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Tuesday, November 3, 2009

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Chair

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)): Order, please.

Committee members, could you take your seats?

Media, could you leave the room, please? Thank you.

Before us today we have witnesses from the Privy Council: Mr. Wayne Wouters, Clerk of the Privy Council and secretary to the cabinet; and Mr. Simon Kennedy, deputy secretary to the cabinet, plans and consultation. From the Treasury Board Secretariat, we have with us Madam d'Auray, secretary of the Treasury Board of Canada, and Philip A. Hurcomb, assistant secretary.

I understand that both of you have a 10-minute presentation.

We will start with you, Mr. Wouters.

[Translation]

Mr. Wayne Wouters (Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet, Privy Council Office): Thank you. I am pleased to be here today to discuss the government's communications activities related to Canada's Economic Action Plan.

[English]

In response to the weakening of the Canadian economy and the impact of the global recession, the government committed in budget 2009 to delivering an economic stimulus package to encourage growth and restore confidence in the economy. The International Monetary Fund recently reported that Canada is on track to being the first country to begin recovering from the global recession, with expected GDP growth of 2.1% in 2010, faster growth than for any other member of the G-7.

The economic action plan represents the largest stimulus package in Canadian history. Part of the strategy to ensure rapid deployment of the plan was the rollout of a comprehensive communications approach in order to inform Canadians not only of what was in the plan, but also about how they could access the programs and benefits contained in it.

[Translation]

In my role as Clerk, I provide professional, non-partisan support to the Prime Minister and Cabinet on all policy and operational issues that affect the government. Communications is, of course, a component of the government's operations.

[English]

Communication is, of course, a component of the government's operations, so at the table with me today is my colleague, the deputy secretary of plans and consultations, Simon Kennedy, who is a deputy minister level official in PCO and has been responsible for managing the overall communications of the action plan.

One of his key responsibilities is to provide the government with advice on communications and to ensure the government's communications activities are carried out in a coordinated way. The specific decision on what, when, and where to communicate, of course, rests with the government.

In the context of our discussion today, I will talk about the work the PCO is doing to coordinate communications across the government for the economic action plan. In particular, I will focus my remarks on two main areas that I believe will be of interest to the committee.

These are, first, the objectives that the government has pursued in strengthening communications with regard to the economic action plan; and second, the activities that have been undertaken to meet these goals and how they conform to existing policies and rules concerning communications by the Government of Canada.

With respect to the economic stimulus package, Parliament made clear the critical importance of two key objectives: the need for a rapid deployment of the measures, and a focus on accountability to Canadians. All of our work on the communications front, whether the website, advertising, signage, or other activities, has been focused squarely on the achievements of these two objectives.

Informing Canadians about the economic action plan, whether they are individual citizens, homeowners, municipal officials, aboriginal people, or business leaders, has been an important means of supporting the uptake of the measures in the plan.

• (1535)

[Translation]

Our objective has always been to give Canadians concrete information about the different programs and services available, and how they can access those programs and services.

[English]

On the second point, accountability, Parliament made clear its desire to ensure that taxpayers see how their money is spent. Thus, communicating with Canadians about the impact of the economic action plan has been an important means of supporting this objective.

I would now like to talk briefly about the various communications activities that have been undertaken.

Let's first look at the website. It was launched in January, shortly after the budget was tabled, and at the time included basic information on the action plan. Since the initial launch, all our efforts have been to ensure that the site provides useful information so that people can not only learn how they can access the measures, but also know how their tax dollars are being used.

Now, the first major component of the website that was developed was a guide to benefits and programs. The guide allows visitors to the website to search for information on each of the more than 130 economic action plan measures, organized by client group—for example, senior, homeowner, municipal leader, aboriginal person, and so on.

It includes information on how the initiatives work, who is eligible for them, where they can apply, and how to find more information. In many cases, the guide will link the citizen directly to the application form of the program in question. This guide is one of the most popular features of the website.

The second major component of the website to be developed was the project map. Using a map of Canada to track projects, the map plots projects by location and uses technology never before deployed by the Government of Canada on such a scale. When this new feature was introduced in June, there were 3,200 projects mapped. It now contains close to 6,500 projects, and while PCO houses the map on the action plan website, the project data are supplied by departments.

This map is helping support accountability to citizens, who can use this feature of the site to find relatively detailed information about how the action plan is working in their communities.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to talk now about advertising.

[*English*]

Members will know that the communications policy of the government states, "In the Canadian system of parliamentary democracy and responsible government, the government has a duty to explain its policies and decisions and to inform the public of its priorities for the country". The policy goes on to say, "The public has a right to such information".

Earlier this year when the government introduced the economic action plan, it faced an important communications challenge: how to reach the largest number of Canadians to inform them of the measures being taken to stimulate the economy. Recognizing that advertising is the most effective way to do that, the government developed an advertising strategy.

In terms of the advertising that has run to date, it falls into one of two categories: first, advertising that describes specific measures in the economic action plan and how to access them, like the home renovation tax credit; or secondly, advertising that provides general information about the broad suite of measures contained in the plan and drives people to either the website or the 1-800 number where they can get the detailed information needed.

Our statistics indicate that the advertising is working to inform citizens about the plan and about where they can obtain detailed information. Whenever the advertising campaign runs, the volume of calls to the 1-800-O-CANADA number and the number of visits to the website increases noticeably.

Let me use the home renovation tax credit as an example. In research done this summer, 70% of Canadians said they were aware of the HRTC. Now, this is a pretty healthy number to begin with. However, a month later, in July, after the introduction of the advertisements, the number had increased to 81%, or 3 million more Canadians. Since February 2009, the 1-800-O-CANADA call centre has received more than 70,000 calls related to the economic action plan.

Now, on signage, it's been a long-standing practice for the Government of Canada to install signs on infrastructure projects so that people are able to differentiate projects funded for the federal government from other projects. Under the economic action plan, the government is following this long-standing practice.

In addition, the government is ensuring that all signage clearly labels the projects as part of the action plan. The signs also refer Canadians to the website, where they can get more information. These common features of the signage help support the objectives, as I've said, of accountability and uptake of the plan.

Clear identification with the economic action plan is needed if Canadians are to know that the individual projects are part of the plan, and clear information about where to get more detail about the plan is important to support uptake.

Finally, I would like to say that in executing the communications activities related to the economic action plan, PCO has given advice to the government to ensure conformity with the existing framework of rules. These rules are mainly included in the government's communications policy and related standards. I can confirm that the advertising, website, and signage described earlier comply with the requirements and processes set out by the Treasury Board.

Some new and innovative features of the website, like Google Maps or other advanced technologies, are features that were not envisioned when the policy was written. In those cases we have worked with Treasury Board Secretariat and others to ensure that we implement these new features in a way that respects the guidelines and the processes. Where policy has not kept pace with the technology, we continue to work with Treasury Board to address these issues.

I will now turn to my colleague, the Secretary of the Treasury Board, to speak in greater detail about the rules and policies governing communications.

Michelle.

● (1540)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wouters.

Madam d'Auray.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray (Secretary of the Treasury Board, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Wayne.

Madam Chair, with me, as you indicated, is Mr. Phil Hurcomb. He is the assistant secretary, strategic communications and ministerial affairs, and the lead person within the secretariat with the oversight responsibilities for the communications policy and the federal identity program policy.

The role of the Treasury Board Secretariat is to provide advice and guidance to departments about communicating with Canadians. We do so primarily through the Government of Canada's communications policy and the federal identity program policy, otherwise known as the FIP.

The communications policy is a management tool that provides direction to ensure that Canadians receive timely, accurate, objective, and complete information about the government's policies, programs, services, and initiatives. As the clerk indicated, the policy is clear that in "the Canadian system of parliamentary democracy and responsible government, the government has a duty to explain its policies and decisions, and to inform the public of its priorities for the country".

It is also clear that "Ministers, both individually and collectively as members of Cabinet...provide leadership in establishing the priorities and overall themes of government communications". The communications policy also clearly states—and this is a requirement directly made about advertising—that "institutions must ensure products are aligned with government priorities...and government themes and messages".

The policy also helps to ensure that government departments and agencies are visible, accessible, and accountable to the public they serve, and that their communications activities safeguard Canadians' trust and confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the public service of Canada.

The policy sets out 10 interconnected and interdependent policy commitments based on Canadian and public service values, statutes, and regulations. It has 31 policy requirements. It also sets out accountabilities, or if you will, roles and responsibilities, for each key partner in the policy development. Its procedures provide specific direction for advertising, publishing, and public opinion research.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

Complementing the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada is the Federal Identity Program policy, sometimes known as FIP.

We often use these policies in tandem so as to frame the voice and the face of government. The communications policy promotes coherent, consistent communications: one government, speaking with one voice; the FIP supports the government's corporate identity—it helps to shape the face of government.

The Federal Identity Program is about clear and consistent identification. It projects the government as a coherent, unified administration and enables Canadians to recognize at a glance where their government is at work for them.

The FIP governs the use of the three identifiers of the government: the Arms of Canada, the signature, that is to say the flag with the title

of the institution or the Government of Canada, and the "Canada" wordmark.

You'll see the results of FIP on every Government of Canada building, on every piece of official correspondence—even on the Canadarm on the International Space Station.

[*English*]

Having given the context and an overview of the policies and their functions, I will turn now to some of the specific issues of potential interest to the committee: advertising, events, and compliance.

With regard to advertising, the communications policy clearly states that departments and agencies may place advertisements to inform Canadians about their rights or responsibilities, about government policies, programs, services, or initiatives, or about dangers or risks to public health, safety, or the environment. It also states that departments and agencies must ensure that advertising campaigns are aligned with government priorities, themes, and messages.

