here, the government sought to support a couple of flagship projects that could showcase the participation model and that, hopefully, could be emulated over time in other communities across the country.

Under the EAF, as prescribed in the design of the program, these larger-scale capital projects will support enhanced social inclusion, increased opportunities—whether in communities or for employment—and participation of Canadians. In general, the objective of such participation-based centres is to enrich the quality of life of people with varying degrees of abilities by helping them to develop the skills required to achieve their objectives and the knowledge, confidence, and opportunity to live healthy and active lifestyles.

In addition to funding a few large capital projects, EAF provides funding for some small projects related to physical accessibility. These can include retrofitting existing buildings, information and communication accessibility projects, and vehicle modifications. The funding of small projects improves accessibility in many communities across Canada. These smaller projects include, for example, the installation of computers that are voice-interactive and wheelchair lifts in community-use vehicles.

As an example, St. Joseph's Parish in Charlos Cove, Nova Scotia, has a hall. It's a place where there are lots of activities. I'm told weekly dart tournaments are played, fundraisers are held, and the local community access program is located there to allow members access to the Internet. This hall is used by people in the community for many sorts of celebrations. It has accessible parking spots that are already in place, and there's a wheelchair ramp to get into the building. But the hall was without washrooms accessible to people with disabilities. They were too small for wheelchairs and were difficult to move around in for a person using a walker.

This is a project, then, for which St. Joseph's Parish made an application to the EAF in 2008 to renovate its hall by extending the building in order to widen the hallways to the washrooms and bring the washrooms up to date with modern building codes. And with a \$35,000 grant, it was possible for the parish to do that through this program.

Specifically, with respect to the funding available and funding allocations, budget 2007 allocated \$45 million over three years to this program. In the detailed design, we estimate that one to three ability centres and approximately 250 smaller projects could be funded.

I realize I have a buzzer there, so I'll move on quickly.

Given, though, that the program was limited to three years, a national delivery model was selected here so that it could be established and operating in the least amount of time possible.

Now, with respect to operations of this program, the first set of proposals were funded and announced in September 2008. A second call for proposals for small projects was recently concluded, and assessment of these applications is now under way.

As we did the first time through, we will be looking at the funding of all of these applications using a fair and transparent process of assessing based on merit—those that meet the terms and conditions of the program. They all have to indicate community support. They all have to demonstrate to us how they're actually going to improve accessibility.

● (1115)

We use external evaluators to assist us in the assessment of projects. If there are questions about this, I can go into greater detail about how we use them. We evaluate projects against criteria and program objectives, but also for value for money, feasibility, and cost. Each inquiry for organizations that are not successful in funding is reviewed by program officials, and further feedback is applied to applications.

I will conclude with some figures. There were over 729 proposals submitted for small projects in 2008. There were 87 proposals submitted for major projects. A total of 166 small projects were funded, coming to \$5.8 million. Two major projects were funded for an additional \$30 million. Over 150 Canadian communities have benefited from these projects. We would anticipate, with the funding to be approved in 2009, that there will be projects we'll be able to support in another 150 or more communities.

With that, I'm more than ready to answer the members' questions.

Thank you.

• (1120)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ)): Thank you, Ms. Jackson. Am I to understand that you made the presentation on behalf of Ms. Oleson as well?

Ms. Laura Oleson (Acting Director General, Office for Disability Issues, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): I see.

Each party has seven minutes to ask questions, beginning with the Liberal Party. I would ask you to limit yourself to answering the question. I remind you that the purpose of this morning's meeting is to shed some light on how the Enabling Accessibility Fund is managed.

Members have seven minutes during the first round, and five minutes during the second round. Again, I would ask you to keep your responses brief and to stay on point.

You are up first, Mr. Savage.

[English]

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you.

My thanks to the witnesses for coming today. I know there are lots of things you could be doing in your department, so I appreciate your taking the time.

You will know that this Enabling Accessibility Fund has been somewhat controversial. I congratulate our chair for bringing this to the committee today. I've asked questions in the House, and to say that answers have been lacking would be an understatement. Last year, when the fund was announced, there were a number of articles. One called this program "tailor-made to send cash to Flaherty's riding." Another said that "critics allege" the program was "geared to Flaherty's riding" and that the finance minister's wife and aide stood to "benefit from \$45 million in funding". A number of people in the disability community are concerned about what has gone on here. What set the two major projects that were funded apart from the ones that were not funded?

Ms. Karen Jackson: In our assessment of the major project applications, we began with the program objectives for those projects. The intention was to try to support either the construction or the expansion of what we call participatory ability standards. These are state-of-the-art, leading-edge standards that are meant to showcase our approach to offering all Canadians, whether with disabilities or not, the opportunity to participate fully in their communities. From those objectives, we built a set of assessment criteria. We had external evaluators in place who assisted as necessary with looking at the feasibility and the costing of these projects. It was on that basis that our program officials put forward recommendations to support the two major projects, after which the recommendations were accepted by the minister.

Mr. Michael Savage: Could you provide a list of those who applied and were rejected?

Ms. Karen Jackson: Yes, we can. In fact, we've already provided one. At the minister's May appearance at main estimates, she was asked for a complete list of all those who had applied. We supplied the list, and I believe it should now be with the committee.

Mr. Michael Savage: I don't have that list. I don't know if any of the members have that list.

I'd like to ask you about the criteria. How did they determine this? Was it a point system that determined how the major and minor projects were funded?

Ms. Karen Jackson: There's a couple of phases to it.

