



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

ENVI • NUMBER 002 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, March 16, 2010

—
Chair

Mr. James Bezan

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Tuesday, March 16, 2010

• (1605)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC)): We'll call this meeting to order.

We're lucky to have Minister of Environment Jim Prentice joining us today for the consideration of supplementary estimates (C) as well as the main estimates, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4) and Standing Order 81(5).

I welcome the minister to the table.

I know that your time with us is short and you're committed at 5 o'clock, so I will turn it over to you for your opening comments.

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your invitation to speak to the committee.

I have with me today Mr. Ian Shugart, the deputy minister of Environment Canada, Alan Latourelle, who is the chief executive officer of Parks Canada, and Peter Sylvester of CEAA.

Mr. Chairman, 2010-11 will be a year in which we hope to emerge fully from the economic recession, wind down the stimulus program that has seen us come through this much better than many of our trading partners, and look ahead towards balancing our books once more.

With regard to the environment portfolio, we have come through the tough economic times with solid progress on several key environmental priorities.

Environment Canada's 2010-11 main estimates reference level will total \$1.1 billion. While this gives a snapshot of the annual planned spending for the department, these main estimates, if approved by Parliament, outline more planned spending at the beginning of the year for my department than any main estimates in recent years. I will get into more detail in a minute.

The estimates for Parks Canada for 2010-11 total \$805 million, a net increase of \$185.7 million over the 2009-10 main estimates. The majority of the net increase relates to improvements and upgrades to national historic sites and visitor facilities, twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway through Banff National Park, and for federal contaminated sites. I think it's fair to say that the investments made in our national parks system over the last several years are historic in size.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, this year and next, Parks Canada will invite Canadians from across the country and visitors around the world to "Come Celebrate", come celebrate 125 years since the creation of Canada's first national park, come celebrate the centenary of the world's first national park service.

[English]

For the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, the 2010-11 main estimates are \$29 million, which is a reduction of \$3 million from last year. It's related mostly to the agency's temporary funding to cover shortfalls in resources needed to support panel reviews prior to 2010-11. These resources were earmarked for sunset in 2010-11. I would, however, note that the funding for aboriginal consultations announced in Budget 2010 significantly closes this gap.

However, not reflected in the main estimates are a number of Budget 2010 items that are typically reflected in supplementary estimates or through the budget implementation bill.

The budget includes more than \$190 million for a number of departments and agencies in new measures to support a cleaner and more sustainable environment and to help meet Canada's climate change objectives. This includes a range of investments, from the next generation renewable power initiative in the forestry sector, to a new permanent commitment of resources to the Great Lakes, which we will discuss in a moment.

Let me highlight some of our portfolio's activities, beginning with the Great Lakes initiative.

[Translation]

Last year, Canada and the United States celebrated the centennial of the Boundary Waters Treaty between Canada and the United States—a visionary treaty for its day, which has led to the creation of the International Joint Commission and the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. I am very pleased that the governments of Canada and the United States are negotiating to strengthen the agreement.

[English]

In the meantime, the Government of Canada is taking decisive action to protect the water quality of the largest group of freshwater lakes on the planet. In fact, Budget 2010 includes \$8 million per year, ongoing, to continue to implement the Great Lakes action plan.

With this commitment, current Environment Canada funding to address issues in the Great Lakes is now in excess of \$28 million per year. This includes government spending of \$48.9 million between 2008 and 2016 to accelerate the remediation of specific areas of concern in the Great Lakes region, as well as \$30 million over five years to promote the cleanup of Lake Simcoe, which is part of the Great Lakes basin.

This funding is supplemented by an additional \$22 million annually from other government departments, bringing the total that this government invests on an annual basis in the health of the Great Lakes to \$50 million per year.

I would also remind the committee that federal infrastructure programs also contribute to the government's efforts in cleaning up the Great Lakes. Since 2007, the government has spent or committed to over \$325 million for the Great Lakes on infrastructure programs that benefit the environment—most particularly, improving municipal waste water infrastructure.

•(1610)

[*Translation*]

Perhaps nowhere does the Government of Canada's infrastructure investment make more of a difference to the lives of Canadians today and for generations to come than the funds invested to improve the management of municipal waste water. In 2010, it is unacceptable that some municipalities continue to dump waste water into our rivers, lakes and shorelines. This government has taken decisive action—both in creating the standards and regulations that will mean cleaner rivers, lakes and shorelines, and in helping municipalities meet those standards.

[*English*]

It has taken years of hard work, but my provincial and territorial colleagues and I have developed a Canada-wide strategy for the management of municipal waste water effluent. New draft regulations have been developed. They will be gazetted on Saturday, March 20.

I'm happy to report that under the Government of Canada infrastructure funds, including the Building Canada fund, green infrastructure fund, stimulus, and gas tax funds, over \$3.25 billion has been spent or committed already for waste water and water infrastructure. That represents the federal contribution.