Some recent examples include recruitment campaigns for the Canadian Forces and the RCMP, or advice to Canadians on helping them to prepare for emergency situations, or how to take advantage of the more than 100 initiatives contained in the economic action plan.

The rules are quite clear. Departments and agencies must ensure that the design and presentation of advertisements conform to the communications policy and its procedures as well as requirements of the FIP. All advertising and public opinion research projects are reviewed by the Privy Council Office and contracts must be issued through Public Works and Government Services Canada.

Furthermore, departments and agencies must not use public funds to purchase advertising in support of a political party. The economic action plan advertising is in compliance with these policies.

[*Translation*]

With regard to events, ministers, or their designated officials, are the primary spokespersons for the Government of Canada. Ministers may also designate members of Parliament or other parliamentarians to represent the government on their behalf.

Ministers are responsible for explaining government priorities, policies and decisions to the public and, in so doing, must conform to Treasury Board policies in the running of their departments.

Members of Parliament acting independently of ministerial activities are not subject to these policies, including the Federal Identity Program.

[English]

As for the use of so-called prop cheques, or what we prefer to call ceremonial cheques, departments and agencies are permitted to use Government of Canada ceremonial cheques for official events of the Government of Canada, those organized by ministers as official spokespersons or by their designated representatives.

As is the case for all government communications products, ceremonial cheques used in official events must include the official symbols of the Government of Canada, as required by the federal identity program policy. Events organized by members of Parliament who are not acting as designated ministerial spokespersons are not covered by the policy.

I'll turn now to monitoring and compliance. As clearly stated in the communications and FIP policies, deputy heads are responsible for ensuring that their organizations comply with these policies. The policy commitments, requirements, and procedures are clear, as are the FIP rules.

The Treasury Board Secretariat uses a number of tools to help monitor overall compliance to these policies. For instance, the secretariat reviews Treasury Board submissions prepared by departments to ensure that key communications and corporate identity requirements are addressed. We also work closely with and advise departments when initiatives are launched and communications materials are in development. It is an iterative process. This approach was applied to the EAP communications.

When they are raised or when we identify them, TBS reviews issues of non-compliance by departments with these policies. When issues of non-compliance are confirmed, the secretariat works with the parties responsible to resolve the issues.

Having given an overview of the government communications and FIP policies, I would like to conclude by confirming that the economic action plan, or EAP, advertising, website, and signage comply with the commitments, requirements, and procedures set out in both the communications and federal identity program policies.

I and my colleague would be pleased to address any questions the committee members may have. *Merci.*

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go with the first round of questions.

Madam Hall Findlay, you have eight minutes.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much, everyone, for being here with us this afternoon.

Mr. Wouters, I offer you belated congratulations on your new role, which is not so new anymore.

Quite frankly, I am now at a bit of a loss as to where to start. I say this with the utmost respect for all of you and for all of the people you work with in your departments. Some of these comments, I stress, are not to be taken personally.

I am astounded at the position that everything that has been done complies with all of the rules. I would first point out that almost a month ago I wrote a detailed letter to the Treasury Board outlining very serious allegations about breaches of the communications policy in the federal identity program. Not once have I received a response or even an acknowledgement of my letter.

I find it astounding that what I have now heard and read in your submissions sounds extraordinarily like a response to my letter, and I find it rather extraordinary that we've waited a month for a response to that letter and you've now done it in this committee process.

We have two hours. We have significant questions about accountability and the amount of money that has been spent, but at this point in time, I want to focus on the content of the advertising and our real concern that the Government of Canada's use of colours, images, and slogans, and the "look and feel" aspects and other branding elements, are the same as or mirror those of the Conservative Party.

Our allegations and concerns about the content of the advertising are very serious.

We saw this in Ontario under Mike Harris's government. The subsequent Liberal government brought in significantly different rules, and I think very appropriately so. I would point out, too, the comments about the Privy Council's involvement in this. There is significant responsibility, and I quote: "To ensure the integrity and efficacy of government advertising, institutions must: co-ordinate advertising planning with PCO...". There is specific responsibility to do so in a "non-partisan fashion consistent with the principles of parliamentary democracy...".

The PCO itself has responsibility. I quote from the communications policy itself: "The Privy Council Office...has a central role in the co-ordination and management of government communications". On PCO, the policy states, "It is responsible for advising Cabinet and its committees...on communication issues, themes and strategies". I can go on, but I needn't tell you what your jobs are.

But in the sense that we have a massive advertising program that has the same or an extremely similar look and feel to that of the Conservative Party of Canada, and that as far as we know upwards of \$100 million may have been spent on this advertising, while we don't take exception to advertising that may inform Canadians of programs, I would suggest to you that the majority of this advertising program does not in fact do so. Rather, it goes out to tell the Canadian public how wonderful the government is. In so doing, in that effort to confuse the government with the Conservative party, it is in effect conferring a massive benefit on the Conservative Party of Canada.

Ms. d'Auray, you said that part of the job was to tell Canadians that the government is out working for them. With all respect, knowing that it's their taxpayer money that is being spent on this, I think Canadians actually would rather have the government simply do the work than spend their taxpayer money on telling them that somehow the government is working for them. I would suggest that it should be an assumption that the government is actually working for us.

I will now turn to what is probably most problematic about this entire advertising campaign and the breaches of the communications policy in a way that confers a significant benefit on the Conservative Party. The logos on the cheques, in my view, are a symptom of the larger disease of trying to confuse the two in the Canadian public's eyes.

• (1555)

There was a piece done by the Canadian Press not too long ago that was the result of what was said by a number of members of the Privy Council Office, both former and current, who, not surprisingly, would not reveal their identities for fear of reprisals, and who had informed the Prime Minister of significant misgivings at the time of the budget and the planning. They said that “the Tories are trampling the admittedly grey area between partisanship and policy”. Also, they said that “they've never seen anything so blatant as the current use of the office for self-promotion”.

Can you please speak to the very specific question? Because if I ask you questions about whether you believe this complies with the policy, you've already said that, and I'll significantly disagree with you. So I'm now going to ask my question slightly differently.

Can you speak specifically to this question? Has there been anyone in the Privy Council Office from January until now who has expressed concern about the partisan nature of the government advertising?

Mr. Wayne Wouters: I can only speak for PCO since the time I've been there, Madam Chair; it was on July 1 that I became the Clerk of the Privy Council. At no time during my period there has anyone questioned the overall approach the government is taking here.

In fact, if I had been the clerk previous to that, it would still have been my advice that it's important for the government to have an effective, comprehensive communications initiative around this campaign.

I can't comment on specific accusations that individuals are making. I'm not aware of that.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: With respect, Mr. Wouters, if you weren't there, maybe if Mr. Kennedy was there, it's a point-blank question: has anybody in the office.... I say this knowing that there have been people who have expressed concern but are very concerned about reprisals.

Mr. Simon Kennedy (Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, Plans and Consultation, Privy Council Office): Madam Chair, I'm not aware of specific concerns that have been raised with the Prime Minister about this. I would echo the comments of the clerk.

I think it's always difficult to talk about the public service's advice in an open forum, because we typically don't talk about what our advice is, one way or the other. But I can confirm, as the clerk said, that PCO in general has been a strong supporter of the need to complement the economic action plan with fairly robust communications with Canadians, to address the issues around accountability and—

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I hate to be rude, but that wasn't my question, and I have real concerns about.... I said at the beginning that we understand the value of government advertising to inform the

public. I would suggest that the H1N1 communication has been clearly not effective, and in fact perhaps quite the opposite, in light of massively greater advertising campaigns such as the wrapping of GO Transit trains. With respect, that is not information. That is the government patting itself on the back.

But you did not answer my question and I think the non-answer in fact speaks for itself. We are very concerned that people within the government have expressed real concern about the partisan nature of this advertising campaign. It is not surprising that the Ontario government imposed significantly tighter rules, because if there is any thought that this might comply with the rules, it's extraordinary.

The Chair: Ms. Hall Findlay, your time is over.

You have 30 seconds to answer.

Mr. Wayne Wouters: As you know, Madam Chair, when it comes to individual accusations in any department, unless we're aware of the accusations, unless they're brought forward, it's very difficult to respond and to react. So as I said, I'm not aware of any of these accusations that have been made. Accusations that are made... we see that often throughout the public service, and they could be made to newspapers, they can be made publicly, but I'm not aware of those, and I guess until I am made aware of them it's very difficult to respond to that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to the next questioner.

Madame Bourgeois, pour huit minutes, s'il vous plaît.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Wouters, Ms. d'Auray and gentlemen, good afternoon and welcome to the committee.

First, I would like to say that I didn't know there was a Government of Canada communications policy. Please pardon my ignorance. I've seen that policy nowhere. Would you be so kind as to file it with the committee so that we can examine it, unless it is already on a website? I see no problem in the Government of Canada's using a communications policy. Canadian citizens, like Quebecers, have the opportunity, since they pay taxes, to access information and services offered by the Canadian government.

I didn't know that policy had a part entitled “Signage”. Don't worry, I'm not throwing stones, but I get the impression you felt obliged to insert a few pages on signage in your presentation document. You seem to be saying that this policy entails two important points. First, “[...] this information is necessary in order to gain access to government programs and services [...]” and, second, “[...] to reach the largest number of Canadians to inform them of the measures being taken to stimulate the economy.”

Does the Government of Canada absolutely need to install signs to inform citizens that it has, for example, changed the windows or door knobs of a building? I'm referring to an article that appeared in *Le Devoir* or in *La Presse*, stating that signs were posted to indicate that the economic recovery plan had been used to make changes to government buildings. Does the Government of Canada need to use these kinds of communications to tell the public how many millions of dollars it has invested in a government building?