The first phase of screening is against the mandatory criteria of the terms and conditions of the program. By that, then, we're verifying the completeness of the application. We're verifying the eligibility of the applicant to actually be eligible for the program.

We move from that to a second phase of assessing against the criterion of whether this is a project, as I said, that is going to be eliminating barriers and promoting accessibility. There were provisions in the criteria around indicating the full support of the community. When you got to that second phase of criteria, there was actually a scoring process used.

• (1125)

Mr. Michael Savage: Would you be able to provide us with the scoring for each of the applicants for the major projects?

Ms. Karen Jackson: We can provide you with the scoring grid. I would have to check to see if we can give you the scoring of each—

Mr. Michael Savage: I'd like to see how each of the major projects, the 89 that were requesting funding, were graded.

Who wrote the request for proposals?

Ms. Karen Jackson: Program officials in the office for disability issues did.

Mr. Michael Savage: Was there any discussion with any other department, such as the Department of Finance, about that?

Ms. Karen Jackson: Consistent with the provisions in the budget, there were discussions with provinces and territorial governments. There were discussions with the not-for-profit organizations. There were indeed some discussions with other government departments, such as Infrastructure, because of similar programs you find elsewhere. I'm not aware that there were any discussions with officials in the Department of Finance.

Mr. Michael Savage: Could you find that out for us and send that to the committee as well?

I want to ask about the period of time that was allowed for people to apply. It sounds from what you've told us that it was a fairly detailed evaluation process. That's what you're telling us. Yet the application for proposals was only open from April 1 to the end of April, I believe. Is that normal?

Ms. Karen Jackson: The length of time for calls for proposals will vary from program to program. I think in this case it was a program with a very precise time limit of three years and a lot of interest and a hope that we could move quickly.

I will acknowledge that we did hear some concerns expressed about that time limit. Therefore, for example, in this year, 2009, that period was extended to six weeks. But calls for proposals in any kind of grant and contribution program would range from being open for four weeks, I'd say, up to eight or ten weeks.

Mr. Michael Savage: People in the disabilities community have indicated that they just were not able to respond in this period of time for a request for proposals that detailed, which leads to the conclusion that it may have been rigged for a specific reason. Do you have any comment on that?

Ms. Karen Jackson: I don't. I think we could look at the applications that are received and we could.... I don't have the data right here at hand, but there were certainly a lot of not-for-profit organizations within the disability community that did apply and that did indeed receive funding to modify their own structures and buildings.

Mr. Michael Savage: Okay. I appreciate that you're bureaucrats and I certainly don't question your commitment to persons with disabilities. I'm not asking for a political answer to this. But does it seem a little particular that 94% of funding for any government program would go only to the ridings of members represented by the governing party?

Ms. Karen Jackson: I am aware that this question has been put to Minister Finley. It has been put here and it has been put in the House of Commons, and she has provided an answer to that question.

I'm also aware of the chair asking me to specifically answer only questions, but what I would say is that if you set aside the \$30 million that was earmarked for the major projects, for the two, and you look at the rest of the money that was spent on small projects, 43% of those projects are in electoral districts that are represented by opposition members of Parliament and 57% are represented by government members of Parliament.

I think maybe in another answer I can explain a little bit more some of why we think that with the particular case of rural and remote communities.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Savage. You went over your allotted time slightly, but the important thing is to get some answers.

With your permission, I would like to use the seven minutes allotted to the Bloc, even though I'm chairing the proceedings. I believe I'm entitled to speak since I am the mover of this motion.

Ms. Jackson, have you managed other funds similar to the Enabling Accessibility Fund?

[English]

Ms. Karen Jackson: I have and I am currently responsible for the homelessness partnering strategy. There are similarities in the case of the types of projects that we're trying to support. They include capital projects and building of buildings. Another aspect of it is that I am also responsible for the New Horizons program, which is community-based. There's a capital program part to that too, where we're trying to improve facilities for seniors.

• (1130)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): So then, the answer is yes.

You do understand why we invited you here today to discuss the nature and management of the Fund.

Based on your experience, can you explain why \$45 million has been budgeted for this program over just three years and why the majority of these funds are being used for two projects? Is there a logical explanation for this, or does this decision defy logic?

[English]

Ms. Karen Jackson: On the question about the three-year horizon, it is not uncommon for governments to create programs that are time limited. There are others within the Department of Human Resources and Social Development and elsewhere that are created for a period of three, four, or five years.

On the second part of your question—

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): I understand, but the arrangement was that the funds would be available over a three-year period and be allocated as equitably as possible.

Isn't it rather odd that two-thirds of the funding announced has been earmarked for two large projects in year one? Would you not agree that this decision raises some questions?

[English]

Ms. Karen Jackson: I would begin by looking at the statement of what the government was trying to achieve in budget 2007. There were two key program objectives. One, as I said, was to support some of these flagship participatory ability centres—

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): I'm curious about your personal opinion, not about the government's intentions.

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): On a point of order, the chair is a chair and he's also the questioner. Now, to do it properly, if the chair wants to question, he should move to the table and ask questions. If he's going to be a chair and a questioner at the same time, then in fairness he should let the witness answer, because there's nobody overseeing his interruption.

So I would ask the chair that if he wants to sit as a chair and a questioner, he should allow the witness to finish answering before he interrupts her, or he should take his place as a questioner and have somebody else oversee it. If you wish to continue as a chair, you should then use your discretion so as not to interrupt the witness and allow the witness to finish her answer.

Is that not fair?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Yes. There are two things to consider here, but I will take your point of order as a clarification.

