



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

OGGO • NUMBER 017 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, November 22, 2011

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Chair

Mr. Pat Martin

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome, everyone, to the seventeenth meeting of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. We're meeting today to review the supplementary estimates.

Our first group of witnesses is with the Department of Public Works: Mr. Alex Lakroni, chief financial officer, and John McBain, assistant deputy minister, real property branch.

Welcome back, Mr. McBain.

We also have with us from the department Pierre-Marc Mongeau, assistant deputy minister, parliamentary precinct branch.

It's a very interesting selection of witnesses that we've compiled today.

Before we get going, I would like to recognize the wonderful job that has been done for us by our analysts and our researchers with the Library of Parliament, Tina Lise, Lindsay, and Édison. It's very helpful and high-quality work that's going to help guide us in our examination of the estimates.

We will have a brief presentation, perhaps, from the witnesses and then go right into questions from committee members.

Who would like to begin?

[Translation]

Mr. Alex Lakroni (Chief Financial Officer, Finance Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, good afternoon.

My name is Alex Lakroni, and I am the Chief Financial Officer at Public Works and Government Services Canada. With me are John McBain, Assistant Deputy Minister of Real Property Branch, and Pierre-Marc Mongeau, Assistant Deputy Minister of Parliamentary Precinct Branch.

We are pleased to be here today as part of your review of the supplementary estimates (B), which were tabled on November 3.

Firstly, I would like to provide you with a high-level overview of the department's activities and its budget.

PWGSC plays an important role in the daily operations of the Government of Canada. As its principal banker, accountant, central

purchasing agent, linguistic authority, and real property manager, we manage a diverse portfolio of real estate that accommodates 269,000 federal employees in 1,849 locations across Canada; we facilitate approximately 55,000 procurement-related transactions for goods and services worth about \$16.7 billion per year; we manage the preparation of the annual Public Accounts of Canada and cash flow of more than \$2 trillion a year through the operations of the federal treasury; we translate more than 1.7 million pages a year for federal departments and agencies, and provide translation and interpretation services for more than 1,700 sessions of the House of Commons, the Senate and parliamentary committees like this one.

[English]

PWGSC's financial structure is more complex than that of many other departments.

Turning to the department's total budget for 2011-12, PWGSC will spend \$6.4 billion this fiscal year to deliver its mandate.

The department is heavily dependent on revenue, with 57% of its expenditures, or \$3.6 billion, covered by revenue, as I mentioned earlier, primarily from client government departments for services rendered in support of their programs. This leaves a net appropriation of \$2.8 billion approved by Parliament.

Of the \$6.4-billion total budget, \$1.1 billion is needed to deliver on our core programs, such as central purchasing and banking, public accounts, and payroll and pension services; \$2.5 billion is required to pay for rent, fit-up, and utilities for government-wide accommodation, Receiver General treasury functions, such as banking fees paid to financial institutions, cheques, and envelopes, and translation services to Parliament; \$502 million in capital is needed to invest in Government of Canada buildings and infrastructure; \$2.3 billion is related to providing other services, such as real property and translation services, to client departments; and \$5.2 million is required for contributions by the Translation Bureau to the language industry in Canada.

These supplementary estimates (B) request net funding of \$125 million previously approved by the Treasury Board, resulting in a net appropriation of \$2.8 billion for PWGSC.

I will briefly describe each major item now and will be happy to address your questions at the end.

In support of the long term vision and plan for the parliamentary precinct, PWGSC is requesting \$64.5 million for the continued rehabilitation of the Parliament Buildings. Over the last few years, we have completed 15 projects on time and on or below budget, allowing us to vacate and start the much-needed rehabilitation of the West Block and the Wellington Building.

Another \$39 million is needed for the additional office accommodation that PWGSC is mandated to provide to government departments and agencies. The cost of operating and maintaining buildings under the custody of PWGSC is approximately \$2.2 billion annually.

In support of the cyber authentication renewal—e-pass replacement—initiative, \$16.5 million is required for the implementation of a system to enable secure online transactions by Canadians by improving the protection of their identity and privacy and modernizing the authentication services.

PWGSC is responsible for meeting the accommodation needs of federal employees across Canada through a variety of approaches, including owning, leasing, and, most recently, public-private partnerships, or P3s. An amount of \$15 million is required for the national investment strategy in order to make capital investments to preserve the useful life of crown-owned buildings.

In order to deliver phase two of the federal contaminated sites initiative, \$5.2 million is required for the assessment, management, and remediation of contaminated sites.

• (1535)

[Translation]

In the current period of fiscal restraint, PWGSC will make good on its strategic review commitments made in Budget 2011, as evidenced by the \$16.5 million in reductions included in this document. The department has fully met the objectives of the strategic review exercise for this fiscal year.

There are other smaller adjustments to the appropriations, and we would be pleased to provide additional details about these, if you wish.

Mr. Chair, these represent the key items for which PWGSC is requesting additional funds.

We would be happy to answer your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lakroni.