• (1600)

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: I'm going to start by talking about the two policies, which are on our website. The clerk of the committee can access them or I can send you the hyperlinks directly. You'll see that the rules concerning how to communicate, communication orientations and the use of the government's corporate identity are clearly identified in the policy elements.

I'm going to answer your question on signage, and then I'll hand over to my colleague from the Privy Council Office.

It is entirely consistent for the government to use a symbol bringing all elements together to indicate activities carried on under the Economic Action Plan because there are more than a hundred programs. It is normal for people to know that a road construction project, rebuilding project or purchase is funded by the Government of Canada. This is clearly what the policy requires.

Perhaps my colleague can add something.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: As the Treasury Board Secretariat has indicated, it is the government's long-term practice to use signage to indicate investments that are being made under the Economic Action Plan. In its communications coordinator role, the Privy Council Office has prepared a signage guide that the departments must follow when they make signage decisions. The guide clearly states that it is important that signage be linked to investments. Small investments, such as windows in small buildings, require a small sign, and larger investments, such as a job site or metro, require a larger sign.

I have copies here if committee members are curious.

• (1605)

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Yes, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: I can leave them with the clerk.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: All right, thank you.

In your speech, Ms. d'Auray, you say: "All advertising and public opinion research projects are reviewed by the Privy Council Office [...]." I imagine all advertising and research projects are, regardless of subject. The government's recovery plan must have been, no?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: That's correct. All advertising and public opinion research projects must be coordinated. To move forward, you have to obtain Privy Council Office authorization. Then it has to go through Public Works and Government Services Canada.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: That's entirely correct.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: So there's a consolidation.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: All right. That leads me to a question that I hope won't shock you.

A few years ago, we witnessed the sponsorship scandal. In the context of those events, there was a government signage and

communication plan. Everything went through Public Works and Government Services.

How can you ensure us that, this time, there won't be any favouritism, that the communication plan of the government—which is Conservative this time—is above all suspicion in this regard?

In asking this question, I'm thinking of an article that appeared in *Le Devoir* in which it was stated that it cost as much as \$7,000 to produce and install each giant sign announcing the recovery plan. They're very costly.

How can you assure us that, as Quebeckers and Canadians, we won't have the wool pulled over our eyes once again?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Madam Chair, I would say—

The Chair: Is that all, Ms. Bourgeois?

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Yes, thank you.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Measures have been taken to that end. We've followed a number of the recommendations that the Auditor General has made to us in her numerous audits. As a result, all contracts are posted. They are all linked to a call for tenders. These standing offers are identified. Competitions are transparent, open, and the control, cross-checking and monitoring mechanisms are very rigorous.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.*

We'll now go to *Monsieur Gourde, pour huit minutes, s'il vous plaît.*

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Can you explain to me in greater detail the purpose of the Federal Identity Program? You, the Treasury Board Secretary provided a few examples in your presentation. However, I would like to have more examples of the way that program operates and the circumstances in which Canadians can see it at work.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Thank you.

Madam Chair, the mechanisms and components lead us to say more specifically how Canada's three major symbols can be used and in what circumstances. For example, only certain institutions are entitled to use the Arms of Canada. The Speaker of the House of Commons and the Speaker of the Senate are entitled to use the arms within their precincts.

As for the signature of the Government of Canada, it is very clearly prescribed that the flag, with the official title of the department, must always be posted so that the source of information or material communicated can be determined. The same principle applies in the case of Canada's wordmark, that is the word "Canada" with a small flag on the *a* at the end. This symbol must appear in all communications.

This principle applies whether it concerns letterhead, a sign or an advertisement. The signature must even be verbal as well. That's why you hear on the radio: "This is an advertisement of the Government of Canada." These guidelines ensure that every official communication of the Government of Canada is identified, trackable and traceable. It enables Canadians to be sure that this is indeed an official communication of the Government of Canada.

• (1610)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Contrary to what my colleague said, we hear the words "Government of Canada" and not "Conservative Government of Canada". So these are non-partisan advertisements.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: As I explained, we have examined all communications activities, whether it be television advertising, visual signage or the website. And communication materials are in compliance with both policies.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: What is the role of the deputy ministers with regard to the communication policy and the Federal Identity Program policy, and what are they doing to ensure that their departments comply with all those policies?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: The communications policy, like the Accountability Act, clearly states that deputy ministers are responsible for putting in place all the necessary control and monitoring measures to ensure that the government's policies are complied with and that the initiatives and activities of their departments and agencies are consistent with those policies. So they have control measures for following up on financial controls, for human resources controls. In communications, a good part of those controls are the responsibility of the communication function, that is a communications branch in their department or agency, and the terms and conditions of operation are very clearly prescribed in the communications policy. As I mentioned earlier, we're going to provide the clerk of the committee with the hyperlink. You'll see that there are indeed 31 clearly established directives that provide for the use and control and monitoring mechanisms that a department must put in place within its organization.

So the deputy ministers have at least a fairly precise guideline. We also define the role of a communications director or director general within a department, what the follow-up audit mechanisms are for the exchanges necessary for approvals, and so on. So it's quite clearly established so that the deputy ministers can perform their duties and their responsibilities.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: With regard to the advertisements of the Government of Canada, do the cheques used to pay for the advertisements bear the government identification? Do the cheques look a lot like the signs that also appear around the edges of the places where infrastructure projects are underway, or other projects?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: As I said, the guidelines must apply to what are called the "ceremonial" cheques used for official advertisements, that is to say the cheques that a minister uses, or that a member of Parliament uses on behalf of a minister during an official event. When a member or senator takes an initiative, the guidelines do not apply to the member as an individual. They will apply only in an event for which a parliamentarian—if I may use that expression—acts on behalf of the minister and is designated as such.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Those cheques are produced by the departments?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: In this case, Public Works and Government Services Canada offers a production service for this kind of event and initiative. The departments wishing to use it may do so.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you. Do I have any time left?

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: There seem to be some direct, natural links between the communications policy and the Federal Identity Program policy. Can you explain how those two policies fit together and supplement each other?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: I would say that the communications policy enables us to say or to explain what's called the voice of government, whereas the Federal Identity Program policy is really the image or face of government. That's what we call the complementary or interactive nature of the two policies. So the identity policy enables us to ensure the integrity of the government's visual image to the same extent as the communications policy allows us to ensure consistency and the orientation of the communication is done in accordance with the orientation of the priorities and policies of the Government of Canada.

• (1615)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: You've finished? Thank you.

[English]

We'll now go to Mr. Martin for eight minutes.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It seems to me, witnesses, that government communications has always been a bit of a cesspool of partisan monkey business over the years—really, since anybody can remember. The flag of Canada itself bears a striking resemblance to the colours and logos of the Liberal Party, which was the ruling party at the time. How we ever wound up with a flag that had no blue representing La Belle Province is beyond me.

It seems to me that it's almost like the victor gets to write the history books, and control of this big government communications machine is one of the spoils of war that the victor gets to exploit. This is the way it looks to me. But after a certain point, I mean, some limitations have to be put on that or the room for abuse is just staggering. The Government of Ontario has cleansed this process.

Now, I don't envy you; you're here trying to defend the indefensible, which Canadians have been crying out about in these recent months. As a specific, can anybody tell me who actually created the action plan website and maintains it?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: The website was originally created by, I believe, the Department of Finance. It's now managed by the Privy Council Office.

Mr. Pat Martin: How does the Privy Council Office feel about that?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Well, it's part and parcel of our role in coordinating government communications. In fact, we had agreed to take on the management of the website because the material on the site does not come from PCO; it actually comes from the departments who are participating in the action plan.

Mr. Pat Martin: So who would have put the link onto the Prime Minister playing the piano and all the multiple pictures of him in friendly poses that you connect to through that website? Who would have done that?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: The government is the one that decides what it wishes to communicate, and wanted to have the links to the social media—

Mr. Pat Martin: But doesn't the PCO run the government's wishes through sort of an ethical filter?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: We give advice. As both the secretary and the clerk mentioned, we ensure that the communications are done within the confines of the policy.

Mr. Pat Martin: Did you advise them that it would be a really, really bad idea to put a link to the Prime Minister playing the piano on the Canada action plan website?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Well, I think the intention of having the social media links—

Mr. Pat Martin: Just yes or no.

In the process of the advice that you give government departments, did anybody say, "That really crosses the line"? Did anybody say, "That offends the sensibility of every Canadian who's going to see that who has half a brain"?

We're getting government propaganda shoved down.... That website's not supposed to be a cheerleader booster for the ruling party. It's supposed to be an information vehicle.

Didn't somebody who is...?

You're new to this job, Mr. Wouters. I respect your career as a deputy minister before, and even before that in the Government of Saskatchewan. Didn't you see something wrong with that?

Mr. Wayne Wouters: Madam Chair, we're into a new world here with websites. In fact, the policy has not contemplated moving to the new media that we've now seen.

So the government made the decision to include some social media, because it did provide information on the economic action plan—

Mr. Pat Martin: No, it didn't, sir.

Mr. Wayne Wouters: There was information on the economic action plan.

Mr. Pat Martin: "I'll get by with a little help from my friends" has nothing to do with economic recovery.

Mr. Wayne Wouters: You know, in some ways, many young people in this country—who are difficult to reach, too, in terms of newspapers and sometimes ads—

Mr. Pat Martin: Oh, sir, with all due respect—

Mr. Wayne Wouters: —are on the social media. Therefore, I think the government's decision....