First, the duties of the vice-chair were explained to me. In the absence of the chair, one of the two vice-chair presides over the proceedings. I raised this issue because I wanted to be sure that it would not limit my ability to ask questions.

However, if you feel that I have no business asking questions, then I would invite you to take over and chair the meeting. I don't have a problem with that. I will return to my seat and ask my questions as a regular member. If you are more comfortable with that arrangement, it's fine with me. I'll turn over my responsibilities immediately, provided our colleagues seated at this table have no objections. How does that sound?

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: The point I'm making, Mr. Chair, is that I'm not yet at this point thinking you should abdicate the chair if you're prepared to use it with discretion, where you ask the question, allow them to finish, and not interrupt the answer. If you're prepared to do that, I'm fine with you being the chair. But if you're going to interrupt the witnesses and cut them short before they finish, then you should abdicate the position and have somebody else in it.

It's your choice, but if you're prepared to be judicious and fair about it, I'm okay.

• (1135)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): I'll just say one more thing, then I'll turn the floor over to you.

Go ahead, Mr. Volpe. You have something you would like to say.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): While I'm new to this committee, I do find Mr. Komarnicki's comments rather odd, because as committee members, we do have the right to cut in when a witness is answering a question. In this particular instance, a member who also happens to be chairing today's meeting, is putting his questions in French, and there is a bit of a time lag between the question and the answer because Ms. Jackson must wait for the translation. A great deal of his time is lost because of the translation. As I see it, the member has every right to interrupt the witness once he has received the answer he was looking for. I don't see a problem there and I think Ms. Jackson is fine with this as well. I have no problem with Mr. Lessard chairing this meeting and at the same time, putting questions to the witness. This is quite acceptable in a committee setting.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Mr. Savage.

[English]

Mr. Michael Savage: Rather than waste a lot of time on this, and because we don't have a vice-chair here, with the unanimous consent of the committee, I would certainly be happy to step into the position of chair so you can ask your questions. As a former vice-chair—and a very distinguished one at that—I'd be happy to, just so we can get on and not waste the time of our distinguished guests.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Before we get into this, Mr. Chair, I have no objection to your staying in the chair, providing you balance that, but if you do interrupt, I will ask that we shift it. I'm not overly concerned, but you have a delicate role because you're the questioner and the overseeing chair. I think you can continue, but somebody has to oversee it, and so I'm prepared to have him—

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): I'm prepared to continue, but I want to make it quite clear that I have no intention of being restricted in terms of how I can ask questions. I intend to proceed as I have always done, that is in a respectful manner. I want us to benefit as much as we can from the presence of these two witnesses who have come to shed light on this program, and as Mr. Volpe said, once I think my question has been answered, I'd like to be able to move on and ask a secondary question.

Does anyone have a problem with that?

[English]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): In view of that, I think just to expedite and get along here and quit wasting time, I would concur that Mr. Savage should be in the chair—distinguished as he is—and then you have total liberty. He referees, polices the whole thing, and I would be supportive of that. I think that's the way to go. I think it's a precedent-setting thing to do.

I'm not challenging the chair. He is very conciliatory about it. Those are my comments. I appreciate your conciliatory response on this and Mr. Savage's offer. I think that would be the way, so we don't get ourselves into a procedural bind in the future. I think that's a fair way to go.

An hon. member: His seven minutes are up now. I'm just kidding.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): You are free to appeal my decision, but I have no intention of setting this type of precedent. Therefore, I will continue to chair the meeting, to fulfill my duties, and to question the witness as I was doing. If you have a problem with that, then you can appeal my decision. I think it will be easier if I carry on in this manner. I do not see what difference it makes if I put my questions from the chair's seat, or from my other seat.

Do you have a problem with this?

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I hear what the chair is saying, but it's like being the prosecutor and the judge at the same time. It's a difficult role to balance, but in any event, I think we should carry on. Let's see where it goes.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): I can understand you're having a problem with this, since we are trying to get some clarification as to how the EAF is managed, but for heaven's sake, please let us benefit as much as we can from the presence of these two witnesses here this morning.

I will carry on.

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Chair, don't for a moment suggest I'm saying that, because I'm not. That's taking it totally out of context. You can proceed, but that is not what I was saying, just for the record.

•(1140)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): I know what the government's intentions are, but I was curious to learn your opinion as a manager. A total of \$45 billion has been budgeted for the fund. In the very first year, two thirds of the money, or \$30 million, has been earmarked for two large projects.

Had three big projects been eligible, would they have eaten up the entire \$45 million?

[English]

Ms. Karen Jackson: No. As I was trying to explain, in budget 2007 there were further commitments to have the minister consult provinces and territories, NGOs, and community groups around two objectives. One was to support some of these flagship participatory ability centres. The second clear objective was to support smaller retrofitting projects in communities.

Through those consultations, through our program officers and analysts studying the cost of doing things, and through our experience and knowledge of some of these ability centres where they exist in Canada and internationally, as part of the program design, the notional budget allocation was created for the two components of the program. There was about \$28 million to \$30 million for major projects. We realized that would probably allow us to support one to three projects. The remaining budget of \$13 million to \$15 million was allocated to the smaller projects. Our estimate from the beginning for the design was that we would probably be able to support in the neighbourhood of 300 projects overall in the three years of the program.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Ms. Jackson, as far as large projects are concerned, I understand that funds can be used to purchase a building. Is that correct? A agency could thus become a building owner. Correct?

[English]

Ms. Karen Jackson: I'm going to ask Laura to comment on that.