In fact, such projects are a top priority for these funds. Take the city of Hamilton, for example. Just this past weekend, on March 12, the Government of Canada committed \$100 million through the economic action plan to upgrade a water treatment plant. Our investment levered support from the city and from the province. The end result is a \$456 million investment that will protect water, remediate the harbour, ensure the city's sustainable growth, achieve the objectives of our municipal waste water treatment guidelines, and also significantly improve the health of the Great Lakes.

Mr. Chairman, the era of dumping raw sewage into our rivers, lakes, and coastal areas is coming to an end in Canada. We have a Canada-wide strategy on municipal waste water, and we are helping communities across Canada meet these new standards.

Let me turn briefly to some of the highlights from Parks Canada. The United Nations has declared 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity. Canada has made a major contribution by setting aside wilderness and water for the benefit of future generations. In fact, in the past few years, we have made remarkable strides. It took 121 years for Canada to set aside essentially 277,000 square kilometres of our nation as a system of national parks and national marine conservation areas.

Since 2006—since this government came to office—we have added an additional 45,500 square kilometres to the system and have taken actions that will result in a further expansion of 40,000 square kilometres. In total, since this government came to office, we have increased the size of the land set aside in this country for such purposes by 30%.

In addition, the Government of Canada has invested \$275 million to improve the science, recovery, and overall implementation of the Species at Risk Act. Since 2000, more than 1,600 projects have been delivered under the habitat stewardship program to protect and to assist the recovery of species at risk. As an illustration, Parks Canada recently reintroduced the black-footed ferret to Canada after it had disappeared almost 30 years ago.

As I come to a close, these are a few of the highlights of a very broad and far-reaching portfolio. We will meet the changing needs and priorities of Canadians for weather forecasting. We must respond as well to new developments in the environment, changing technologies, and increasing public demand.

Budget 2010 includes \$8 million over two years to support community-based environmental monitoring, reporting, and the collection of baseline data in the north. Another \$18 million over two years will support the annual reporting of key environmental indicators, such as clean air, clean water, and greenhouse gas emissions.

•(1615)

[*Translation*]

We will also continue to ensure that chemicals that may pose risks to human health and the environment are managed safely through the Chemicals Management Plan.

We want to accelerate the pace of risk assessment and risk management to address the substances that have not yet been assessed under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

[*English*]

When it comes to this government's stated intent to reduce the amount of red tape and bureaucracy that now encumbers the approval for large-scale resource energy projects, let us be crystal clear: we are not talking about any weakening of the environmental review process, especially when it comes to the oil sands.

[Translation]

We aim to improve the efficiency of the existing system in order to attract investment and encourage the creation of high-quality jobs. We will reduce duplication, not the stringency of our high standards.

[English]

In closing, the environment portfolio manages some of the issues that affect Canadians most directly in their daily lives, such as weather forecasting, and it includes some of the issues that will affect their lives for generations to come, including climate change and protecting biodiversity.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I welcome the opportunity to be with the committee, and I welcome your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate your respecting our timeline as well. You're well under our 15-minute timeline for ministers.

I'm going to be very judicious in allocating rounds. The first round is seven minutes to all parties, and then we'll try to get as far into the second round of questioning of five-minute rounds.

Mr. McGuinty, you have the floor.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks, Mr. Minister, for being here. I want to pick up with you on a question I raised yesterday in the House of Commons with your colleague, the President of the Treasury Board. In my view, and in our view as the official opposition, it has a direct bearing on both the main estimates and the supplementary estimates (C) that we're discussing here today, particularly supplementary estimates (C), which are due back next week in the House of Commons.

I asked the President of the Treasury Board yesterday if he could explain to Canadians how much is being spent by your government on its national advertising campaign. I put to him yesterday that the estimates are now somewhere between \$200 million and \$250 million, which media and advertising experts have confirmed is the largest single media buy from the private or public sector in Canadian history.

In my riding of Ottawa South, I'm not convinced that my constituents have to see a bonanza of advertising on the six o'clock or eleven o'clock news, or for that matter roughly every nine minutes during the entire Olympics. Whether it's on the Internet or TV or radio or print, Canadians are being bombarded with what is now arguably—approximately, according to experts in the media—a quarter of a billion dollars of advertising.

As the minister responsible for the Department of the Environment, which needs more and more support all the time, does this square with you? As a member of a cabinet that's approved this advertising, number one, does it square with you? Number two, can you help Canadians who are watching understand how much of this money has been spent, for example, on climate change and climate change measures in order to prepare this country for the climate change crisis that lies ahead?

The Chair: Minister Prentice, Mr. McGuinty's question is not actually relevant to the discussion, which is on the departmental

expenditures, supplementary estimates (C), and the main estimates that relate to the Department of the Environment. Advertising falls under Public Works.

If you want to ask those questions to the Minister of Public Works or the President of the Treasury Board, that is another discussion.

I'll leave it up to the minister as to whether he wants to respond to that question.

Mr. David McGuinty: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, the minister oversees Parks Canada's massive advertising budget. It's part of his supplementary estimates (C) and main estimates expenditures.

Parks Canada is running ads now, and it has been throughout the Olympics as well. I don't want to get into the Parks Canada ads—that's not my question.