I mean, I'm not here to defend the government's decision. They decided that was in their interest—

Mr. Pat Martin: But you're here to provide an ethical screen for the government's decision. The PCO is supposed to filter that stuff out before it gets to—

Mr. Wayne Wouters: Can I respond to the question?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Holder.

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair, we're trying to have a thoughtful dialogue on this.

I know we're trying to bring clarity, but it strikes me that if my colleague Mr. Martin has the wonderful courtesy to ask a question, he should offer the same courtesy to allow them to respond.

● (1620)

The Chair: Mr. Holder, as I told your colleague last time—

Mr. Pat Martin: That's not really a point of order.

The Chair: —the opportunity to ask questions and interject and stop the witnesses when the witnesses are not giving the answer is the prerogative of the member. It's not a point of order, it's a debate.

Mr. Martin, please continue.

Mr. Ed Holder: Madam Chair, may I come back on that point of order, please?

If you recall, when you and I discussed this once before, we talked about courtesy around this table with our guests.

The Chair: Mr. Holder, I appreciate that. He's not being rude to the witness.

The witnesses do know that they are here to give answers. If the member does not feel that their answers are relevant, the member is at liberty to interject and stop. That's their right.

So we will not have these points of order regarding the member's right to pose questions.

You may continue, Mr. Martin. I will let you go for a few more minutes.

Mr. Pat Martin: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will try to let the witnesses answer.

Were you aware, Mr. Wouters, that the links that are connected to the action plan of Canada are in fact links to the Conservative Party of Canada's website, that the social media clips are exactly the same in content as the Conservative view, because they are effectively overseeing a website for the Conservative Party of Canada?

Mr. Wayne Wouters: I think it's fair to say, Madam Chair, that when these issues were raised with the government, the government removed the connections to those social sites at that time. As a result, the government is now looking at ensuring, in fact, that the information available is for the economic action plan only.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: If I may talk about the social networking sites, Madam Chair, what we are finding—and this is where the current policy is silent because they were not prevalent at the time at which the policy was last updated—is that linking to social network sites is actually quite useful in certain instances.

The problem with the social network sites is that they're actually driven by the popularity of the images that happen to be on the site. If we link to a particular set of images, a whole bunch of other images can come in, depending on the popularity. That's why we're now rethinking our approach to linking to social network sites, because in fact we do not control at that point—

Mr. Pat Martin: With all due respect, I think it's being rethought because of the public outrage at the room for abuse that's going on. This is not new technology. YouTube is not new. Twitter is not new. Facebook is not new.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Perhaps it may not be new, but it is not something that the Government of Canada has envisaged in its official communications activities.

We have tried it. We have looked at it in a number of ways, and we're trying to come to grips with what it means when other people feed into a social network site that we link up to. That's all. At this point, given that the communications policy is silent on these issues, we have started to examine how best we can make use of those social networking tools in the Government of Canada communications—

Mr. Pat Martin: Without being cheerleaders for the ruling party, I would hope.

Could I ask one last specific question? You said that MPs are not covered by the policy regarding ceremonial cheques. Ministers are, or their designates are, but an MP doing the exact same task can put a Conservative Party of Canada logo on his or her cheque and not worry about the wordmark or anything else, if they're not acting as a designated ministerial spokesperson.

When Gerald Keddy is handing a cheque over on behalf of the Government of Canada, surely he is performing the function that the minister would have performed, were the minister available. In that case, he is the designated spokesperson for the government, is he not?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: When a member of Parliament acts as a designated spokesperson for the government, that means the department acts as the support mechanism for the communications activities, so there is in fact a direct link between the minister acting as a spokesperson and his or her designate. In this instance, and we have had a look at a number of these activities, members of

Parliament who were not acting as designated spokespersons are not supported or covered by the communications and federal identity policy.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Martin, thank you.

We'll now go to Madam Foote for five minutes.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm sitting here and sometimes hearing the answers with some disbelief. I want to ask each of our witnesses if they are serving at the pleasure of the Prime Minister, all four of you.

• (1625)

Mr. Wayne Wouters: Yes, we are.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: I am. I don't think Mr. Hurcomb is.

Mr. Philip Hurcomb (Assistant Secretary, Treasury Board Secretariat): No. I work for the secretariat.

Ms. Judy Foote: Okay.

I want to ask a question in terms of the creation of the economic action plan. In coming up with the plan itself, was all of your advice taken in terms of actually coming up with the economic action plan?

Mr. Wayne Wouters: Again, with respect to the honourable member, I cannot divulge what advice I provided as secretary of the Treasury Board, in this case, if we go back to that, and as to what specific advice the President of the Treasury Board or the board accepted or did not accept. That is confidential information between me, as a senior adviser, and my minister in this case.

Ms. Judy Foote: Okay. Let me just ask a question, then, and I guess I won't ask for specifics. But did you provide any advice that was not accepted?

Mr. Wayne Wouters: I'm not prepared to comment on what advice was accepted or not accepted. That is our system. We are public servants.

Ms. Judy Foote: Okay, and I'm not asking you to comment on—

Mr. Wayne Wouters: We provide confidential advice to ministers, some of which is accepted, and some advice which is not accepted.

Ms. Judy Foote: That wasn't the question. The question was: did you provide any advice that wasn't accepted? I'm not asking for particulars.

Mr. Wayne Wouters: I'm not going to go back in terms of my advice to the President of the Treasury Board, what is accepted and what...I'm not prepared to get into that discussion as to what was accepted or not accepted, and whether it was accepted or whether it was not accepted.

Ms. Judy Foote: Okay. Let me ask, then, what department was actually responsible for the creation of the economic action plan?

Mr. Wayne Wouters: Well, the economic action plan was essentially a plan that was developed by a number of departments, with the central agencies, the Treasury Board, the Department of Finance, and the PCO, all providing oversight coordination roles. So it essentially was a plan that was developed by public servants across the public service, working through cabinet and cabinet committees.

Ms. Judy Foote: Would the Prime Minister's Office have had anyone sit in on the discussions with respect to the development of the economic action plan?

Mr. Wayne Wouters: The Prime Minister's Office is represented at cabinet committees. This is a long-standing tradition. They are there to observe and hear discussions. As I say, this is a long-standing tradition—

Ms. Judy Foote: And that's the point—

Mr. Wayne Wouters: —as long as I've been a public servant.

Ms. Judy Foote: —to observe and hear discussions.

Did they have any input into actually what comprises the economic action plan?

Mr. Wayne Wouters: Again, I'm not going to divulge what the cabinet discussions were. Like any initiative, we provide advice to ministers. That advice goes to ministers. Normally a minister's office will have views on that advice. In my case, as Clerk of the Privy Council, I provide my advice to my minister, the Prime Minister, and the political staff of the Prime Minister provide their advice.

The Prime Minister, based on that advice coming from the political side and from me, the public service, will make his decision. That's our system of government. That's how it works in departments and how it works in the Privy Council Office.

The Chair: Mr. Wouters, I just want to bring this to the attention of committee members. I'm going to read the standing order for responses by public servants so that this line of questioning is regarded carefully:

Consequently, public servants have been excused from commenting on the policy decisions made by the government. In addition, committees will ordinarily accept the reasons that a public servant gives for declining to answer a specific question or series of questions....

Please, all of you, keep that in mind. Thank you.

Continue, Madam.

Ms. Judy Foote: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to go back to the economic action plan and ask about the signage component of that plan and the cost for that component.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: The actual signage, Madam Chair, is the responsibility of the individual department. We provide guidance as to when it's appropriate to have a sign, the kind of sign you'd use, and so on, but the actual expenditure is done in the context of the expenditures the individual departments are doing on their programs. That's the way it has been in the past.

So transport or infrastructure has an infrastructure program, a portion of the budget is for communications and signage, and it would be captured by that budget. I don't, at this table, have a global

figure for you on signage, but it would be the individual departments managing those budgets.

• (1630)

Ms. Judy Foote: How about the location of the signs? Who determines where the signs are going to appear?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Well, essentially—

The Chair: Madam Foote—

Go ahead, answer that.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Essentially, the rule of thumb would be that if it's on the economic action plan website—if you visit the website and it's on the map—that would be the type of project that would have a sign. It would be a project that would have a fixed location—for example, an infrastructure project.

Things such as the work-sharing program or EI benefits, things that are more for individuals and that aren't in a fixed location, obviously wouldn't have a sign. But for infrastructure projects, major projects, that have a fixed kind of geographic location, they would typically have a sign.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Dorion for *cinq minutes, s'il vous plaît*.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, madam and gentlemen, for being here.

Mr. Wouters, we've just been told that, when a “ceremonial” cheque is handed over at the initiative of a member who is not the spokesperson of his party in the field concerned, the cheque does not need to be consistent with the public policy. That suggests that the Treasury Board and other bodies that you represent allow members to present cheques bearing the logo of the Conservative Party of Canada. We know very well that members who do that kind of thing are trying to create the impression in their audience that it's not really the Government of Canada that is giving the money, but rather the Conservative Party.

Doesn't that mean that you are allowing people to act in this manner and that you believe it is not contrary to accepted morality? Acts and regulations are one thing, but there is also a matter of common sense. If Mr. A gave \$1,000 to a charity and Mr. B claimed it was he who gave that amount, I don't believe Mr. A would accept that. You are representatives of the Canadian government. How can you allow this kind of thing?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Madam Chair, allow me to answer the question. As you indicated, the policy does not apply to parliamentarians who are not the official spokespersons of a minister.

In the case you refer to, it is up to political authorities to determine what the situation is. In this case, the Prime Minister had clearly stated that this was not an appropriate use and that the mix of the two events and the presence of political ties were not acceptable.