[Translation]

Ms. Laura Oleson: Are you talking about giving an organization the go-ahead to become an owner, or about imposing the requirement to become an owner? Either the organization had to own the building, or have a contract showing that it planned to become the owner over the next five years.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): I see. So then, it wasn't a requirement that the organization own the building at the time. It could become the owner at a later date?

Ms. Laura Oleson: However, if it didn't own the property, it had to disclose that fact to us and had to have a contract stipulating that it would be occupying the premises for the next five years, so that we would be sure that it would benefit from the retrofitting of the property for the next five years.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): I understand. Thank you, Ms. Oleson.

Mr. Martin.

[English]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): I want to thank Mr. Lessard for bringing this motion forward and giving us this opportunity to ask questions on a very important initiative by this government on behalf of the thousands of people in the country who find it difficult to participate in everyday life. There seems to be some peculiarity around the way decisions have been made on this fund.

When the minister was before us in May, she indicated that this program was oversubscribed, and that a panel of third party experts evaluated applications and made recommendations to the government. I'd like to know who was on the panel, how they were selected, and how much they were paid. What were the eligibility criteria used by the panel to select applications? Did the panel rank applications for the major projects? If so, what ranking was given to the two projects that were selected?

•(1145)

Ms. Karen Jackson: There are lots of questions there.

We selected external reviewers through tendering the requirement for this service under the government's MERX service, which is the tendering service run by PWGSC. In the case of the major project and most of the small projects, the bidder who was successful and with whom we put in place a contract is a company with its head office here in Ottawa named Hanscomb Limited. It is a constructionesque, cost-estimating type of company with engineers and other people on staff. In the case of the small projects that were about changes to vehicles, there was a separate contract put in place with a different company, the name of which was SRD Bolduc Inc.

With respect to the second part of your question, yes, these were contracts. There were fees paid under them. Hanscomb Limited was paid in the order of \$55,000 for its work during 2008. The other company, SRD Bolduc, was paid just under \$4,000 to assist us in this work.

What did they do and how did they do it? There were essentially three different things we had these external experts help us with.

The first was that they worked with our program staff to actually provide guidelines around costing. What should we expect would be the cost of putting in place a ramp? Or what is the going price for an elevator that's going to be accessible to persons with disabilities? That is the first thing they did, which then assisted our internal program experts to do their jobs.

The second thing they did was, yes, on occasion, as required, they reviewed individual projects when there may have been some questions or some doubts about the costing proposed or about the feasibility of the projects.

Third, those contracts still remain in place, in fact. So even after the projects are approved, as we are proceeding to negotiate contribution agreements and as we're proceeding to actually finalize the amount of money we're going to put into the agreements, they're there as experts we can continue to consult.

Your final question is relevant to the second part of the answer I just gave you. No, not all projects were reviewed individually by the external consultants. There was a combination of activities they were doing for us.

Mr. Tony Martin: Because of that, then, you weren't able to give a ranking to the two major projects. Were they just approved and moved forward?

Ms. Karen Jackson: That's correct. The ranking and scoring of projects was actually the activity of the program experts within the department.

Mr. Tony Martin: So there was no ranking.

In other words, the third party panel was actually two companies that the ministry hired to do this work. Would they have been aware of the fact that for the one big project that was approved, the one in Durham, the finance minister used to sit on the board of that centre? Would they have been aware that the finance minister's wife sits on the board? Would they have been aware that the finance minister's executive assistant also sits on the board and that all of this might be perceived by some to be a huge conflict of interest?

• (1150)

Ms. Karen Jackson: I can't speak on behalf of those two construction companies. I can say that the information you just spoke about is on the public record. It is publicly available information.

Mr. Tony Martin: Would you not have been concerned about the possibility of some conflict of interest here? Also, given that you hired two companies, which stood to do probably more work for the government, the inference or possible thinking there might have been that if these two companies made sure the finance minister's project was funded, they might in fact get some more work. Might there not have been the possibility of a conflict of interest there on this, as well? Were you not concerned about that at all?

Ms. Karen Jackson: As I say, I think departmental officials were aware, as information was public about members on the boards of directors of some of these projects. However, I find it difficult to talk on behalf of the construction companies, the experts, and I do not know what they might have been contemplating or thinking.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you, Ms. Jackson.

Mr. Komarnicki.

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity—and the interjections.

Thank you for taking the time to come before this committee to outline the program and the process that was involved. I'm trying to put it in some perspective.

I see in your speaking notes that budget 2009 provided \$20 million in each of two years to improve accessibility to federal buildings and \$75 million over two years for the construction of social housing, and that approximately \$9 billion is spent by the government on disability-related programs and services each year. So when you look at the amount of money that is being spent, what

we have here is \$45 million, which in that context is not a large amount spread over three years.

Given that and the objectives of the program, which were twofold, as I understand it, you wanted to fund some hard projects, small projects that dealt with things like ramps and the normal kinds of things that would allow for physical improvements to ensure access. Then the other part of the program was to deal with showcasing some flagship, or sample, or showcase projects to see what could be done.

Was that the underpinning of the program?

Ms. Karen Jackson: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Given those two objectives or goals, were the projects then weighed and awarded with that in mind?

Ms. Karen Jackson: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Notwithstanding the honourable member from the Liberal Party talking about the four-week opening for applications, did you receive a lot of applications in both categories?

Ms. Karen Jackson: We did. Looking at the application numbers from 2008, we had 729 applications for support under the stream of small projects, and we had 88 projects apply for support in the spring of 2008 for the major projects.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Some of the small projects would have been disqualified because, I assume, they didn't meet the criteria or were obviously not in line with the program. Would that be correct?