• (1620)

The Chair: But that's what he's responsible for; it would be constrained to that area.

Mr. David McGuinty: No. I want to ask the minister in his capacity as Minister of the Environment, how much is Public Works...? How much is being spent by the Government of Canada on advertising for climate change initiatives, for example? It's about a quarter of a billion dollars. The President of the Treasury Board refused yesterday to give us a clear number, but our estimates are about \$250 million. We'd like to know, and Canadians would like to know. They're seeing these ads on every newscast.

The Chair: Minister Prentice.

Hon. Jim Prentice: I'm pleased to respond.

First, I'm here to explain the estimates and the supplementary estimates with respect to my portfolio. I'm quite pleased to speak to that.

You will find within the material before you \$360,000 of Environment Canada advertising expenditures. You will find the details of the Parks Canada advertising campaign, and the total campaign over a number of years has been between \$3 million and \$6 million. The purpose of that campaign has been to expand utilization of the national parks system, because we've seen a significant drop in attendance in our national parks system. I'm pleased to provide those numbers to you and respond to that. I'm not here to deal with the broader issues that you raise. There are other forums, as you know, where they should be raised.

You do, however, mention the Copenhagen Accord and climate change, and I think it's important to take stock of where we are there. The last time I was before the committee we were embarking towards Copenhagen. I'm pleased to advise the committee that at Copenhagen we were able to achieve an agreement in principle that I think represents a turning point in how the world will deal with climate change. This is something that our government has advocated for many years, and we're very pleased with the outcome.

It provides a binding agreement for the post-2012 period. I mentioned in the House of Commons today that as of today, 110 nations have come forward and associated themselves formally with the accord. This includes all of the major emitters, including the United States, China, India, and others. This was something we set out to achieve, and we spoke about it the last time I attended before the committee.

Mr. David McGuinty: Minister, you know what it's like in opposition. You have seven minutes to ask a question. I didn't ask you about climate change; I asked you about advertising. That's fair enough if you say you have no answer—that's okay. Canadians will draw their own conclusions. But I have another question for you.

Hon. Jim Prentice: Actually I did not say I didn't have an answer. I provided you with the details of advertising within my portfolio and said I was pleased to respond to questions.

Mr. David McGuinty: As a member of cabinet you're not in a position to speak about the quarter-billion-dollar advertising campaign, and that's okay. Let's go on to theme number two.

Yesterday I asked you in the House of Commons about your approach to science and the communication of science. We learned that your scientists in Environment Canada cannot take direct calls from the media. We learned that they have to report any direct calls to your communications director. We learned that if they participate in a panel where media is suspected of being present—I think even if they are attending a conference—they must advise the communications officer of your department, if not your own office. If they are permitted to speak to the media, they must get approval for what they will say before they say it.

Your answer to that question yesterday was that it's not just the policy of Environment Canada; it's the policy of the entire Government of Canada in every department, to which I reply, "Censorship is censorship is censorship". So not only are Environment Canada scientists being censored; you're saying that every scientist in the federal government across all line departments are being censored in this way. It's never happened before at the federal level, and rudimentary checking of the provinces has revealed that no province in the country has these standards to this regulation, which you brought in, in 2008.

Hon. Jim Prentice: May I respond, Mr. Chair?

Mr. David McGuinty: Just yesterday your own department wrote another report that said there has been an 80% decline in media coverage around climate change. That's in large part because four of your senior scientists have been muzzled.

The Chair: Your time has expired.

Mr. David McGuinty: I'd like to get your response to that for Canadians who are watching.

The Chair: Mr. Prentice, I ask that you make a very brief response. I have to respect the wishes of the members here that they all get equal time and not be dominated by one member.

Mr. Prentice.

Hon. Jim Prentice: The response is very clear. We have scientists who work at Environment Canada as employees of Environment Canada. We value their work. I value science, research, and

empiricism wherever we find it. It's especially important at Environment Canada.

Since I have been the minister at Environment Canada I have not received any complaints from our scientists that they feel hampered. So let's be perfectly clear about that. The rules that apply to any employee of the Government of Canada, quite apart from what their educational background is, are the same across the government. There is nothing different at Environment Canada in any respect relative to the employees of Environment Canada.

We value their efforts at science. We base our decisions as a regulatory agency at Environment Canada on the empiricism and the fine work they do. They're valued employees as such. The questions you raised relate back to 2007, 2008, and some counting of media interviews back at that time. They're not germane to the issues currently.

•(1625)

The Chair: Mr. Bigras, you have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. Minister, and welcome to the committee. I am going to pick up where my colleague, Mr. McGuinty left off.

We were indeed a little surprised to see that scientists at Environment Canada were muzzled and to read that your communications policy actually included a good scientist's guide.

But I was even more surprised yesterday when scientists sent me a note that appears not only on your parliamentary site, but also on your intranet. The communications policy includes an appendix entitled Environment Canada Standard for Scientific and Technical Publications, a guide for authors.

After the guide on media relations, there is now a good scientist's guide. That is quite something, what you are telling us.