We can only act in the case of an activity that comes under our responsibility. If these kinds of initiatives are brought to our attention, we can intervene. In this case, however, the Prime Minister had already intervened to say that it was not an acceptable practice.

Mr. Jean Dorion: Did you know about that practice before the Prime Minister intervened, or before it was revealed by the newspapers?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: No, we weren't aware of it.

Mr. Jean Dorion: Thank you.

The Chair: You have two minutes left.

Mr. Jean Dorion: The government's economic recovery plan suffers from a lack of transparency. We saw that last week in this committee. We have no figures, no data on the plan's economic impact. The parliamentary budget director does not have the summary necessary to an exhaustive analysis of the government plan.

Furthermore, this morning, I attended a meeting of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. We heard from the acting Access to Information Commissioner, Suzanne Legault, who presented the organization's annual report to us. I recall from that testimony that there were a lot of complaints about undue delays in responses by departments, agencies and so on. It appears the delays were caused by the intervention and consultation of a third organization. In a number of cases, the third party organization was the Privy Council Office or the Treasury Board Secretariat.

Don't you think that the Treasury Board and Privy Council Office could substantially improve their transparency rules so as to inform Quebec and Canadian taxpayers about how their money is spent and, especially, what the results of those expenditures are in the case of the recovery plan in particular? Can you provide us with any specific statistics on the amounts invested in Quebec under the economic recovery plan, not the announced amounts, but the amounts actually granted?

• (1635)

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Madam Chair, with regard to the publication of documents, I believe the government has tabled three quarterly reports in Parliament and a fourth is scheduled for December, if I'm not mistaken, outlining the commitments made by the Government of Canada on the economic recovery action plan.

In terms of the amounts spent or committed, most information is on the website, as my colleague Mr. Kennedy indicated. Each of the projects, appears on the website once it has been signed off. So, by going to the site, you can see which projects are currently underway in Quebec because they should all be posted as the agreements are signed for the individual projects.

In certain circumstances, I know discussions are still underway with certain provinces to finalize certain agreements. However, as soon as individual projects and agreements are signed, the initiatives are posted on the sites.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We go now to Mr. Brown, for five minutes.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

We're talking about the infrastructure stimulus. It's a huge amount. Just to put this into context, think of \$7.5 billion in budget 2009 alone combined with other levels of government for \$22 billion in stimulus.

I want to know what is the total spent on advertising to make Canadians aware of this program? As a rough estimate, what percentage of the \$22 billion is on advertising?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: So far, to date, the expenditure has been roughly \$34 million for advertising of the economic action plan.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Out of \$7.5 billion, \$34 million.

The interesting thing is that back in the winter when we were discussing the budget, I watched panels of Liberal MPs talking about the budget. They complained that we were not advertising the economic stimulus. There were complaints: Why can't they be like the States and advertise? Why can't we have a website, like the U.S. did, pointing to projects around the country?

Now that we do advertise, it almost seems like the Liberals are attacking for the sake of attacking. Now that their attack has no base, they're complaining about the actual cost of doing exactly what they had asked for.

So in the case of the website, since the Liberals were demanding this only a few months ago, maybe it would be nice to let them know about this website, the functions it offers, and the cost associated with offering Canadians this valuable information.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: We're managing the website on a very low budget. I have four staff who actually manage it. There is no formal budget for the website. We spent a small amount of money on some market research to focus groups to just see what people think of the website and to try to improve its functionality, but it actually has no budget other than the staff time of the people who are managing it.

Of course, departments are all contributing information so there will be staff time in departments as well.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I'm also curious about the costs associated with advertising the home renovation tax credit. When the Liberals tried to force an unnecessary \$300-million election, a lot of Canadians were worried about how to actually claim this tax credit because of the uncertainty caused by the opposition.

This is such a valuable program that Canadians tremendously appreciate and are eager to qualify for. Getting the message out in the midst of the confusion sown by the opposition was important.

What efforts have been undertaken to share with Canadians this important program, specifically the home renovation tax credit?

• (1640)

Mr. Simon Kennedy: The total cost of the campaign for the home renovation tax credit is \$7 million. That includes print advertising in magazines, some advertising on the Internet, television advertising, obviously, which a number of members may have seen, as well an attempt to have, at least for the government, more innovative advertising. Some members may have seen the point-of-sale displays in stores such as Home Depot and Rona, as well as door hangers. For houses in new neighbourhoods, where Canadians would be more likely to want to undertake renovations—put in a new kitchen, that sort of thing—there are door hangers to put on the door knocker.

So that's a \$7-million campaign.

Mr. Patrick Brown: In terms of the signage, I notice in my riding, and around Ontario, and around Canada, there are all these signs about the economic action plan. I can see why the Liberals would be upset about this, because they are saying there are no projects happening around Canada, that it hasn't started. It's really frustrating for them to have to go into communities and see these giant signs where people can see construction work taking place, jobs being created.

In terms of this program, the signage, what are the costs associated with that? I'm also curious, because the signs in Ontario have the provincial sign by the Liberal provincial government and the federal sign. I haven't heard members of the opposition complain about the provincial signs, which are actually attached to all the federal signs. I wonder if that's just because there's a provincial Liberal government. But it just seems to be a little bit disingenuous.

So I just want to verify, are the economic stimulus signs with these projects with the provinces indeed attached, as I see when I drive around in Ontario; and what is the cost in terms of this program?

The Chair: You have time to respond.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thank you, Madam Chair.

As I mentioned earlier to the committee, the actual cost of signage is absorbed in the program budgets of individual departments, so we don't have that specific information handy. The Privy Council Office has given guidance to departments to ensure that the signage is appropriate and that they follow the graphic standards.

It is true that, in a number of cases, the infrastructure programming is joint. For example, for a road upgrade, the provincial sign and the federal sign would be side by side. That's not the case in all programs. In some cases, it would only be a federal sign, but in some others it would be joint.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Madam Hall Findlay for five minutes.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Kennedy, you said something that is just astounding to me, about the budget for the website for the information on the projects. We would love to have a website comparable to the one that's being done in the United States, absolutely. The Canadian one doesn't even come close. Maybe with the fact that you've acknowledged that the

budget is so tiny and there are so few people, I would just like to point out for the record that today we've learned that the cost of billboards alone in Quebec might be as high as \$45 million, compared to what apparently is a very small budget for a website actually telling us about the detail of projects. So there might be an opportunity to spend money a little bit more correctly.

Going back to the content, I want to just highlight some pieces about the Treasury Board communications policy, that all Government of Canada communications must be objective; they must inform the public in an accountable, non-partisan fashion consistent with the principles of Canadian parliamentary democracy; they must ensure that public trust and confidence in the impartiality and integrity of the Public Service of Canada is upheld; and they must avoid conflicts of interest and the appearance or public perception of endorsing or providing a marketing subsidy or any unfair competitive image to any person, organization, or entity outside of government. That would include the Conservative Party of Canada.

May I ask, was it a coincidence that the throne speech was almost identical to the cover of the 2008 Conservative Party platform?

Mr. Kennedy, maybe you were around, or Madame d'Auray.

Was that a coincidence? Yes or no?

• (1645)

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: I wasn't around for the Speech from the Throne and this, but I would say, if I can indicate in terms of the government communications policy or the FIP, there are no prescriptions or elements that determine colour, font, or format. So it is really up to each government to determine the nature of the presentation elements they will use.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Given the policies that require non-partisanship, I would suggest that it's a rather striking comparison.

I would also ask if it was a coincidence that the Government of Canada website and the Conservative Party website, given the millions of colours that can be chosen from, chose a pigment that is exactly the same, out of millions of opportunities, as the colour used by the Conservative Party of Canada.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Again, the policy does not preclude or prescribe the nature of the colour, font, or other elements that are used in government communications.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I will add that one of the requirements in the communications policy is in fact the use of the words "Government of Canada". Is it in fact part of the communications policy that an official identity of the Government of Canada has now become "the Harper government", and on that basis, it is somehow acceptable to have well over 9,000 examples of "the Harper government" on government websites and communications?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Again, Madam Chair, according to the policy, the requirements are for the official signature of the government, the image of the government, to be labelled as such. There are no components that prescribe the use of specific wording in terms of the messages and the communications materials as long as the signature and the use of the official symbols are consistent with the policies.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I will accept that there's been a brave attempt to suggest that "the Harper government" has now become a national symbol of Canada, at least in terms of this government's perception, and I will register my significant disagreement with that.

I will also ask this: what part of blaming new technology is acceptable in the question of linking to social networking sites?

It's not a question of technology, and the policy is not silent. The policy deals specifically with non-partisanship. What part of the technology is to blame for linking to a social networking site that isn't the government? The government sites link to Stephen Harper personal social networking sites that link to Conservative Party networking sites. It's the linking.

What part of that in fact complies with the policy?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: If I may, the original linkages—I'll turn to my colleague on this—were to the Prime Minister of Canada. Again, if there are some subsequent linkages, those are some of the issues that we've discovered when we've linked to social networking.

For the specifics of the points that you're raising, in particular for this website, I'll perhaps ask my colleague to expand on that.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: As the Clerk of the Privy Council had mentioned earlier, the government's decision to include the links to the social media sites were in recognition of the extensive use of social media sites by younger Canadians. I think the opposition and others have raised concerns, and so the government has asked us to build social media sites—Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, etc.—that are specifically about the economic action plan.

On the website now, the previous links are now broken. If you go to visit them, you'll get an under construction symbol. We're working to relaunch those sites exclusively dedicated to the economic action plan.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Hall Findlay.