Ms. Karen Jackson: That's correct, yes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: You had a number, I understand, that were rejected for that purpose in the small project category.

Ms. Karen Jackson: Yes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: What was that number?

Ms. Karen Jackson: Well, we approved in principle 166 small projects, so I guess you would take 729 and subtract 166, and you would have the number that did not measure up or did not score high as we assessed them against our scoring grid.

• (1155)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Okay. Now, with respect to the others, the major ones, when you talked about some of the experts, would they be the types of people who had backgrounds in engineering, surveying, costing, that kind of thing?

Ms. Karen Jackson: That's correct. That's the kind of expertise we wanted to have at our disposal so that we could use it if necessary—estimators of the cost of projects, engineers who could look at something and give us advice, when necessary, about the feasibility of a project.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Is the budget realistic? Are you getting value for money? Does it add up or does it measure up, those kinds of things?

Ms. Karen Jackson: Yes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: When you look at the smaller projects and the numbers that were approved, were those approved on the basis of distributing them province to province throughout the nation? Or how did that turn out?

Ms. Karen Jackson: As I said, given the duration of this program as three years and given the amount of money, there was a decision taken in the designing of the program not to allocate that budget region by region. We ran it as a national program.

Having said that, we do have the analysis that shows us, for example—I suppose I can take Quebec as an example—that in Quebec the number of applications received for small projects was in the neighbourhood of 13% of the total, and the number of small projects that actually were offered funding was in the neighbourhood of 10% to 11% of the total. We are conscious of those things. Even when we are running a national program, we want to be able to have these projects stretch across the country and be funded in a range of communities across the country.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: When dealing with flagship programs or ones that might be samples throughout the nation, obviously you couldn't deal with very many. It had to be pitting the guidelines or proposals, and I think you called it something in the nature of a participatory model. You were, I take it, looking for something that would best emulate this. When I say “best emulate” the participatory model, I mean what might a participatory model look like, and what would it entail or involve?

Ms. Karen Jackson: As for the notion of a participatory ability centre, it is a place. It's a facility that is fully accessible, regardless of people and what kind of disability they may have. And it's multi-purpose. It's a place where training and educational courses may occur. It is a place where there would be recreational facilities. It may be a place where there is access to arts and other leisure types of activities. It's that notion of multi-purpose. It's that notion of holistic service and access to activities in the community.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Would it also involve the fact that persons with varying degrees of disability would interact or interchange with others in the community in each of those areas? Would there be persons with differing degrees of disability involved?

Ms. Karen Jackson: Yes, both on the question of it being a facility that's there for persons with disabilities and for those without, and it's also there for people with various kinds of disability.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you, Mr. Komarnicki.

Ms. Minna.

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Just one moment, Mr. Chair. It's Mike Savage and then me.

Mr. Michael Savage: I'm going to go first. I'll just take 30 seconds and then go to Maria.

I just want to clear the record. You had mentioned a percentage of funding that went on the small projects. In fact, according to the order paper question that I put in and the response that came from the department, we know that 100% of the \$30 million in the large projects went to Conservative ridings. Of the 166 smaller projects, 59, or 36%, went to opposition ridings. In total funding it was \$2.092 million out of \$5.8 million, which is 35%. So one-third and one-third of total projects and total funding went to opposition ridings.

Thank you, Chair.

• (1200)

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm just going to start with a very quick comment. Having been involved in communities for many years and having applied for funding, I've never had a situation where a month is for a major program like that. It's very unusual.

I have a number of questions and very little time, so I would appreciate very quick answers.

The first question is this. Both the minister's wife and the minister's EA were involved. Were there any questions raised with your department with respect to the potential conflict of interest in this situation? Did anyone say, “We have a problem here; there's a conflict with two people”?

Ms. Karen Jackson: No such questions were raised with me.

Hon. Maria Minna: No one asked. Okay.

Ms. Karen Jackson: As I said, it was public knowledge. We knew we were dealing with an applicant with that kind of situation. We also knew this project wasn't unknown to the Government of Canada. It's also something that was being considered under the Ontario infrastructure—

Hon. Maria Minna: I understand that, but that issue didn't come up then. Okay.

You said there was a ranking system. Could you tell me how many points were given for location, if there was such a thing? Were the applicants aware this was to be a flagship type of project? Were they told this in advance? Who signed off on the project?

Ms. Karen Jackson: Location was not part of the criteria against which we assessed projects. The minister signed off on all these projects at the time. The previous minister was the minister who approved them all.

Hon. Maria Minna: I'd like to see how they were ranked, if you have that from when you did the assessment.

Ms. Karen Jackson: In my understanding, that is the question; it's the same as Mr. Savage's. We'll go back and look for that.

Hon. Maria Minna: All right.

Were the applicants told this was a flagship project?

Ms. Karen Jackson: Yes, there was a description in the material that was placed on the website inviting applications about the type of project we were looking for.

Hon. Maria Minna: Who had access to the RFP before it went out? Did anyone outside the department, like PCO or Finance, have access to the RFPs before they were made public?

Ms. Karen Jackson: The actual documents are part of a communications approval process within government, so yes, they would have been looked at by—

Hon. Maria Minna: So the ministers would have had access to the RFPs before they became public?

Ms. Karen Jackson: Yes, they would have been part of the review of the documents.