On page 4 of the French version of this document, where it talks about the document approval process, it says that authors must ask themselves the following five questions, which are listed in the approval process for scientific documents.

The first question asks, "Who is the intended audience?" The second asks, "Is it a formal or complementary publication?" The fourth asks, "Is the publication significant and relevant to key policies, priorities or regulations of the government?"

After the communications guide, there is now a good scientist's guide. Is that not direct interference with scientific content? Is your department not attempting to control scientific research and content? Do you think that is acceptable? Do you see it as a good measure, something that represents the principles of scientific independence?

Hon. Jim Prentice: I will explain in English.

[English]

The principles of good science involve empiricism. They involve the integrity of research that is carried out by scientists, the accuracy of the information they produce, the basis upon which they reach their conclusions, their methodology, and the way in which they report. We value science. It is carried out on that basis.

You're referring to a document that deals with advice on media communications, which is a separate issue from the way in which science is conducted. You're referring to a guide that simply asks what I would suggest to you are fairly germane questions.

If a person, whether a scientist, a businessperson, or any other professional, is going to sit down with the media, those are questions that would be germane. No one is suggesting that in any way there is limitation on the scientific research, the way in which the methodology is determined, what the conclusions are, or how they're reported.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Why put out a guide? Is it because the minister does not trust Environment Canada's scientists? Is it because the minister does not trust science?

Let's talk about the strategy for sustainable development. The minister did not tell us about his sustainable development strategy. It was presented to us late, just last week. What did we see in the strategy? First, we saw that the government and the minister reduced GHG targets as compared with those set in Copenhagen. Then, they cut funding to scientists. Later, they decided to muzzle them. Finally, they will announce a program review.

In short, we are not dealing with a strategy for sustainable development, but an environmental tragedy. Isn't this government's problem the fact that it does not believe the science? That is why it is cutting the foundation's funding, muzzling scientists and giving them guides for defining the scope of their research.

● (1630)

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice: Mr. Chair, nothing could be further from the truth. My friend rolls a number of accusations into what purports to be a question.

First, with respect to the climate change foundation of which he speaks, this is a foundation that was established in 2000. It has been provided with \$110 million of public money to carry out research. It is not the only vehicle through which the Government of Canada carries out environment research or climate change research.

I would remind my friend that on March 22, 2001, he voted against the creation of the foundation and its funding. I don't know how it lies in his mouth today to call into question its continuation. He voted against it. My point is that this foundation has had ten years. It's carried out important work, which we value. It is time to take stock of what has been accomplished, to assess the results of the research, to determine over the course of the next year what additional research needs to be done, and to hear from them.

That's not to say that the government does not have many other initiatives under way, which are extremely important to climate

change. I would point out for the benefit of the members that there are meteorological and navigational investments referred to in the budget, which will allow Environment Canada to do work in northern Canada that has never previously been done. The Minister of Industry has also made reference to the significant support for the RADARSAT constellation satellites, which will, frankly, put Canada in the foremost position in the world in terms of capacity to do climate change research, meteorological research, and research relating to ice conditions in the north. These are scientific investments. They're not being funded through the foundation. They're being funded through the appropriate agencies, such as the Canadian Space Agency.

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I am trying to get some sense of the minister's logic when it comes to research. On one hand, there is funding for carbon capture and storage research. On the other, there is no funding for the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences.

Does that not show that, at the end of the day, the government is in fact limiting its research to funding the oil industry, not researchers, who are there to do climate change modelling?

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice: Nothing could be further from the truth. The \$1 billion fund relating to green technology investments, including carbon capture and storage, which was set up in the 2009 budget, is not a research investment. These are demonstration projects investments. I would say to my friend, if he's someone who is passionate about climate change, that they're extremely important, because the only known technology to abate carbon emissions from thermal coal plants is carbon capture and storage. It is the only technology that has ever been discovered that can actually abate emissions.

It's of obvious importance, because the world is going to build 2,000 new coal-burning plants in the next 20 years. Canada is making signature investments in that technology. We will lead the world in that technology, and I submit to you that's a shrewd thing to do.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Bigras, tu as fini.

Ms. Duncan, the floor is yours.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's nice to see you, Mr. Prentice.

I find myself quite frustrated in the questions to put to you. While you are the minister considered to be responsible for climate change and you are the signator for a number of agreements, including the U.S.-Canada clean energy dialogue, one does not find anything in your budget related to that.

If one looks extremely closely at it with a magnifying glass, one might be able to find it in Natural Resources. Nonetheless, I'm going to ask you some questions and I'm hoping you can answer to the best of your ability. Time after time, when questions are put to you, you speak about some of these technologies, which you're proud the government is financing. Among those is carbon capture sequestration. Almost half of your government's five-year, \$1 billion clean energy fund has already been allocated to three carbon sequestration projects, as far as I can tell from the budget document you've tabled. Those moneys have been gifted to one coal-fired power company in Alberta and two oil companies.

Coal-fired power remains the largest source of greenhouse gases emitted in Alberta, as far as I've looked at the figures.