We now go to Mr. Warkentin for five minutes.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): I believe Mr. Holder is on the list before I am.

Mr. Wayne Wouters: Madam Chair, just for clarification, I don't think one of the social networking...was the Conservative Party site. It was the Prime Minister's site. I know that has come up a number of times here today.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: You are right.

The Chair: We'll continue with the questions. Somebody's going to find out what the bells are about.

Go ahead, Mr. Holder.

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank our guests for attending and for their comments today.

I find you very credible, very sincere. Notwithstanding some of the tone of the dialogue that has taken place today, please let me express my appreciation for the work you do on behalf of Canadians. I think that has to be said, and frankly, should be said more.

There are a couple of things. I'd actually like to salute Mr. Martin and some comments that he made. I want to acknowledge that.

It was rather interesting when you talked about the colours, and some question about colours came up. I think you noted, very ably, that the Canadian flag, a great symbol of this country, seems to look somewhat like another party that happens to be in this country.

Those are beautiful colours, by the way. Don't ever let me suggest otherwise.

To our guests, is there anything in your policies that would prevent the opposition parties from using the same colours, fonts, or styles that are in Canada's current economic action plan?

• (1650)

Mr. Wayne Wouters: The policy does not apply to members of the opposition. The Treasury Board policies apply to the government.

Mr. Ed Holder: So in fact there would be nothing, then, sir, that would prevent opposition parties from using those similar colours if they wanted to take advantage of all the strengths of Canada's economic action plan.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: There wouldn't be any element....

I think where we exercise a compliance rule is if somebody, for example, uses a Government of Canada identifier or symbol for their own commercial activities, or starts to misrepresent activities of the government. At that point, we would intervene.

Mr. Ed Holder: Okay. I think that's a fair comment.

It's rather interesting; I know there has been some reference made to the Prime Minister and piano playing.

Mr. Martin, I'm disappointed. I mean, you're such a thoughtful guy as it relates to the stage. I don't know why you'd be against the arts. But you know, that's a discussion we might have for another time, in fun.

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Ed Holder: I will withdraw that as a comment. It wasn't meant to be inappropriate.

Mr. Wouters said earlier, on signage, that it's been a long-standing practice for the Government of Canada to install signs on infrastructure projects so that people are able to differentiate projects funded by the federal government from other projects.

How long has that been a practice, sir, to your understanding?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: I will have to return to the committee with the specifics, but certainly past infrastructure programs....

Perhaps the secretary would have more specific comments.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: I do have some history of when the first infrastructure program was established. The signage for the Canada infrastructure works program was started within four months of the launch of the initiative, when the first agreements were signed with the provinces.

Mr. Ed Holder: Did the practice of using signage precede this government? In other words, have other governments used signs?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: If I may, Madam Chair, it would have started in 1994.

Mr. Ed Holder: In 1994; that was not the Conservatives in government at that time, as I recall.

Let me ask a different question. A question was asked of you of whether you sit at the pleasure of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Wouters, I believe you mentioned that three of the four of you sit at the pleasure of the Prime Minister.

Is that a brand new practice?

Mr. Wayne Wouters: No, it is part of our system of government. We are appointed by the Prime Minister. I am appointed by the Prime Minister and I serve the Prime Minister. My colleagues are appointed to serve a minister.

Mr. Ed Holder: Would that practice—not yours specifically, but appointments to a position such as yours previously—precede this Conservative government?

Mr. Wayne Wouters: Oh, yes, this is a long-standing practice in our Westminster system.

Mr. Ed Holder: So it might include Liberal governments as well.

You also indicated in your testimony that you weren't prepared to divulge certain advice that you give to the president of the Treasury Board.

Again, is that just current practice, or has it always been the practice of the clerk?

Mr. Wayne Wouters: No, it is long-standing practice. The advice we provide to ministers is confidential.

The Chair: Your time is up.

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to Madame Bourgeois, *pour cinq minutes, s'il vous plaît.*

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. d'Auray, I would like to go back to the answer you gave me a little earlier. I want to get a clear understanding.

To meet the requirements of the Government of Canada's communications policy, you no doubt develop a planning process. I imagine you have a communications policy.

You say that this year you'll proceed with such and such a form. In any case, you're developing a planning process, I'm sure, so that we can have a planning process in terms of deadlines for specific programs, but also in terms of costs. Is that correct?

• (1655)

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Madam Chair, the policy establishes the guidelines that the departments must follow. It is up to each department to establish a communications plan or a communications strategy. The Treasury Board does not have a communications plan, except for its own department. Most of the communications initiatives form an integral part of the initiatives of the programs of every department and agency.

When you examine, for example, the departments' reports on plans and priorities, you can see the major communications orientations and the amounts allocated to communications activities because they come out of the budgets of each of the departments.

The exception, if I may say, are really the advertising issues. Amounts are allocated by the government for advertising campaigns, and that signage is done directly on the Treasury Board website. However, planning and execution are the direct responsibility of the departments.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: You nevertheless have to conduct some advertising planning.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Indeed, our advertising planning is done based on the amounts that are allocated and posted. We can provide you and the clerk with the hyperlink to the Treasury Board Secretariat site where the amounts and initiatives to which those amounts are allocated are posted.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Give me the time to get a clear understanding. Every department is responsible for its communications. A general advertisement concerning the departments is done by the Government of Canada on its website.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Allow me to point out that there is no pan-governmental planning. Funding is available for television, radio and other advertising. The departments request access to that funding. The allocation of that funding is posted on the website. However, it is the responsibility of each department to undertake the advertising activities and initiatives.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: All right. Every department does its own advertising based on its own budget.

The recovery plan is a quite special initiative that arrived suddenly. Earlier, in response to my question concerning signs, you said that every department uses part of its budget to advertise the recovery plan. Does that mean that every department has to bear the cost of the signs it installs in front of its buildings?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: I would point out that, for advertising, there is a Treasury Board Secretariat website where the amounts allocated to each of the departments for advertising campaigns are posted. There you can find the amounts that were allocated under the economic recovery plan, for example, to the Canada Revenue Agency, for advertising the renovation credit. There's an amount of \$7 million, as my colleague Mr. Kennedy said earlier.

As for the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, there's also an amount allocated for advertising and for an advertising campaign concerning the initiatives. The amounts are posted on the websites of each of the departments that have an activity to carry out under the action plan and have an advertising campaign.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to five minutes each.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: Thank you, Chair.

I have three quick things I'd like to deal with. I'll skip across them very quickly.

First of all, I'm curious about these door hangers. I've never heard of them. How many were produced? Who distributes them? And who decides what neighbourhoods they get distributed to? Would you please table some of them with this committee so we can examine them?

Secondly, the website doesn't comply with your own common look and feel standards. We've investigated this. In fact, part 3 of your common look and feel standards of the Treasury Board Secretariat, sections 3 and 4, says that you don't conform to the guidelines with the word mark, the banner, and so on. That's a concern.

Finally, it's still not clear to me when MPs can hand out these prop cheques and not be in contradiction of Treasury Board guidelines. I know that nothing is stopping me from creating a dummy cheque, or whatever it is, and signing my own name on it in front of a construction site and trying to take credit for it. But if you're a government backbencher, as 60 or 70 of these people were, in my own province, does the Treasury Board not have some comment on a Conservative Party or government-side member signing these cheques and using the government word mark? Never mind the Conservative Party of Canada logo; are they authorized to sign the cheque and to use the wordmark?

I'm sorry about asking three things, but I tried to be concise.

• (1700)

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Thanks for the question.

Regarding the issue of door hangers, there were 3.5 million of those produced and, just for a bit of precision, in general they were distributed to houses that were older than 15 years, houses where the judgment would be that there would be a greater likelihood of the individuals undertaking a renovation.

In terms of having the specifics of how that would happen, I have to get back to the committee with the details. My assumption would be that, as with other marketing, it would be done by postal code. The firm that would have been engaged to do this would have had some methodology to ensure that distribution.

Mr. Pat Martin: It would be distributed door to door.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: That's right.

Mr. Pat Martin: With some guidance from the government, I assume, as to what neighbourhoods they would go to.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: It would probably be a direct marketing firm that would be engaged for that, but I would have to get back to the committee with the details.

Mr. Pat Martin: Thank you.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: With regard to the website, as the honourable member said, it's absolutely true that there are elements of the site that were not compliant with the common look and feel standard. That relates primarily to the technology being used for the site, such as Google Maps.

We had been working for some time with the Treasury Board to get an exemption from those elements of the common look and feel standards. If you're using new technology or if there's some facet to the website that may not be compliant, there's a procedure to seek an exemption, and we did obtain that. So we are compliant with the exemption in place.

Mr. Pat Martin: It's sort of like *Animal Farm*. No, I'm sorry, that's a cheap shot.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: On your third question, I think the secretary was going to respond.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: With regard to what we prefer to call ceremonial cheques, the usage of them is covered only when a member of Parliament or parliamentarian is acting specifically on behalf of a minister as his or her designate. In that instance, it is an official Government of Canada activity where the department of that minister or the organization of that minister is supporting the member of Parliament or the parliamentarian in that event. We don't exercise an oversight over those events or initiatives that would have been organized by the parliamentarian's own volition or accord.

Mr. Pat Martin: I don't have any way of proving this, but I don't imagine these guys all orchestrated these events on their own volition. They were doing a task for the government, which was to hand a very welcome and much appreciated cheque to people in their constituencies. Shouldn't that fall under the auspices of the Treasury Board guidelines? Where do you draw the line?

Again, any one of my colleagues here could produce their own cheque, I suppose, and go to where there's an excavation being dug and take credit for it. I can understand how that would be above and beyond Treasury Board guidelines, but it seems that when you call the media out—

The Chair: Mr. Martin, wrap up, please. Thank you.