Hon. Maria Minna: That's what I thought, and presumably he could have shared them in advance and some others could have had advance notice of what the RFP was in this case, given the proximity.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): You still have a few second.
[English]

Hon. Maria Minna: Of all these projects, have you funded these many times? Maybe it's just a statement. For me, a percentage of nothing is nothing, so if you're getting, say, 35% or even 15%, it doesn't matter. The actual number of dollars is small. I'm simply going to say that I find this totally unusual, that one month is given for a major project like that, especially when you're trying to establish flagship...no discussion of communication. I find that very odd, but that's just a comment, because there's no time for a reply.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you, Ms. Minna.

I was going to use the time allotted to the Bloc Québécois for the second round, but in the second round, the Conservatives have the floor a second time. You were right to remind me. I apologize.

Mr. Lobb.

• (1205)

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Lobb is going to allow me to make a 30-second comment during his time, and the comment is simply that when we're talking about percentages, the difference between what Ms. Jackson was talking about and what he's talking about could be that the percentage she gives is for the previous representation of Liberals and Conservatives compared to today, when there are more Conservatives, so when he was correcting the record, his correction may need to be corrected. I just wanted to make that point, and then we'll move on to Mr. Lobb.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Mr. Savage, on a point of order.

[English]

Mr. Michael Savage: If he's questioning the statistics, they come directly from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: All I'm saying is that there are fewer Liberals today in those ridings than perhaps there were then. I'll leave that for its own; it'll take care of itself when we look at the record. I don't want to take away more time from Mr. Lobb.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): You have the floor, Mr. Lobb.

[English]

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Lessard. I don't know if I have two minutes left or four minutes and thirty seconds, but we'll go until the beeper.

I think a lot about programs, programming, and accessibility, especially about a program specifically tailored to enabling accessibility, but I also think about other programs that promote

and support persons with disabilities and enabling accessibility. I thought about a program called the New Horizons program, which I'm sure you're familiar with, and its support for seniors in allowing them to remain active and mobile in their senior years. I thought about a project in my riding that provided a new parking lot for a church to allow those using canes, wheelchairs, or walkers to still attend their church service.

When we look at one moment in time, or one second in time, we can see things through different lenses, but I like to take the approach where you look at the big picture and the entire landscape. In particular, I think about announcements this year on infrastructure. I again think back to my riding and perhaps a fire hall that is going to get built and will promote and enable further accessibility. I think about a library in Teeswater that would allow more accessibility for those in the municipality of South Bruce to further utilize the library there. I think about a theatre in Grand Bend that this government has made investments in, along with the province, and that will further enable accessibility.

I'm sure my colleagues across the way have numerous other examples of those types of investments in their riding. I think of a facility in Blyth that's going to also renovate and create bathrooms in that area. That's going to allow for accessibility.

As well, I also think about the provincial investment that's been made in enabling and promoting accessibility. I think of a town hall in one of my towns and an investment of \$4 million, three-quarters of which was an investment by the Province of Ontario. Again, it's a very good example of the theme we've worked on so far this year, the theme of all parties and all levels of government working together to get results for Canadians and, in this example, results for people in my riding of Huron—Bruce. To give you an example, that town provides marriage services to people. People could not even get married inside the building. So the province provided those dollars, and as well, we in turn provided dollars to the province.

So if we want to look at one lens at one moment in time, that's our prerogative. But if we choose to look at a big picture and a big approach, the lens changes significantly, in my opinion.

I wonder if you could perhaps provide more information here, if you have any, on some programs for New Horizons. You may not, but if you do have any information on the New Horizons program, perhaps you could provide that.

Ms. Karen Jackson: I don't have a lot at hand, but as I said quickly in answer to one of the other questions, yes, within the New Horizons program, there is a component that does indeed specifically support improvements to the accessibility of facilities that seniors use. As I said in my opening remarks, we do see increasing rates of disability as people age, so it is there to recognize that as a priority.

• (1210)

Mr. Ben Lobb: I thought so. Another part I was curious about is the physical accessibility for ramps and around vehicle modifications and so forth. I wonder if you could share that information with the committee.

Ms. Karen Jackson: I can. It was part of the criteria of the small projects that we would indeed be able to help make changes to automobiles, buses, whatever, to increase the access to transportation services. We do know, actually, from that Statistics Canada survey I referred to, that probably over 200,000 adults in Canada do not have access to transportation because of barriers of that sort.

The Chair: Thanks, Ben.

We'll now go to Monsieur Lessard. Monsieur, thank you for taking over for a period of time for me.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: It was my pleasure, Mr. Chair. They gave me a hard time while you were away.

Were the same criteria in place for the second request for proposals as in the case of the first request for proposals?

[English]

Ms. Karen Jackson: The second request for proposals was tailored to applications for small projects only, but beyond that, yes, the same criteria, the same program objectives that were in place for 2008 are in place for 2009.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I see.

How do you explain then that some people who had their initial project proposal rejected were invited to submit a request the second time around? If they were deemed ineligible the first time, I don't see how they could be selected in the second round.

[English]

Ms. Karen Jackson: As I explained, there were applications the first time around that would have gone through and met mandatory requirements, then as we looked at them and scored them against the criteria around reduction of barriers, around community support, etc., they may indeed have achieved a certain score, but there were so many that were better than them that they were the ones that got the financial support.

We can't prioritize before we gather applications and begin to assess them, know whether or not something that didn't get funded last time won't get funded this time. It is possible.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Did the same two companies set the notional budgets for large and small projects?

[English]

Ms. Karen Jackson: Yes, we are working with the same expert company with respect to both those components, except for the vehicles.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: The government initially budgeted \$45 million for this program. Was there an understanding that two thirds of the funds would be allocated to only two projects? Would it not have been better to try and have these investments benefit all regions of the country, since each project could receive between \$1 million and \$15 million? Why was the decision made to allocate \$15 million each to two projects in two specific regions?