Last year, Michael Martin provided the committee with Canada's climate change strategy, tabled presumably at the Copenhagen negotiations. That strategy reported that Canada is phasing out its coal-fired power industry. If that is the case, why the massive subsidy in the form of almost \$1 billion for CCS? If it is not being phased out, could you also speak to the issue of how much additional money the government is planning to expend this year from that fund? More than half of it is already gone, and it's supposed to be for five years. One of the facilities—coal-fired power is being expanded in Alberta, as we sit here; two new facilities are about to be commissioned. One of those undertook that they would be commissioned on the condition that they would operate equivalent to a natural gas combined cycle, therefore substantially reducing greenhouse gases. They have now filed an application to the Government of Alberta to renege on that, seeking to amend their licence and no longer reduce to that level.

Are we putting money for naught? Why are we subsidizing the dirtiest source of electricity in Canada if it is being phased out, according to your officials?

• (1635)

Hon. Jim Prentice: You raise an important issue, and that's the subject of coal emissions, which you and I have spoken about often before. I know you are passionate about this subject.

I think it's important contextually to start by noting that 41% of the carbon in our atmosphere today came from burning coal. Coal is the greatest source of carbon emissions and the buildup of greenhouse gases. The importance of carbon capture and storage—as I said earlier, and not to reiterate—is that the world continues to burn coal. Canada doesn't, on a relative basis—and I'll come to this—but the rest of the world does. Over 2,000 plants are slated to be constructed in the next 25 years, all of them emitting carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The only technology we know of to abate those emissions is carbon capture and storage.

I'm proud as a Canadian that between the \$1 billion in the fund that you refer to, set up by the Government of Canada, close to \$2 billion set aside by the Government of Alberta, and another \$1 billion set aside by the Government of Saskatchewan, we're actually leading the world in terms of investments to try to find a technology that works to reduce those emissions.

Canada burns very little coal; 73% of our electricity system emits no carbon at all. We have only 21 coal-burning facilities in this country. By contrast, the United States has over 650 coal-burning

thermal plants at work today. Our plan, as Michael Martin said before Copenhagen, is to deal with those in a regulatory manner.

Ms. Linda Duncan: My question then, Mr. Minister, is when can we finally expect the greenhouse gas regulations, and why do we not see any line item in either of the estimates for the public review of those regulations?

Hon. Jim Prentice: We have adequate dollars set aside for the regulatory functions of the department, and you'll find those dollars set aside in the estimates.

There is no doubt that the Department of the Environment, as a regulator, has adequate resources set aside to do that. In terms of your question of where are the regulations, you will see the regulations imminently in terms of dealing with greenhouse gas emissions. You have heard previously that we are harmonizing with the United States.

All of the emissions from the transportation system, I can speak to. That will begin very shortly in terms of harmonized tailpipe emissions standards for passenger vehicles and light-duty trucks. We will go from there to heavy-duty trucks, and we have task forces at work with the United States on rail, shipping, and aviation emissions. You will begin to see the regulations almost immediately.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I'll take you at your word on that.

Let's go on to waste water. You've reported that under the action plan, the government has allocated \$3.25 billion towards supporting municipalities to implement those regulations. It has been estimated that the cost is more in the order of \$45 billion. I'm wondering if you can speak to how the municipalities are going to be able to comply with these regulations. Do you have a compliance strategy? Are you going to be charging the municipalities that don't upgrade? Is there a timeline? And do you have a specific budget set aside for Environment Canada to take action to protect source water, since aboriginals—first nations and Métis—are also going to have to comply? They really don't have the means and resources to move forward but will need their source water kept clean.

• (1640)

Hon. Jim Prentice: First, just to clarify the record, the \$3.25 billion I referred to is a combination of investments in water and waste water. The waste water component alone is \$1.75 billion, which has been either spent or committed, carrying through, as I recall, to 2014.

We begin, however, with regulations, and I would point out that waste water infrastructure, which by definition involves a decision on the part of the municipality to build such a system, is fully eligible for funding, whether you're talking about the green infrastructure fund, the gas tax fund, stimulus funds, or, formerly, the Building Canada fund. Waste water was an eligible expenditure under all those programs. And that's why you see that \$1.75 billion has been allocated. That is only the federal government's share, so you could make the assumption that it should be multiplied by three, because you need the provincial share and the municipality's share, in most cases.

That reflects the immediate investments being made. The waste water regulations—they have been published previously in draft—talk about a multi-year effort. We've taken all 4,000 waste water facilities in the country, and they've been prioritized into high risk, medium risk—

Ms. Linda Duncan: What is the deadline?

Hon. Jim Prentice: —and low risk, the intent being to focus more quickly on the high-risk situations. I would submit to you that the city of Victoria or the city of Montreal represent more pressing cases than a small community in Newfoundland—

Ms. Linda Duncan: Again, I would disagree.

Hon. Jim Prentice: —just because of the nature of the water courses we're speaking of and the populations. So it's necessary to prioritize these choices.