Mr. Pat Martin: I'm still not clear on how 50 or 60 of these people did that without any oversight from the Treasury Board guidelines, Madam d'Auray.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Again, Madam Chair, if these events were not organized or set out by the minister or by his or her delegates, the department would have not been involved in the event or the initiative, at which point the federal identity program and the communications policy would not have applied.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Warkentin for five minutes.

• (1705)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate it.

Many good questions have been asked and we appreciate your answers this afternoon.

Congratulations, Mr. Wouters, on your appointment. You've been to the committee many times before. As usual, you don't disappoint, but this is the first time in your new capacity, so we appreciate your willingness to come here this afternoon.

There's been a number of things talked about around the table today. I just thought it was interesting, and perhaps it's a point of interest to members of Parliament who sit at the table here, that some concern was brought up by my colleague Martha Hall Findlay as it relates to the cost of the GO Train advertising that was undertaken to advertise the action plan.

I think it's of interest to members of the committee that in fact this is probably good value for money. I wasn't aware of what it cost to advertise in the *Toronto Star*, but apparently for a two-day ad it costs some \$57,000 for half a page. I think that most of us in our capacities as members of Parliament have advertised either in election campaigns or at different times and do understand that advertising in newspapers is quite expensive and is not always the most effective way.

I would commend the folks who spent \$46,000 to advertise with the GO Trains by wrapping those GO Trains, because not only has that run for 10 weeks, but in addition to that, they effectively received several full-page ads in earned media.

I'm just curious to hear if there is any Treasury Board policy related to innovative advertising where it involves the possibility of or a strategy that may result in earned media in addition to the expenditure that the government may have had taking place. Is there any concern or anything that would discourage the government from purchasing media that may lead to earned media as a result of that advertising?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Madam Chair, on the communications policy, the only elements that would guide certain activities would be ones where, for example, there would be partnership arrangements or events or initiatives where more than one partner would be involved, at which point there are some specific elements with regard to signage and credit, if I can put it that way.

In terms of subsequent media coverage, if I can put it that way, no, there are no elements that are in the policy in relation to that.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I studied some marketing in my education and we were taught that, if you can get some earned media in addition to purchased media, that was always good value for money. I think this is a demonstration of where the government has clearly

been wise in terms of the expenditure on this particular initiative. I think we'd all agree that there's been a fair bit of attention and a lot of people have noticed, even outside of Toronto, through the earned media that resulted from the decision to advertise in this way. I think we as a committee can commend the folks who came up with that.

I know there's some discussion as to the amount that has been spent in advertising the action plan. In my own community there are people who are unaware of the provisions under the home renovation tax credit. From time to time I have people contacting my office saying they heard from so-and-so just recently that this program exists. So there are still people learning about it for the first time, so we need to continue the effort.

There are also other provisions within the action plan that Canadians need to take up. They're things that Canadians actually have to act on, not things that are simply provided to them. And there are still Canadians who are unaware of that.

I'm wondering if the Treasury Board has any policy as it relates to polling to see how many Canadians are aware of certain provisions of government services and how that relates to advertising policies.

The Chair: You can answer.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be brief. I want to avoid your hand signal.

The communications policy does in fact have some elements with regard to the polling, the public opinion research. In fact, we do have to test prior to the advertising in order for us to be able to measure and monitor whether or not the advertising has generated what our objectives were.

For example, as Mr. Wouters mentioned, when we run a set of advertisements with regard to the home renovation tax credit, it's trying to get a sense of how many people know about it beforehand and then trying to get a sense of how many people know about it afterwards. It's the same thing when we run advertising for a particular campaign around emergency preparedness, for example. How many Canadians would know what they should prepare for or stock in the case of an emergency? We then run some tests afterwards to get a sense of whether or not the advertising was effective, or whether or not there has been take-up of a 1-800 number, a service, or a specific program or initiative.

Any advertising campaign, I believe it's over \$400,000 or \$1 million—

• (1710)

The Chair: Can you wrap up, please? I have a few members who really want to ask questions.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Over a certain dollar amount, there is a requirement to do polling before and after.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Foote, you have five minutes.

Ms. Judy Foote: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to pick up on what Ms. d'Auray was just talking about.

I'm wondering if it's possible for you to table the objectives of the economic action plan and the polling data that you just referenced as well, for the benefit of the committee.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: I believe that is possible. We'll have to compile the material because it's not a single document. There's a number of studies in different departments. We can get back to the committee with that.

Ms. Judy Foote: Thank you.

The Chair: Would two weeks suffice?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: For the research that has been done, I think that sounds fine.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Judy Foote: I want to get back to the economic action plan. There's a figure that's been thrown out there that to date \$34 million has been spent on the plan.

Is that a realistic figure? Is that what's been spent to date, to the best of your knowledge?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: We could certainly get back to the committee. I have a piece of paper; unfortunately it's only in one official language at the moment. But this is the breakdown: finance spending on the economic action plan—this was for two phases of work in June and September-October of this year—\$12 million; CRA, for the home renovation tax credit, \$7 million; infrastructure, for one campaign in September and October, \$8 million; and there are plans under way that will be coming out soon for HRSDC for work-sharing and so on, for \$7 million.

That's a total of \$34 million. It's \$34 million and so many cents, but that's a pretty firm number in terms of advertising. It's \$34 million, with that breakdown.

Ms. Judy Foote: Do you anticipate spending more?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: My colleague has noted as well, just for clarity, that signage is in departmental budgets, but for the advertising proper—television, radio, and so on—that's \$34 million. There will be some additional spending this year. I believe it's in the order—

Ms. Judy Foote: I'm sorry, but take me back to the \$34 million. Does that include the cost of the signage as well?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: No. This is just for advertising, not signage. Signage would be in departmental program budgets.

Mr. Wayne Wouters: That would be over and above that.

Ms. Judy Foote: Do you have the figure for that?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Not for signage, ma'am, no.

Ms. Judy Foote: Can you get that for us?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: That would take a fair amount of time.

I think we can provide the information on the advertising within two weeks. With regard to the signage, that really is within each departmental budget. It is also dependent, if I may, on the number of initiatives and activities. It would be an iterative "constant-evolution" number, if I can put it that way.

So I think where we could do it is on the advertising; and I think it would be a....

Mr. Wayne Wouters: I think it would be a massive undertaking, Madam Chair.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Wouters: The reason is that normally what happens here is that if it's under departmental budgets, so the funding is allocated to the departments, the departments will then allocate that down to program functions—

Ms. Judy Foote: I'm sorry, and I appreciate what you're saying, but I—

Mr. Wayne Wouters: It would be out in the regions. The regional manager in the west would have responsibility, when he's managing a project, to put up the sign, so it would be very difficult to pull that information.

Ms. Judy Foote: I guess it goes back to accountability and transparency and wanting to get a handle on just how much money is being spent, whether it's on signage or some other element of the economic action plan. Certainly someone has a handle on how much money is being spent on signage.

• (1715)

Mr. Wayne Wouters: Madam Chair, we have a handle on how much is being spent on the economic action plan on each of the programs in the economic action plan. That's the oversight control function, that so much money has been approved for this particular project. Within that project budget will be a number of operating costs related to the project, including signage. Therefore, in order to get that estimate for each program, each area, we'd have to go back to all the departments, into the system.

It can be done, but it's a huge exercise.

The Chair: A short question, Ms. Foote; I'm a little curious about that, so go ahead.

Ms. Judy Foote: The next question, then, is do you anticipate spending more money on the economic action plan? We talked about the \$34 million, plus the money that's being spent for signage.

Is there somewhere in your strategy or your plan a dollar figure that you have for rolling out the economic action plan?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Madam Chair, there's no specific overall dollar figure.

There are two things here. One is with regard to additional spending. There is a plan to do some additional spending on advertising this fiscal year. I don't have the specific amount available. It's relatively small in terms of the overall spend.

In terms of the way in which the advertising has been done, essentially what was done this year.... The typical advertising budget for the government would be spread across five or six departments. This year basically all of the advertising campaigns of the relevant departments have been branded under the economic action plan, because all of the measures being undertaken by departments by and large are for the economic action plan.

So the actual advertising spending this year is really not out of line with historical norms. It's just that it's all being done under the rubric of the economic action plan as opposed to separate campaigns for different initiatives.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have to end with a question from Mr. Anders.

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): You're going to love it. I know you will.

Thank you.

I heard some, I think, interesting statements from my Liberal colleague across the way, Ms. Martha Hall Findlay. She talked about, for example, posing with cheques and whether or not that type of thing can confer any benefit for an entity other than the government, in this case the federal government. I think it's an interesting question.

When I look at this photo...and I know that it's slightly pixilated, and I know that you're doing it from a distance, but I hope that people can help me with regard to this. Committee members may be able to help later on in terms of determining what's going on here.

In the photo there's a young lady. I can't make out who she is because I don't think I've seen her around the committee or the environs of Parliament Hill very much. There's a fellow in the background with a beard, playing a bagpipe, and I don't know who he is. But a couple of these other characters here, I think I've seen, and I think maybe committee members might have seen as well. And, for all I know, our witnesses may be able to help me.

The fellow who seems to be holding a cheque here, I think I've seen him quite a bit, as a matter of fact. I think he's probably a member of Parliament. If I look very closely I think he's actually the former chair of this committee, a Mr. Derek Lee, with the Liberal Party of Canada.

If I look next to him, I see another gentleman who looks familiar too. I don't think I've seen him on the committee, but it appears to be John Cannis, who's also a Liberal member of Parliament.