•(1215)

[English]

Ms. Karen Jackson: As I said, in the consultation and in the design stage of the program, it was at that point that we had the notional budgets for the two components set in the order of \$30 million and \$15 million, \$30 million for the major and \$15 million for small. I do say that in that stage, planning and designing the program and doing the research, it was realized that probably with \$30 million, what we were going to be able to fund by way of these flagship ability centres was one to three projects, and that indeed, once we received and evaluated the applications, turned out to be the case.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: You talk about regional equity, but you were well aware that two-thirds of the money budgeted was going to only two regions. I have here a large project proposal for which approximately \$4 million was requested. The request was denied because ownership of the property was a requirement. However, the parties submitting the proposal would have purchased the property had the proposal been accepted. Now they are being told that they might be eligible for the second call for proposals. Yet, they are no longer eligible, because theirs would be a large project.

What are we to make of this?

[English]

Ms. Karen Jackson: As I said, when we notionally allocated \$30 million for major projects, we did expect we would only be able to fund between one in three projects.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: For some reason, I'm not getting the translation any more.

[English]

Ms. Karen Jackson: *Je m'excuse, monsieur.*

As I said, yes, through that period of analyzing and designing the program, we were aware that in notionally allocating \$30 million to that component for major projects, it was likely we were only going to be able to support between one and three, in the neighbourhood of two or three projects. We were aware of that.

To the second part of your question, I must say that I can't comment on the spot on what kinds of communications there might have been with one of the applicants who was not successful and had a \$4 million application in last time.

But yes, we've just finished another period of application. This is, as I said, for small projects, and if there was a project from that applicant that fell within that funding range, that could be considered. But at this point a project valued at \$4 million cannot be eligible for funding.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Jackson, and thank you, Mr. Lessard.

We're now going to move to Mr. Vellacott. Sir, you have five minutes.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My question may not even take my whole time, depending on the nature of your response.

Maybe not a lot of people are aware that under the small projects there can be some communication accessibility as a part of that too. Can you describe for me a little bit and give me some examples of what some of these communication accessibility issues would be? What are the devices and things being covered under the small projects for modifications in respect to that?

And has this always been a part of some other program, or is this a new and novel thing, Karen?

Ms. Karen Jackson: This is about things like the technical apparatus that will allow for voice activation of computers, for example, or special aids and other kinds of equipment needed by people with a vision disability to be able to use a computer in a community facility.

Laura, would you have other examples?

I would just say that we do know that with the growing use of the Internet, for example, there are a significant number of Canadians, perhaps in the order of 200,000, who because of some disability are impaired or impeded from actually using that as a type of communication.

• (1220)

Ms. Laura Oleson: Other examples could be, for instance, tactile signs in community centres so that someone can identify the rooms they're in. In board rooms you can put in devices so that somebody with a hearing impairment can fully participate in the meeting by hearing the conversation effectively. Those are some of the items.

I might put a pitch in for the Office for Disability Issues of the Government of Canada, where we have a model for accessibility. We have many of these instruments and would welcome the opportunity to show off that model to anyone who is interested.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Some of this, then, might even be mobile headsets for seniors, where sometimes microphone systems or amplification doesn't quite work out for them, so they have to have special devices. I notice this at public session times with senior people. Is it that type of thing, maybe mobile—

Ms. Laura Oleson: That's correct. The spaces had to be publicly available, but those were the types of projects we funded. Often they were very small dollar value but could relieve a heavy burden on a small organization.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: Certainly. This is good news, of course, but what are our means and mode of getting this out to people?

I assume you have your typical ways of relaying this to these people we have on database already, seniors groups and so on. What are we doing to be sure they are aware of this? There's probably no doubt—I expect this from my riding and constituency—that some of these seniors groups and so on, various disability groups, would not be aware of the good program that is there for them.

Ms. Karen Jackson: I have just a couple of quick comments. Maybe Laura can add to them.

You're right, it's especially a challenge, when the government does establish a new program, to be sure that all who may be interested in applying for support are aware of the program.

In addition to all the information we do put on websites and make publicly available that way, we will make efforts at other kinds of awareness raising initiatives and outreach activities through Service Canada. In some cases, and indeed this case, we actually had a small contract with a consultant that targeted some of the hard-to-reach communities to make sure they were aware of this opportunity.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: There's something along that line that I'd like to encourage too. Sometimes we get from various groups and organizations, banks and so on, in terms of financial literacy for our householders, something of an electronic file that we could potentially use in our householders, because we obviously as MPs cover quite a swath of people when we get those out.

If it's not being done, it's maybe something I would encourage Karen and Laura to think of doing. We can then maybe even template letters. We have databases of our various community organizations, disability groups, seniors and so on, which we could relay as well in addition to template letters. There may be something you could provide us for our householders, which we do about four times a year.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to move over to Mr. Savage for five minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you very much.

You've told us that the RFP was part of a communications package that was vetted by the government, so the finance minister and his EA would likely have seen the RFP before it went out. For clarity, I just need a simple answer. Did officials managing the file or consultants handling approvals have any contact with anybody in the Minister of Finance's office?

Ms. Karen Jackson: Just to set the record straight, the communications protocols and the approvals of documents do not, as a rule in a case like this, include the Department of Finance. It does include the Privy Council Office. In answer to your second question, no, not that I'm aware of.

• (1225)

Mr. Michael Savage: You're saying clearly that the Minister of Finance's office did not have involvement with the RFP before it went out?