The Chair: Your time has expired. The last of the seven-minute rounds goes to Mr. Warawa, please.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Minister, thank you for being here. I'm sure that you're as surprised as the majority around this table that we have the Minister of the Environment here at the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. Yet the Liberals and the Bloc refuse to ask questions about the environment. Maybe they're happy with the good work the government is doing.

Minister, 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. I know that you, personally, are passionate about supporting biodiversity in Canada, so I'm going to ask what the government has done, what specific conservation actions the government has taken, since becoming the government.

Hon. Jim Prentice: Thank you very much.

This is, of course, the International Year of Biodiversity. This is an aspect of what is done at Environment Canada and Parks Canada that is extremely important. I think that is sometimes overlooked.

I made the point that in the course of the time this government has been in office, we will have expanded the footprint of Canada's national parks system by 30%, which is an enormous achievement. It reflects matters such as the expansion of the Nahanni National Park, where, in collaboration with the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Dehcho, we have expanded the park by 30,000 square kilometres. We didn't double or triple it or make it four or five times bigger; it is six times its original size.

In addition, there is work under way on other national parks. A month ago, we established the Mealy Mountains National Park. Not

much was said about it at the time in Canada. This is a park that is twice the size of Prince Edward Island. It is the largest national park in Canada east of Ontario. Setting this aside represents, really, a historic achievement of the Government of Newfoundland and our government. It's augmented, in fact, by an adjoining provincial park.

We have discussions ongoing with the Government of Nova Scotia relative to the setting aside of Sable Island, either as a wildlife habitat or, alternatively, as a national park. We have other parks initiatives in the north. Torngat Mountains National Park has been brought into the national parks system. We've set aside land on the eastern arm of Great Slave Lake. The Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve, adjoining the Nahanni, has been set aside.

These are all very significant achievements, Mr. Chairman. There have been six new wildlife areas established under the Northwest Territories protected areas strategy. We have set aside close to three million hectares of wetland and upland habitat under the North American waterfowl management plan. We have worked with Guujaaw of the Haida First Nation to essentially produce, in Gwaii Haanas, the world's first park, where everything is protected, from the top of the mountains down to the bottom of the continental shelf, through the creation of a national marine conservation area. We've created marine conservation areas in Lake Superior.

I could go on and on.

I would add that there has been a different approach brought forward. We have also worked with the Nature Conservancy of Canada. They have acquired and set aside, pursuant to funding provided by the government in a previous budget, 136,000 hectares of land.

All of this is important, because Canadians are passionate about our parks, our biodiversity, and the protection of land. Mr. Chair, I would point out that it also has real relevance to climate change. Not only are these lands biodiverse, but they are carbon sinks that are available on a scale, frankly, that no one else in the world is achieving as set-asides for that purpose.

• (1645)

Mr. Mark Warawa: I have about three minutes left.

Minister, you touched on what happened in Copenhagen and the resulting Copenhagen Accord. You led that delegation. I want to thank you for your efforts and for the strong leadership you provided.

The accord represents a package of outcomes that, when taken together, provide a significant step forward in the global fight against climate change. That package includes a clear recognition of the importance of limiting the average global temperature increase to below two degrees Celsius. It also includes a framework for developed and developing countries to establish international mitigation commitments. More than 100 countries—I think you said it is 110 now—including Canada, and all the major developed and developing economies, have now submitted their commitments for incorporation into the appendices of the accord. So it's been a great accomplishment. The outcomes you had set, we achieved. Again, congratulations on that.

Minister, what are the next steps in building on this historic agreement to see real action on climate change?

Hon. Jim Prentice: That is an excellent question.

I did reference some of this in the House as I encouraged our friends from the parties opposite to support the Copenhagen Accord and to support the progress that has been made, Mr. Chairman.

As of today, there are in fact 110 countries that have come forward and associated themselves formally with the accord. Of those, 41 are developed countries. This contrasts quite sharply with the Kyoto Protocol. Essentially all of the developed countries, including the United States, are now formal associates of the Copenhagen Accord.

In addition, there are 32 developed countries that have associated themselves with the accord and have submitted nationally appropriate mitigation actions. Those include Brazil, China, and India. In fact the historic nature of the Copenhagen Accord is to bring the major developing countries, along with many other nations, into the accord. In addition, another 36 or so developing countries have associated themselves with the accord with less formal undertakings.

To go from here, basically the accord represented an agreement in principle, a historic turning point. Over the course of 2010—and I would submit probably into 2011—the international community will be engaged in the process of converting the accord into a binding legal treaty. This will take time. It's a complicated document. In the case of Kyoto, as I recall, it took in excess of three years, so we shouldn't be surprised that it will take several years to actually turn this agreement into a full treaty.

Canada wishes to see that happen. We are at the table. I just returned from Washington a week or so ago. I met with the American negotiator, and we are working towards the next ministerial meetings, which will happen this spring, at which time we will take this to the next step.

The Chair: Thank you.

Time has expired. We're going to go on to our five-minute round.