For our first round of questioning, for five minutes, Mathieu Ravignat.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Is that five or seven minutes?

The Chair: Five, I believe.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Five? Okay. Sorry. I confused it with another committee.

[Translation]

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to ask questions, Mr. Chair.

And thank you for being here. The work that you do is crucial.

My first question is on the supplementary amounts for office accommodation. I feel it is a recurring problem. We can easily see that there are requests for additional funding year after year.

Since the plan is to reduce the number of public servants, why do you think the minister is still asking for \$38 million? That's the figure in the second item on page 128. Is it a math problem or is it because we constantly underestimate the needs for office space?

[English]

Mr. John McBain (Assistant Deputy Minister, Real Property Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you for the question.

This funding is a requirement expressed as a result of decisions taken by Treasury Board from October 14, 2010, until June 2011, so it reflects decisions that the government has made with regard to programs. In total there are 35 organizations where programs have been either expanded or renewed.

Of the \$38 million, \$37 million is for continuation of programs that currently exist. They are programs that had a specific period of funding set aside, and this funding will allow those programs to continue. We do not yet see coming to us, as a common service provider, reductions in accommodation requirements, although we clearly understand studying and making decisions on programs.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: How do you explain the timing of those requests? It seems to me that a rather significant supplementary request is made every year.

[English]

Mr. John McBain: Certainly \$38 million is considerable, but it does address 35 different organizations and their programs that were approved over the last year. We react to those approvals and what they require in accommodation.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: We know that the government is paying millions of dollars to a private firm in order to cut the public service. We also know that the government is hiring fewer public servants and that the public service is shrinking to the point of losing its efficiency.

So what is the explanation for salary expenditures? Are those increases related to senior positions? Are they related to amounts paid out to subcontractors?

Can you expand on why we are seeing an increase in subcontracting? For example, in 2010-2011, Public Works and Government Services Canada saw an increase of \$842 million in subcontracting.

• (1540)

Mr. Alex Lakroni: There is an explanation for the increase in subcontracting. But I would like to make a clarification. Under no circumstances does Public Works and Government Services Canada hire subcontractors at the expense of public servants. Subcontractors are hired either when there is a fixed project period or when specialized expertise is required.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: But we still note an increase of 91.3%. I would like to know what the explanation is for the increase in contracting out work.

Mr. Alex Lakroni: A few factors come into play. First, as you know, we have been very involved in Canada's Economic Action Plan. That is no longer underway now.

Another factor is inflation, which varies over the years.

There has also been a change in how we account for subcontracting. One part of Public Works and Government Services uses services from another part of the department. In the past, we used to calculate that as salaries. Today, for the sake of transparency, we count it as professional fees, although we use those services internally. Those services amount to about \$200 million.

[English]

The Chair: That is the end of your five minutes.

Next is Mike Wallace.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming today. I appreciate the work you do. I have a couple of basic questions to help me to understand.

This year we had around \$2.5 billion allocated in the main estimates. The supplementary estimates (B) say that authorities to date are \$2.7 billion. When I look at supplementary estimates (A), I see that you actually aren't asking for anything, but you are asking under supplementary estimates (B).

How did we get from \$2.5 billion to \$2.7 billion without somebody giving you some money somewhere along the way? I don't understand where that extra money came from. Maybe you can explain that to me.

Mr. Alex Lakroni: Thank you for the question.

There are certain legitimate transfers that appear under Treasury Board Secretariat and are transferred to PWGSC—for example, termination benefits, maternity leave, and severance pay. That accounts for about \$30 million. Another \$30 million, \$40 million is due to.... Just let me make sure here. So there is severance pay. There is a \$30-million operating budget carried forward. Now I have the details.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay.

Mr. Alex Lakroni: Because, year over year, departments don't spend their full operating budgets, they are entitled to report the following year, up to 5%. Public Works' share this time is \$30 million, which we had access to. That was reported from the previous year to this year.

Mr. Mike Wallace: But where does that show up? For me, as a member of Parliament, I'm trying to find the balls around here, and the financial balls are very difficult to follow, to start with.

So I look at the main estimates. You're given \$2.5 billion. I look at supplementary estimates (A) and there is nothing else, but then all of a sudden, under "Total Authorities to Date", it says that you get \$2.7 billion. If it's somewhere, just tell me where it is I can find that extra money, that \$200 million or whatever it is.

Mr. Alex Lakroni: It is on page 20—

Mr. Mike Wallace: Of which?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: —of the supplementary estimates (B). It is in the second column called "Permanent Allocations from TB Central Votes".

• (1545)

Mr. Mike Wallace: Page 20 of the main document?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: Yes.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay. I've got it.

I have to then go to page 20 to look at any transfers that happened in between the authorities that happened in supplementary estimates (A), (B), or (C). Is that correct?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: Some of it is. The others are reflected under Treasury Board, which acts on behalf of all government departments. Our share of that, to help the members, is the operating budget carry forward within Treasury Board authorities. It is \$30.7 million...a payroll total of \$31.7 million. Of the capital carry forward, because we manage our capital on a mid-year cycle, it is—

Mr. Mike Wallace: Right.