Ms. Karen Jackson: What I am saying is that I am not aware of that fact, whether they did or they did not. The RFP was prepared by program officers who work in my branch in Human Resources and Skills Development, but yes, as I did say previously, these documents are as a rule discussed and approved by ministers, and discussed or looked at by the Privy Council Office.

Mr. Michael Savage: I want to ask you a question. You mentioned there was no regional component to this program, which is very funny when you look at a program like Canada Summer Jobs, for example. It's specifically designed down to the riding level based on population, based on employment. I would think there are people with disabilities who need assistance across the country. It strikes me as odd, for example, that not a single project, big or small, was approved in the Yukon or Nunavut, and one single project was approved in the Northwest Territories, that one for just under \$20,000 in Fort Simpson.

We have a \$45 million fund, of which \$36 million to \$37 million is approved, and one little tiny project in northern Canada gets approved. Are there not people with disabilities in northern Canada?

Ms. Karen Jackson: I'm sure there are people with disabilities in northern Canada. You're absolutely right. As I said, when you have a time-limited program such as this that you're going to deliver for three years and you have a budget of about \$45 million, the decision was taken to run it nationally.

Mr. Michael Savage: I understand, but it was time limited because the government decided that it was time limited. It was a three-year program, and the application process was one month long. It seems to me that the purpose of this should be not just to maybe say at three o'clock in the morning, "We have something; come get it," but to go out and seek where people actually need help, as opposed to having an application process that's so tight.

As you know, a lot of organizations across the country that work with people with disabilities, or even organizations that are trying to become more accessible, don't know the ins and outs of government. I suspect that if you had—what was it?—600-and-some applications, there would be an even greater number of people who actually could use the help if we went out and sought their involvement in this.

Ms. Karen Jackson: On your point about the period for applications being open for four weeks, that was indeed the case in 2008. As I said, we have expanded that. We extended it in 2009 and made it a longer period, because we did hear those complaints as well.

Mr. Michael Savage: There was \$6 million for the small projects last year.

Ms. Karen Jackson: That's correct. And that was open for four weeks, and it has been a longer period this year. Okay?

Mr. Michael Savage: Of the 89 major projects that requested funding, were there a number that would have qualified had there been more funding?

Ms. Karen Jackson: There quite likely could have been, yes.

Mr. Michael Savage: What would prevent them from being funded if there were more money? Did they fail the criteria, or did they just not grade as well as the people who got the two?

Ms. Karen Jackson: It was the latter.

Mr. Michael Savage: They didn't grade as well as those that got the two.

Ms. Karen Jackson: They did not—

Mr. Michael Savage: Somebody decided that these two were better than the rest, whether it was done through a grading process or whether it was done politically or through a decision made by the

government. Two out of 89 got it, but others were quite good projects that would have qualified for funding had there been more money or had the \$30 million been divided into 30 projects or 20 projects.

Ms. Karen Jackson: You always have to keep in mind the program objective here of constructing or putting in place, through expansion, a mobility centre, and you have to understand the significant cost of doing such.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Komarnicki has one question, and then Mr. Lessard has one question. Then we're probably going to wrap it up, unless, Tony, you want to have one. Okay.

I'll go over to you, Ed.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Just following up on part of that, if you were going to try to have a flagship or showcase model, and if you looked at a \$2 million to \$3 million contribution versus a \$15 million contribution, you're talking about two very different things. Would you agree?

Second, it's not just the contribution made by this program. There were provincial contributions made to the projects selected, indeed, by the Province of Ontario, or whoever was involved. Were there provincial, municipal, and third party contributions to these projects as well? That's the first question and the second question.

• (1230)

Ms. Karen Jackson: Yes, and that's my reference too. You have to always keep in mind the program objective here, and that was to support some flagship, multi-purpose, significant, large participatory ability centres, and that does then drive you to higher-cost projects.

In answer to your second question, in the case of the two major projects that were approved, yes, in both cases there is municipal support of those projects as well as provincial financial support and other sources.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Lessard, would you like to wrap it up with a couple of last questions?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you.

These were not the only projects to secure municipal and provincial support. Many others did as well. Correct?

[English]

Ms. Karen Jackson: Is that a question about whether there was provincial and municipal funding in the cases of some of the other applicants for major projects?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Do you have that information?

[English]

Ms. Karen Jackson: I don't have that information here at hand, but I can provide that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Projects are valued at anywhere from \$1 million to \$15 million. In response to one of my questions, you said that you did not accept projects valued at \$4 million. Who decided that?

[*English*]

Ms. Karen Jackson: No, and let me explain. The application period for 2009 has just concluded, and we will not be accepting projects of that value for consideration. This time around the applications that will be eligible will be for small projects only—offering a grant of up to \$50,000.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Right, because there is less money available owing to the fact that \$30 million was allocated to two projects. Isn't that true?

[*English*]

Ms. Karen Jackson: That is correct. I've explained how we've divided it up and allocated the \$45 million.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you very much, Madam.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Before we suspend, I want to thank the witnesses for being here today. Thank you very much.

For the record, this will be the last meeting for Kevin Kerr. Mr. Kerr has decided to retire, for some strange reason. He doesn't look old enough to retire, but he assures me that's what he is going to do. I told him he couldn't retire, but he said, "So what?" I understand he has served continuously on this committee since 2000, and of course he's been with the library for about 105 years or something.

On behalf of the committee—I've been here since 2006—Kevin, we all want to thank you very much for the time you've put in here. We wish you all the best as you head off to retirement, or whatever else you're going to do. Thank you very much for all your work.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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