Mr. Scarpaleggia, please kick us off.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Minister, you've spoken a lot about RADARSAT today and in question period. As you have probably read in the last couple of days, it appears that the Government of Alberta will be weakening its wetlands policy in order to accommodate the oil sands industry. You

probably also know that the mapping of wetlands in Alberta goes back to the year 2000. It's not a dynamic mapping. In other words, you can't really project trends and so on in a wetland area.

Up until your government took power, Ducks Unlimited was working with Environment Canada and the Canadian Space Agency to create a Canadian wetlands inventory. Yet funding from Environment Canada dried up for that project so that it never got beyond phase one.

You've spoken a lot about biodiversity and how much it means to the government, but in actual fact the government is putting the brakes on any effort to create a national wetlands inventory, which is extremely important if we want to preserve our wetlands. I think we're the country with the greatest area of wetlands in the world. So I'd like to know if you're planning to renew that funding in your budget so that the Canadian wetlands inventory can proceed.

My second question has to do with carbon capture and storage. There could be some implications of carbon capture and storage for saline aquifers. Is Environment Canada doing any research on that? Are Environment Canada scientists allowed to do research on that?

Third, you said in your statement—and it was in the budget—that you'll be investing \$8 million in Great Lakes cleanup, but the Obama administration is going to be spending almost \$500 million. What accounts for the difference?

Also, there's nothing in the budget that I can see about the St. Lawrence action plan. So is there going to be any investment in extending the St. Lawrence action plan, or are we just going to concentrate \$8 million on the Great Lakes?

• (1650)

Hon. Jim Prentice: Mr. Chairman, there are quite a few questions there. I'll do the best I can.

First, with respect to the carbon capture and storage demonstration projects, I'm not aware of any science that has been brought to my attention that calls into question the impact of those CCS projects on saline aquifers. I'm not aware of that.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: It was the Munk Centre. The Munk Centre did a seminar—

Hon. Jim Prentice: Just let me carry on.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: —a couple of months ago specifically on that topic.

Hon. Jim Prentice: If I might carry on...?

The Chair: Mr. Scarpaleggia, we always want to show the appropriate courtesy and fairness to the witnesses, so we'll let the minister finish.

Hon. Jim Prentice: All of the investments being made will be made with full regulatory approvals and all of the necessary environmental approvals accompanying them, Mr. Chairman, so those issues will be attended to.

With respect to Ducks Unlimited, certainly, this government has a very important relationship with Ducks Unlimited. I met their executive team a week or more ago and discussed these projects and others that we are working on with them. We have a very sound working relationship, as we do with the Nature Conservancy of Canada. I spoke at their annual general meeting about three weeks ago. We continue to inventory the wetlands we have, and particularly with the Nature Conservancy of Canada to work in southern Canada on protecting those wetlands and areas that are needed for biodiversity.

You raise the Great Lakes initiatives. I think it's important just to put some of this into context. On an annual basis, Environment Canada spends \$28 million per year on the various specific Great Lakes initiatives that we work on. In addition, another \$22 million per year is expended by other government departments, so the Government of Canada, on an annual basis, expends \$50 million, in addition to approximately \$4 million per year of alien species dollars that are allocated specifically to Great Lakes initiatives. That is \$54 million per year. You can compare that to what is being done in the United States if you wish, and you will find that on a per capita basis, Canada is spending more on science and those investments in the Great Lakes than is being spent in the United States of America. I challenge....

My friend Mr. McGuinty is shaking his head. He can do the math himself, but if the spending in the United States—

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: But what about the St. Lawrence, Minister?

Hon. Jim Prentice: —is \$475 million per year, and they're ten times our size, our expenditures of \$54 million per year would rate pretty favourably.

In addition, there is the question of infrastructure. I pointed out earlier that \$325 million has been expended for the period from 2007 to 2014 in improving the health of the Great Lakes. This is extremely important. I would add to that fact that this government is in the midst of negotiating with the United States on the modernization of the agreement that we have relative to the health of the Great Lakes.

• (1655)

The Chair: Mr. Scarpaleggia's time has expired, Mr. Minister, but he did ask you about the St. Lawrence. Do you have anything on the action plan, just briefly?

Hon. Jim Prentice: When I refer to the Great Lakes, I'm essentially including the St. Lawrence as part of those expenditures—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Okay. The time has expired—

Hon. Jim Prentice: —since it is the basin that drains the Great Lakes.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Minister Prentice.

Mr. Armstrong, you can take us up to the top of the hour.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, you mentioned in your opening remarks that you reached an agreement last year with the provinces and territories on a Canada-wide strategy for managing waste water, and that shortly the draft federal regulations will be published in the *Canada Gazette*, part I, as a federal commitment to implementing the strategy.

Municipal waste water treatment has always been managed by the provinces, and we hear concerns in some parts of the country about the cost of upgrading the infrastructure, particularly in these difficult economic times. In fact, I understand that Newfoundland, Nunavut, and Quebec did not sign this agreement.

Could you please explain for us why you feel it is still important for the federal government to regulate waste water and what you're doing to ensure that this does not bankrupt the country?