My question to you, then—and it's probably not your doing, so I'll have to ask TB about this—is whether it would be possible to put a footnote beside it to say that "this is different from the mains and go here to see the difference". Because it is somewhere. Is that correct?

I'm not trying to catch anybody doing anything wrong. I'm just trying to find out where we're spending and where we're not spending, because eventually we're going to have to look at where we are spending and where we're not.

That was my first question.

My second of many questions is whether vote 5 is for capital only.

Mr. Alex Lakroni: It is exclusively capital.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Thank you very much.

Here's my third question. On vote 1, we talk about the authorities within the vote from "savings identified", right? Are you allowed....? If I'm saving somewhere else—you get your \$16 million or something in that range, or whatever the number is—can you just spend it somewhere else? Is it not to be paying down debt and deficits...?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: That's an excellent question. The \$16 million is a portion of our contribution from strategic review. Basically it is savings: we are shaving \$16.5 million from our appropriation and we are using it to reduce our legitimate ask for cash.

Mr. Mike Wallace: So you find the \$16 million. You identify the \$16 million as savings somewhere in the review and you're able to apply that against what the main bank account gives you to spend. Is that correct?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: That is correct.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mike.

For the NDP, we'll go to Denis Blanchette.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am going to share my time with Mr. Ravignat in this round.

I would like to ask a question about the epass Canada authentication system and what comes after it. Do you want to replace epass with something else, or are you asking that investments continue to be made in this system? Could you quickly explain the background to me?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: We are going to replace epass. The initial technology was epass and Bell Canada was the provider. The technology has evolved into the current Access Key, which is still provided by Bell. I have the details here regarding costs, and so on.

But the new technology that we are proposing and for which we are asking \$16.5 million comes from SecureKey Technologies. That's the technology that made it possible to develop the security system currently used for the banking systems of chartered banks. So the idea is to use this technology that has proved its worth and that is well established, and to benefit from the investments made by the private sector. That gives us some quite attractive prices.

In addition, we have to say that cybersecurity is now the responsibility of Shared Services Canada, whose representatives will appear before this committee on December 8, if I am not mistaken. They will then be able to provide you with a more accurate answer.

I could quote some numbers and go into more detail, if you wish.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: I would really like to get those numbers, because, if I remember correctly, it was very expensive to set up the epass system. Could you tell me whether the amounts we see here are the total envelope for this new generation of cyberauthentication or are they just one of the implementation phases?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: That's just one of the phases. The amount of \$16.5 million covers the design and development of the technology replacing the current technology. The total cost is \$61.9 over six

years, which comes to about \$10.3 million annually. If we compare this amount to the \$24.3 million required for the current technology, we see that we are saving a lot of money with the private sector technology.

• (1550)

Mr. Denis Blanchette: What usually happens in this type of situation is that costs tend to get out of hand. Do you have any provisions or safeguards to make sure that the budget is going to be respected, unlike what happened with the epass?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: I would like to answer that question, but I think it might be more appropriate for the people from Shared Services Canada, who are running the program. They would be in a better position to give you a specific answer.

All I can tell you is that the costs represent rather significant savings.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Thank you very much.

Mathieu, the floor is yours.

[English]

The Chair: You have about 90 seconds, if you'd like to continue.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Let me go back to the second item on page 128. Could you tell me whether the large number of overbillings for property management, especially those of SNC-Lavalin, are included in that amount? If not, where are they?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: I'm sorry, but what amount are you talking about?

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: I am talking about the second item on page 128 called "Funding for the estimated cost of additional office accommodation provided to government departments and agencies". I am talking about the first item too.

Mr. Alex Lakroni: What I can tell you is that, in the supplementary estimates (B) being introduced today, there is no amount for SNC-Lavalin.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Are those amounts going to appear in the supplementary estimates (C)?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: I don't know. We use SNC-Lavalin to provide our services. That is included in the department's supplementary estimates.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Even when there is overbilling, unexpected billings?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: As far as I know, there is no overbilling in the supplementary estimates (B) or in the department's supplementary estimates.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Okay.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mathieu. That's the end of your time.

Next, for the Conservatives, we have Jacques Gourde.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here with us.

My question has to do with the renovation of the parliamentary precinct. In your presentation, you said that the work was going well, the deadlines were being met, and costs were even below the expected costs, the estimates. How do you manage to keep costs in line? There are always horror stories about renovations of this nature. I think you have showed discipline so far. Other public administrations would benefit from knowing what your secret is.

Mr. Pierre-Marc Mongeau (Assistant Deputy Minister, Parliamentary Precinct Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you for your question.

The process we have had in place since 2007 is based on a five-year planning system. We are still talking about a project that will go to 2025, when all the buildings will be ready, but we have divided that into five-year blocks. For each of those five-year blocks, we work together with our colleagues from the House of Commons, the Senate, the national capital region and others in order to determine what projects will be planned or carried out in those five years. That also enables us to make sure that costs will be reviewed and that we will be able to respect our estimates.