Then just here, on the very edge of the photograph, if I look closely, I would bet money that this is John McKay, who's also a Liberal member of Parliament.

I notice we have one, two, three Liberal members of Parliament in this particular photograph and they're all clapping and looking rather happy about handing out of this particular cheque. Now some might say that because they're all Liberals and they're handing out a cheque, that would confer a benefit on the Liberal Party of Canada.

I wonder, when Ms. Hall Findlay says something like that, whether or not she would agree that three Liberal members of Parliament holding a cheque is conferring a benefit on the Liberal Party of Canada as a cheque-giver.

I wonder if our witnesses have any thoughts on that.

Mr. Wayne Wouters: No, not really.

• (1720)

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: No.

Mr. Rob Anders: Let me put it this way to my witnesses here. I would think that, given the fact that these members across the way like to take photographs of members handing out cheques and circulate them, for them to ask questions about other people who take pictures with cheques seems a little bit misplaced. It seems to me as though they're going after something they do themselves—

The Chair: On a point of order, Ms. Hall Findlay, go ahead.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: My point of order, Madam Chair, relates to comments that we made. Unless there's a political party logo on that cheque, it doesn't relate at all to anything that I have said today or in the specific complaints that we have made.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay, Mr. Anders—

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Apparently my honourable colleague has completely missed the point of the challenge that we're facing with Conservative Party logos and branding in government advertising. It's quite a different thing.

Mr. Rob Anders: I'm sure—

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Anders, finish your question, please.

Mr. Rob Anders: Of course I will.

I think it would behoove us all to do a close up on that cheque to see whether or not any of those Liberal Party members' names appear or if there happens to be a red "L", but I think the point is fairly moot.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Hall Findlay, we'll have a short question from you, because Mr. Holder wants to ask a short question.

I will enforce time. I will actually cut you off and ask that the microphone be cut off.

Go ahead.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I shall ask for a quick response, because I have a notice of motion that I'd like to present as part of my question. But I'll make just one quick comment.

In the presentation, Mr. Wouters, you talked about part of the responsibility being to inform Canadians using the project map website. I will reiterate that we are wholly supportive of that. I am disturbed by the comments that it is so understaffed and under-budgeted, because we really would love to see information the way the United States is giving information to its population, about projects actually being funded, not just announced, jobs being created other than jobs for sign-makers.

In the U.S., the recovery.gov website has an incredible amount of detailed information, not just announcements, not just commitments. I wholly support this.

My question, though, relates to the billboards and the expected continuing expenditures. From the piece this morning, we understand that the government has already installed close to 2,500 billboards and that another 4,000 have been ordered. Three weeks ago on a television panel, I had an exchange with a member of the Conservative government and raised the point that we understood billboards were being planned. He said there was no such plan; that there was no plan to put up billboards advertising the economic action plan.

Clearly that's not correct. Clearly there is a billboard campaign. Can somebody please confirm that it is in fact correct that, in addition to 2,500, another 4,000 have been ordered, and give some idea of the cost of the anticipated continuing rollout of billboard advertising?

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Madam Chair, the question on cost has already been answered in terms of how it could be compiled. But I can confirm that the number of expected signs would be roughly comparable to the number of projects on the website, which is around 6,500 to 7,000.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: These are billboards. These are not signs associated with projects. These are billboards across the country.

Mr. Simon Kennedy: I'm not aware of any plan that would have that many billboards installed.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: It's from *Le Devoir* this morning that 2,500 have already been done and another 4,000 ordered.

Mr. Wayne Wouters: Maybe they misinterpreted signs for billboards. We have signs.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon Kennedy: Madam Chair, I can leave the committee our signage guide, which clearly states when it is necessary to have a billboard and when a small sign is required.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: If it's signs for projects, I understand. It was for a communication, so that's true. However, we didn't anticipate—

Mr. Simon Kennedy: —having such a large number of billboards, no, not at all.

[*English*]

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: *Merci beaucoup.* Thank you very much for that.

Let me put a notice of motion to the committee. We had the Minister of Transport the other day confirm that he had given to the Parliamentary Budget Officer 4,500-plus pages of documents.

Shall I just quickly read the motion?

The Chair: Sure.

Yes, she has the time.

Quickly, please.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: We have copies for everybody.

It is: That Infrastructure Canada be ordered to provide in electronic format to the clerk of the committee no later than November 9, 2009, a copy of all documents that were provided to the Parliamentary Budget Officer on Thursday, October 29,

2009, for the conduct of his financial analysis with regard to the implementation of the Economic Action Plan.

Mr. Ed Holder: A point of order, Madam Chair.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: It was referred to in committee, so this is a notice of motion that we're putting forward.

• (1725)

Mr. Ed Holder: That's not my point of order.

The Chair: It's just a notice of motion; we don't need to do anything. We'll distribute it, and then—

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: It's just a notice.

The Chair: Yes.

We have a question.

Mr. Holder.

Mr. Ed Holder: No, it's a point of order. Thank you.

We were very clear about three minutes. By my watch, Madam Hall Findlay was speaking for clearly more than three minutes. I'm wondering how assiduously...because you're usually extremely good at this. It just felt as though it was way over.

The Chair: You're taking your time, actually.

Mr. Ed Holder: No, I'm not, actually; this is a point of order.

It seemed to me that the unfairness of this is that if Madam Hall Findlay was going to do it within the prescribed timeframe, I respect that, but you didn't rule it done at three minutes, and I'm curious as to why.

The Chair: Mr. Holder, from now on I'm going to cut off even witnesses, because I've allowed eight minutes, five minutes.... I have been lenient, because I feel it's important for you guys to put this to bed.

She had her motion. She didn't have to read it; she just had to present it, and that would have been it. Then Mr. Warkentin walked over here and that got Ms. Hall Findlay talking, so I couldn't even shut her up there.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: So here we go. You have three minutes. For sure, that's it.

Mr. Ed Holder: I dare say I would never shut up Ms. Hall Findlay. She says such thoughtful things.

The Chair: I didn't mean it in a derogatory manner, but if you disturb the chair she has to pay attention somewhere else.

Go ahead.

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you very much.

I had the opportunity recently to do an interview on CFRB 1010 radio on the issue of prop cheques, which I have heard discussed already. It was rather interesting, because I was certainly proud to make a presentation to my community with my colleagues from various levels of government. Let me tell you how we did it in London, Ontario.

On the prop cheque we had the logos of the federal government; the Government of Ontario; and London, Ontario, the tenth-largest city in Canada. We had three representative signatures on that cheque from me, a Liberal MPP, and the deputy mayor of London. We may be unique, but we have a New Democratic Party member and a Liberal member in our city, so those two federal members were pleased to join me with the cheque and present it, along with several members of provincial government and council. We were delighted to do that. I was there on my behalf, not representing a minister.

Was there anything in my conduct or that of the Liberal or NDP member that would suggest anything was inappropriately done?

Mr. Wayne Wouters: We'll have to give you the boring response again on how the communication policy works or does not work. We apologize.

Michelle.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: You mentioned the famous words that you were "not acting on behalf of".

Mr. Ed Holder: That's correct.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Therefore, none of the policy requirements would apply.

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for being here....

Is there a point of order?

Mr. Pat Martin: Just before you conclude, I asked that some of those door hangers be tabled. I want to be sure we get those in the next day or two.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to thank the witnesses. The committee has been studying the stimulus package, because everybody understands that the job of the government operations and estimates committee is to ensure good, effective, and efficient utilization of government dollars. So in terms of the stimulus package, the communications package, we need to understand whether there is a return on investment.

I have been listening to your response, and I am a little concerned that you could not give us the dollar value of the signage when you stated specifically that in your analysis you do get those signage dollars.

So please get that over to us, and tell us how much of the stimulus package of \$3 billion was rapidly deployed. We will send you those questions.

I think a question was asked by the Conservative on the return on investment of that \$45 million to \$50 million that has been spent.

With that, I'd like to give them 30 seconds to finish....

• (1730)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I don't think there was consensus around the table on that, after they dialogued with us that finding the cost of the signage across the country would be next to impossible. I don't think we as a committee asked for that.

The Chair: Madam Foote did. If you check the blues later, I'm sorry, you will see that she did ask. As a committee member, she's allowed to get it, and we will want it from the bureaucrats.

If you don't mind, I'd to give them the courtesy of wrapping up.

Thank you.

Mr. Wouters is next and then Madam d'Auray.

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: On the question about the signage, if you want us to produce that information it will take us a couple of months to pull that together. My colleague indicated that it is across departments and organizations. This is a rolling issue. This is not something that we can produce tomorrow morning at the click of a button.

The Chair: Fair enough.

Mr. Wayne Wouters: I guess the only thing I would add is that we are often criticized here by this committee, and when I was at the public accounts committee, about the amount of reporting we ask our departments to do. You are now asking them to pull together—which is going to be very difficult—a set of information for which they're going to have to go back, right down through to their own offices across the country, to get this information.

The Chair: Okay. Then can we come to an understanding—

Mr. Wayne Wouters: If this is what the committee wants, we will comply. We just want to make sure the committee is well aware that you are asking public servants who are, I think, very busy, hopefully, implementing the economic action plan, to undertake this additional piece of work.

The Chair: So could I ask a favour, then? I understand that committee members do not understand why you couldn't produce it. Would you give us a little brief background...not here, but probably you could write to us and say this is not possible—

Mr. Wayne Wouters: Everything's possible.

The Chair: —because it would involve so much work. And we're happy to oblige.

Okay?

Ms. Michelle d'Auray: Okay. All right.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for being here.

The meeting is adjourned.

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