Hon. Jim Prentice: Well, I think it's pretty clear that in Canada in the year 2010 we should not be discharging raw sewage, untreated sewage, into our lakes, our rivers, and our harbours. That is in fact what has been happening in some quarters in this country. Some municipalities are better than others, but clearly there is a need for national standards, and I hear very few Canadians who disagree with that. We've worked long and hard with the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment to arrive at these standards. They are national standards. They will be brought into place in an orderly way. The drafting is completed. As I said earlier, we have prioritized the infrastructure systems across the country. There are some 4,000 municipalities in Canada with discharge facilities. Those that need upgrades to achieve these standards have been categorized into high risk, medium risk, and low risk, with the availability of additional time in the case of the lower-risk facilities.

I would say that the facilities that are more pressing are in larger cities. In the city of Victoria, for example, we have been dumping raw sewage with absolutely no treatment into the Pacific Ocean. Both the British Columbia environment minister, Mr. Penner, and the premier have indicated that this needs to be brought to a halt, so discussions are under way as to what kind of infrastructure will be needed.

Certainly there are other communities where significant upgrades will need to take place. The intent here is to do this in an orderly way over a period of time. All of these kinds of investments are eligible under federal infrastructure programs that will run over the next many years. But making these investments will require prioritization on the part of municipalities.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Thank you very much.

My second question has to do with the Great Lakes. I just want to clear up any confusion. Could you please elaborate on government investments in the Great Lakes and the seaway?

Hon. Jim Prentice: Certainly there have been significant investments. I referred earlier to the waste water investments. You can look, for example, at a state-of-the-art water treatment facility that is being constructed today in Brockville, which will significantly improve the quality of the water downstream. You can also look at the announcement that was made this past weekend in Hamilton regarding a \$500 million facility. The federal government announced a \$100 million investment in that facility. So these are waste water investments that relate directly to the water that is being discharged into the Great Lakes. There are a number of communities that still require upgrades. Some of those are under consideration, under discussion, but these are the kinds of investments that will have to be prioritized and will have to be made.

• (1700)

Mr. Scott Armstrong: I have just one more question. Could you also elaborate on the government's investments this year in our national parks?

Hon. Jim Prentice: I mentioned that you would find \$185 million of infrastructure-related investments referred to in the main estimates. What you have seen really over the course of the last two years have been investments in our national parks system that have been historic because of their size. For many years in this country we allowed under-investment in our national parks system. Through economic stimulus, through the actions of this government, we have made very significant investments. One of the most tangible of these has been to improve the highway that runs through Banff National Park to the British Columbia border. The upgrade into that highway will be completed in the next year or more. It is a highway on which there have been many fatalities. It's been quite controversial.

I speak to that upgrade because it underscores the quality of the work that's been done by Parks Canada. People come from all over the world to look at the nature of the animal overpasses that have been built into that construction, which allow safe passage of bears, caribou, deer, and so on over the highway. As I recall, there have been in excess of 200,000 safe crossings to this point documented by way of night cameras and so on. So people actually come from all over the world to see how Parks Canada does the extraordinary work that they do.

Investments are being made in all the parks right across the country in historic sites. They're not limited to Banff by any means. I simply refer that one to you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Ouellet would like to ask one very short and quick question before we suspend.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for agreeing to answer one last question of mine.

As for the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence, have you in fact set aside money for Stratégies Saint-Laurent's plan, in other words, the ZIPs or areas of prime concern? Has funding been earmarked for the St. Lawrence?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Prentice: There are certainly priority areas. Included in the Great Lakes action plan, as you are aware, there have been previous plans that have focused on very specific areas. We will continue to do that. I'm referring to the global budget of the department. The \$54 million I referred to is not allocated to specific projects. It is the investment on the part of the Government of Canada on an annual basis relative to the health of the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence system.

The infrastructure investments I referred to are all available on a community-by-community basis, whether you're talking about the stimulus funds, the green infrastructure fund, the gas tax fund, or the Building Canada fund. St. Lawrence investments are equally eligible, as are the Great Lakes investments and others. I'm simply referring to the historic investments that have been made at this point, the dollars that have been committed by the government.

We are aware that there are significant investments, particularly in relation to waste water, that will need to be undertaken. In particular, the city of Montreal has waste water systems that are in dire need of upgrades. It is certainly an issue of which we are aware and that we will continue to discuss with the province and the city.

The Chair: The time has expired.

Minister, I know you have other places to be right now. I appreciate that you took the time to fit us into your schedule to be able to talk to supplementary estimates (C) and the main estimates.

Before we suspend to go in camera, we have supplementary estimates that are due to be reported back. Do you want to have them deemed as reported back or do you actually want to do the line votes on vote 10(c) and vote 25(c) right now—

Hon. Jim Prentice: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's always a pleasure.

The Chair: Okay. We will suspend.

I would ask everyone who is not tied to a member of Parliament at the committee to clear the room so that we can do other committee business.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:
Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En cas de non-livraison,
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
<http://publications.gc.ca>

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
<http://publications.gc.ca>

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>