We have teams of architect-engineers working with us internally; they are our staff. We also have consulting teams that prepare plans and specifications. Those consultants are also responsible for preparing estimates; so we double-check everything. We have also hired a third party that reviews all the evaluations or estimates for the projects. So we have the main architect for the project, we have the internal teams and we have a third party that reviews the estimates afterwards.

I should also mention that we have some leeway for our projects, given that they are complex. We have the means to deal with contingencies, to deal with the unexpected. We might use that leeway or not, depending on the complexity of the project or the surprises that come up on site.

• (1555)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: When you say third party, do you mean independent experts in architecture that can give you advice on the process that is underway?

Mr. Pierre-Marc Mongeau: Thank you for your question.

The consultants or specialists we hire are hired through a bidding process. They are private companies specialized in cost management. They are the ones we hire to validate what we and the firm of architects have done.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: What have they validated so far in the process? Is it going well? Do any reports show that there could be improvements?

Mr. Pierre-Marc Mongeau: We are learning a lot. The buildings on Parliament Hill are a hundred years old. So we are learning things with each project. Based on the lessons learned, our planning can be better and so can the estimates for the next projects. Those people help us to be even more efficient in subsequent projects.

So we are constantly making strides in our way of doing the estimates. We have so far managed to show our efficiency.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: To conclude, we can see the work that is being done on our buildings. We see that the outside work is rather intricate. The masonry work requires exemplary skills on the part of those Canadians who are practically craftsmen. It is in part masonry and in part, art and culture. Do you have trouble finding workers specialized in this type of work?

Mr. Pierre-Marc Mongeau: We definitely require great expertise for the renovation projects. At the moment, there is enough staff, enough specialists to meet our needs. Clearly, if schools of masonry or specialized trade schools produced even more young masons, we would have some efficient workers readily available. So we hope that this will further encourage young people to opt for those schools.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Please pass this message to those doing the work: based on what I have been able to see so far, they are doing an outstanding job. As you said, I hope that there will be other young people wanting to learn a trade like that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Jacques.

For the Liberals, we have John McCallum.

You have five minutes, John.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'd like to begin with a question along the lines of Mike Wallace's.

I don't quite understand: in the note at the bottom of page 128, under "Explanation of Funds Available", it states that about \$16.5 million "in total authorities is available within the Vote due to savings identified as part of the government's ongoing strategic review", which is a similar quantity, about \$16.5 million.

It certainly looks as if you found \$16.5 million in one part of the department as a savings, and then you put the \$16.5 million back in some other part of the department as spending. So the net saving is approximately zero. Is that right?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: I wouldn't like to contradict you, but on this one, I think it's the cash management. As a responsible department, we do not draw cash unnecessarily from the bank of the government. What we do is generate savings, and then either we give them to the centre and we get them back for legitimate requests, or we reduce our legitimate requests. So instead of the government printing new money for us in the amounts you see here, which amount to \$148 million, and then having us return \$16 million, we just "net". This is a government-wide practice.

• (1600)

Hon. John McCallum: It does strike me as a somewhat theoretical concept that you are sort of saving the \$16 million, but then you're re-spending it, and you're saying that you're taking from the centre \$16 million less than you otherwise would have taken. I would think that would be a little difficult to measure.

Anyway, are we going to be told at any time what that \$16 million in savings consisted of, from which programs or which kinds of expenditures? Also, the budget said that not \$16 million but more like \$23 million was the target for your department, so are you going to have additional savings?

Are we going to be told what those savings consist of, other than the gobbledygook in the budget with words like "improve use of internal resources and administrative efficiency". That doesn't tell you anything. Are we going to find out what programs are involved in these savings?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: Absolutely, and thank you for the question.

In fact, PWGSC, as I mentioned earlier in my opening remarks, is fully committed to delivering on our commitments in terms of strategic review savings, which are \$24.1 million. I can elaborate on the quality of the work we've done on strategic review if you wish, as advisers, the Treasury Board Secretariat, and ministers have stated. But with \$24 million dollars, the delta of \$6.5 million that you see here is savings for leases, which my colleague John McBain can elaborate on. Otherwise, we would have asked for the money to be printed in these supplementary estimates. Instead of asking for the money and reducing it by \$6.5 million more, we don't ask for the money. It's taken from the source.

Hon. John McCallum: Is it written down anywhere or can you provide us information on what the \$16 million or \$24 million in savings consists of in terms of program activities?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: I can tell you now.

Hon. John McCallum: Perhaps you could give it to us in writing, if that is all right. I don't want to run out of time.

Mr. Alex Lakroni: Absolutely. Just for the record, it's \$24 million. It involves 22 specific initiatives that we proposed in the strategic review, touching all areas of PWGSC. PWGSC will deliver \$24.1 million in savings this fiscal year.

Hon. John McCallum: My last question has to do with Treasury Board vote 30. I think your department received \$32 million. It looks as if a lot of that money has gone on severance. You're one of the three departments with the largest receipts of money. Is a lot of that \$31.7 million for severance? Is this an index of job losses in the various departments?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: The \$32 million is a combination of many things. It's maternity leave, severance pay, termination benefits, and other benefits that are managed by the centre—entitlements for employees.

Now, is it an indication that we are losing employees? The answer is no. It's that the government gave the choice to employees to have access to their severance pay while they are in function, while they are still working. What you see here is just a portion of what is owed to those employees.

The Chair: Okay. You're well over time, John. Thank you very much.

For the Conservatives, Kelly Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank you for being with us today. There are two programs that you mentioned in your opening remarks that I would like to ask about. The first is the federal contaminated sites initiative. I'm wondering if you could explain to me what exactly that is.

Mr. John McBain: Thank you for the question.

The federal contaminated sites program is an initiative that is administered by Environment Canada to assist the federal government in managing and remediating its contaminated sites. Public Works and Government Services Canada is a participant in this program. We are beneficiaries of some of the funding that the government has identified for this program.

We fulfill two functions for the program, or FCSP, as we call it. One is remediating PWGSC sites. At this time, the department has identified 308 contaminated sites across Canada, of which 200 sites have been remediated and closed. The remainder are either under active work or under investigation. Our portion of the funding will help us address those contaminated sites.

The funding asked for in these supplementary estimates is primarily to address removal of contaminated sediment at the Esquimalt Graving Dock in Victoria, British Columbia, and remediation along the Alaska highway.

The other function that the department performs in support of Environment Canada is professional technical services to assist departments in cleaning up their sites.

•(1605)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much. I was going to ask for an example and you gave me two, so thank you.

The next question I have was sparked by a question that my colleague asked. Under the transfers, I note that there's a transfer to the national investment strategy. I wonder if you would be willing to talk about the national investment strategy.

Mr. John McBain: Certainly. PWGSC operates one of the largest real estate holdings in the country. We own or manage in total 7 million square metres of office space. Included in that are 340 buildings, as well as a collection of dams and bridges that are historically part of the department.

As a prudent custodian of that kind of an inventory with a replacement cost in excess of \$4 billion, we have a standing investment annually to protect the investment of taxpayers in these buildings, to perform cyclical large maintenance and recapitalization.

For the line you see under "Transfers", for \$14.9 million, is moving it from vote 1, which is operating, to vote 5, which is capital. That's basically allowing us to move funds from what would normally be space provided in leased accommodation, which must be funded from vote 1, to space that we are now providing in crown-owned accommodation. When we do work in crown-owned accommodation, it must be spent from the capital budget. This is us moving money from one vote to another to make it consistent with where we're going to spend it.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Okay.

As a follow-up, you talked about dams and bridges. I'm assuming the reason why we own them is because of that responsibility to protect the taxpayers' money. Is that correct?

Mr. John McBain: Our mandate in office accommodation is very clear. It is set out in the DPWGS act. Paragraph 6(f) states that the minister shall provide office accommodation. That is a mandated function.

In the realm of what we call engineering assets, many of them come historically to the department. The Department of Public Works was created in 1847, so it has a long history in the development of this country, and many of the assets have historically rested with us. At this point it's not quite our mandate, but we have an historical purpose and that's why we have 20 of these assets still in our inventory.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

The Chair: You have nearly one minute left, if any of your colleagues have a question.

Mike always has a question.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Sure: I have a general question for you, and I don't know if you can answer it in a minute.

I have a chart I've made up of everybody's supplements and so on over the last number of years. For Public Works, I'll give you examples: three years ago it was 12%, two years ago it was 28%, and last year it was 17%. This is the difference between what you've asked for in the main estimates and what you've asked for in supplementaries (A), (B), and (C).

I find those to be significant differences. My understanding is that the supplementaries are there so that when the budget comes out, whatever changes there need to be are allocated through supplementaries. Can you explain to me how the Department of Public Works is affected by the budget? I don't see why those numbers from your department are so high compared to those of many other departments.

Mr. Alex Lakroni: Thank you for the question.

I don't have those numbers in front of me, but we take them at face value. I go back to the nature of the business of PWGSC. We're a common service organization. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we have a complex funding structure and 57% of our appropriation is revenue dependent.

We exist to deliver services to other government departments, so our budget is very much linked to the spending of the government. Often, TB submissions—approvals, programs—get approved, and then we provide accommodation to those programs. At the tail end of the process, it's hard to plan for that growth ahead of time. When those programs materialize, we adjust our budget to respond accordingly.

Our business fluctuates depending on a variety of things: the demands of procurement of the government, or the accommodation of public servants, or the volume of translation—

•(1610)

Mr. Mike Wallace: Yes, but on the other side of the coin, when I look at the public accounts books, you spend a lot less than what you ask for compared to other departments. I'm kind of confused. Why are we allocating so much to you if you're not going to actually spend it and why are you asking for so much in the supplementary estimates? It's something to think about.

The Chair: You're well over your time. Thank you. Maybe you can get to that in your next round.

We'll go back to the NDP, with Mathieu Ravignat.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: I have a few questions about the parliamentary precinct.

You are asking for an amount of \$64 million for the next two or three months. What was the additional amount requested last year? Could you also give us more details on the renovation process? Where are you at?

Perhaps you can start by answering those two questions; I will ask more questions afterwards.

Mr. Alex Lakroni: I will try to answer the first question.

Unfortunately, I don't have the numbers with me for last year's supplementary amount. So I cannot give you the exact figure. I can follow up on it and give you the amount later, since I don't want to mislead you.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Okay.

Mr. Pierre-Marc Mongeau: With respect to the request for this year, part of the \$64 million that you see on the list, about \$20 million, will be used for rents, for leases. These are things that have to be paid on an annual basis. We make the request, we obtain the amount and we pay.

This year, another \$28.9 million will be set aside for various projects that have already started. There is recapitalization. For example, we will draft plans and estimates for part of the roof of the Confederation building. We have a multitude of projects like that, that do not necessarily involve millions of dollars but that are part of what we call the long-term vision, which was discussed with the Senate and the House of Commons.

Where are we at? I might take up all your time, but I'll tell you a bit about the main achievements. From 2007 to 2012, our main objective was to find space so we could free up the East Block and the West Block. Later, once they have been renovated, we will also be able to free up the Centre Block. The Senate will then be relocated to the East Block, and the House of Commons will be relocated to the West Block. To create this domino effect, we needed to set people up in various buildings between 2007 and 2010. For example, La Promenade, which some of you here are familiar with, was renovated to make these relocations possible.

Today, the good news is that we have finally freed up the West Block. You know that this building is currently being renovated. You are probably also familiar with the building at 180 Wellington, on the south side of the street. Renovations on that building have also started. Early next year, we will start renovating the former Bank of Montreal building. We are in the process of looking at plans and estimates to transform that building.

While we are doing that, we are also planning the next steps for the East Block. You may have seen that we are in the process of making the new northwest tower—

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: I have to cut you off, but thank you very much. It's very interesting. I can see that a lot of progress has been made.

What improvements have been made with respect to greening or environmental sustainability with this additional \$64 million?

Mr. Pierre-Marc Mongeau: I would say that it is now custom for us to think about sustainable development. So, if you ask me what part of the budget specifically, I would have difficulty giving you an answer.

But we have already integrated new methods into our processes to reduce energy costs and improve system performance. We are also doing a lot of recycling; most of the materials are recycled. We have already integrated specific ideas about sustainable development into our estimates.

• (1615)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Okay. Thank you.

I have another question for Mr. McBain.

When I spoke about the second credit appearing on page 155, you said that it involved programs. Which programs? What are the expenditures? Could you please share this information with the committee?

[English]

Mr. John McBain: Certainly: without question, we can provide the committee with the list of the departments and the amounts of funds that are allocated for new programs and for renewal of existing programs.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Now, for the Conservatives, Peter Braid.

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our officials from PWGSC for being here this afternoon.

In your opening remarks, you mentioned that 57% of your budget is raised from revenue. I'm curious to know with respect to that 57% whether that has been fairly constant in the PWGSC budget. Has that increased over time? Has it decreased? Can you give us a little context on that 57%?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: It varies from year to year depending on where the growth is happening. Some programs are more revenue dependent than others. I don't want to sound technical, but as you know, we provide optional services. These are 100% revenue dependent. For instance, translation services, real property, and specialized services are on an optional basis, so if there is growth in those programs, the revenues grow accordingly. Other programs are partially revenue dependent, but over the last four or five years, I would say, it has remained fairly steady at around 55%.

Mr. Peter Braid: Okay, and what are the top three revenue sources for the department that drive that 57%?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: Real property, for sure.

Mr. Peter Braid: So that's PWGSC being the landlord?

Mr. John McBain: Yes, and also we provide services on behalf of other government departments. If they need a bridge, or a dam, or a building constructed, we will engage the private sector, and we will recover the costs from them for those functions.

Mr. Peter Braid: What percentage of the 57% is cost recovery from outside of government, as opposed to government paying government?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: It's very minimal.

Mr. Peter Braid: Very minimal, okay.

Mr. Alex Lakroni: But to answer your question about the top three, real property services are up there. The second one is telecom informatic services, but this service has now been fully transferred to the new shared services, Shared Services Canada. The third one is translation services. There is about \$200 million to \$220 million in revenue for translation.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you.

I have a question on a specific item on the summary on page 128. There's roughly \$3.4 million for "Reinvestment of revenues from the sale or transfer of real property". Could you elaborate on what that amount represents? Part of the reason I'm asking is that I'm wondering why a revenue source—if that's what this is—would form part of your ask.

Mr. John McBain: That's a great question. Thank you.

Federal government policy allows for custodian organizations, when they sell a property, to ask the government for access to the proceeds of sale for the reinvestment in their remaining inventory.

From December 1, 2010 through to March 31, 2011, the department had 68 transactions disposing of surplus properties and holdings across the country. That resulted in \$3.4 million net revenue being deposited in the consolidated revenue fund. Consistent with federal government policy, we have asked for access to that money from selling our assets to take those funds and reinvest them in our real property holdings.

• (1620)

Mr. Peter Braid: Okay, and is that a fairly common annual occurrence?

Mr. John McBain: Yes, it is. It obviously flows with your sales and your volumes in terms of disposals.

Mr. Peter Braid: Does the sale of real property by the government, when it's appropriate and legitimate, represent an effective source of revenue? Also, are there opportunities in the coming two or three years to look at those sorts of transactions?

Mr. John McBain: It can, but PWGSC itself is not a large custodian of properties. We own 340 buildings, as I said earlier, but there are in excess of 50,000 in the federal inventory. There are 23 federal custodian organizations. They need to look at their holdings in terms of what is core to their programs and what could be disposed of.

But certainly some of them are quite significant. The Canada Lands Company, for example, handles strategic disposals where they seek to maximize the return for the crown.

So it can and it does generate significant revenues for the government at large.

The Chair: That's about it for your time, Peter. Thank you.

I have just one question before we move to the next questioners.

Can you confirm or deny what I've heard about the West Block renovation, which is that one of the most costly features is the glassed-in dome under which the chamber will actually be housed? Now they find that you can't use the television cameras with all that natural light, so they're going to have to build some way to curtain off the atrium they're building. Is this one of the additional costs

we're hearing about in the escalating costs of the renovation of the West Block?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Marc Mongeau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The approximate total cost of the structure that will be built to cover the interior courtyard is \$140 million. Our architects and engineers are currently working on designing the roof, which will have to provide excellent acoustics. As for lighting, the panels will be adjustable to reduce natural light and allow the use of cameras. This will also allow more regular lighting. There is still work to be done. We are working on finalizing solutions with experts from across Canada.

[*English*]

The Chair: It sounds like a staggeringly expensive feature, but I just wanted to get confirmation. I understand, then, that the answer is yes, we're having problems designing this atrium so that it can accommodate the television cameras going in the chamber.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Marc Mongeau: This falls under the challenges that such an innovative project may entail. Is it a difficulty? There are plenty of difficulties in a new project, and there are many issues to be considered. I would not call these difficulties, but rather a challenge, if you will.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Denis Blanchette.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to talk about the new organizations that are involved with you. I'm thinking of the Canada Lands Company and the Old Port of Montreal Corporation. Could you please explain what happened with both entities and how you are going to incorporate them into the department?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: Thank you for the question.

The Canada Lands Corporation and its divisions, including the Old Port of Montreal Corporation, were transferred to our department. Our department became the one responsible for these Crown corporations. They are not part of the Department of Public Works and Government Services, but they are attached to the Public Works portfolio.

For example, I am the chief financial officer of the Department of Public Works and Government Services, but I am not the chief financial officer of the Old Port of Montreal Corporation.

•(1625)

Mr. Denis Blanchette: That's right.

Now, what exactly is the situation with the Canada Lands Corporation?

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Lakroni: Would you like to take that question...?

[*Translation*]

It's a subsidiary of the Canada Lands Corporation that is totally independent from Public Works and Government Services Canada. Our minister is responsible for these organizations, these Crown corporations. What you want to know more about is—

Mr. Denis Blanchette: No. You are announcing here amounts of money for the integration. So I wanted to know what these amounts would basically be used for.

Mr. Alex Lakroni: Okay.

These amounts, so the \$354,000, will be used to manage everything related to administering communications. There are internal costs, costs that existed previously with Transport Canada, because Transport Canada managed that Crown corporation. These amounts have now been transferred to Public Works and Government Services Canada.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: So it's simply a matter of departmental responsibility.

Mr. Alex Lakroni: Absolutely.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: I would like to come back to cyber authentication. The Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology is currently holding meetings on Internet technologies, specifically electronic payment systems. In acquiring a new cyber authentication solution, have you taken into account how technologies have been evolving? In this committee, we were told at one point that a new payment ecosystem was being created. How will the system you are acquiring be able to fit in with these new payment ecosystems?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: I'll try to answer your question, but I'm not an expert in electronic payments. What I can tell you is that the Internet is the tool of choice, the tool that Canadians and the business world chooses for doing business with the federal government. They want to make sure that access is secure and that all private information is protected. It is in this context that \$16.5 million is required in these supplementary estimates.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Basically, the actual question is this: in your selection criteria for the new generation of cyber authentication, what importance have you given to the upgradability as such, so that you don't have to come back additional needs in a few years, very soon, to get up to date with new technologies. We know that things change quickly.

Mr. Alex Lakroni: As I said, this entire business element is now under Shared Services Canada, and the deputy minister is Ms. Liseanne Forand. I think she was invited to appear before this committee. She or her staff will be here on December 8. It's a relevant question. I think they would be in a better position to answer.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: I believe that concludes your five minutes. Thank you very much.

The last questioner today will be Bernard Trottier, for five minutes please, Bernard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I would like to ask some questions about the Office of Infrastructure.

[*English*]

Recently, the Office of Infrastructure of Canada requested another \$709 million for the infrastructure stimulus fund. This was to complete some projects that had been identified in 2009, and some in 2010, I'm sure. Could you explain what happens?

I know that the deadline was extended past October 31 of this year of 2011. What were some of the factors that would have contributed to the postponement or the delaying of the deadline to complete these projects?

I know that in some of the discussions I've had with provincial and municipal counterparts in Ontario and in Toronto, there was a certain amount of fatigue on the part of the provincial and municipal counterparts, in that they couldn't get the funding ready and so on. Could you maybe describe whether that was a contributing factor? Or were there other factors that led to this extension of the deadline?

•(1630)

Mr. John McBain: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

Certainly, your observations are what I have heard in meetings in terms of the issues. For PWGSC itself, however, our funding connected with the economic action plan ended on March 31, 2011, so our program was wrapped up and has come to a conclusion. We are not involved with infrastructure spending, or funding with provinces or municipalities, but in the meetings I've been at, those organizations have described exactly the scenario that you paint.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Okay.

Were there other factors that contributed to this extension beyond just the partners...? Were there factors within the federal government itself that led to some delays there?

Mr. John McBain: Not to my knowledge.

In regard to the economic action plan, speaking as someone who works in real property, obviously, starting from zero and accelerating up in our industry is a difficult thing. I know there was an issue on start-up. We were able to succeed because we were working within our own portfolio. When you're partnering with other organizations and other levels of government, it adds an additional challenge.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Thank you very much.

Changing lanes a little bit, I'll move to the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario. I'm a member of Parliament in the city of Toronto and I'm really interested in hearing about some of the things that were going on. There's an additional request for \$7.5 million around economic and community development in regard to talking about innovation and economic diversification.

Can you describe some of the details behind that and just give some concrete examples of some things that might be behind that funding in the supplemental estimates?

Mr. John McBain: I'm sorry. That's not part of our supplementaries.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: I see. I'm sorry.

Mr. John McBain: I'm not familiar with that, so I couldn't speak to that.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Okay.

Then I would want to discuss anything related to extensions to deadlines within Public Works itself. What are some of the projects you've been working on and what are the postponements or delays? You mentioned a number of projects coming in on time and on budget, but I imagine that there are a number of projects that got postponed. Are outside factors or internal factors resulting in delays when it comes to Public Works projects?

Mr. John McBain: It's an excellent question.

Again, in the world of real property, there are unknown factors.

I can cite a dam that we did a number of years ago. We did all our boreholes and we did all our testing and preparation, but it wasn't until we completely removed all the overburden that we found a large key in the bedrock, which required many more tens of cubic yards of concrete than had originally been estimated.

Those sorts of things happen. They cause delays. You have to get revised approvals and revised authorities.

On program approvals, while some of our estimates, as colleagues have noted, bring funding to the department, getting the programs approved in terms of their architecture, their structure, and their staffing, can delay when we have to implement them and when we can start up. In that case, we ask for money to be reprofiled.

There's an amount in the supplementary estimates that was supposed to be reprofiled last winter, but the election curtailed that, so it is being reprofiled now. That's why you see some of these fundings and some of these delays.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Okay.

My final question actually has to do with what you mentioned in terms of the budget. As you know, there was a certain delay in getting a budget passed in the spring. That was passed in June. Now we're working on getting a budget implementation bill passed.

Can you describe any impacts these measures or these activities in the House of Commons and in Parliament would have on your ability to execute these projects?

Mr. Alex Lakroni: That's a very good question.

I would say that when these events happen they rarely occur exactly the same way. As I mentioned, because of our capacity, we are revenue dependent. We are used to adjusting to fluctuations in markets and managing the unknown. When reprofiling doesn't happen one year, then it happens the following year.

What needs to be retained here is that we manage our projects on a multi-year basis, on a multi-year cycle within a one-year appropriation, do what doesn't get done one year gets done the following year. But we have strong governance, we have excellent performance on our projects, and we adjust as the events change.

• (1635)

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Is that it, Mr. Chair?

Thank you very much.

The Chair: You're well over time, but thank you very much.

I'm going to suspend the meeting briefly and thank our guests and our witnesses from the Department of Public Works and Government Services for a very useful exchange.

Thank you very much.

We'll suspend for two minutes while we invite our witnesses from the Privy Council to come to the table.

• (1635)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: We'll call to order again this seventeenth meeting of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

We've invited representatives from the Privy Council Office to defend their supplementary estimates, so we'll welcome: Mr. Marc Bélisle, the acting assistant deputy minister of corporate services; Mr. Bill Pentney, deputy secretary to the cabinet; and Mr. Yvan Roy, deputy secretary to the cabinet and counsel to the Clerk of the Privy Council.

Welcome, gentlemen, and thank you for being here.

If you have a brief presentation, please proceed. Then we'll move right to questions.

Mr. Marc Bélisle (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services, Privy Council Office): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to meet with the members of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

I am accompanied by Mr. Yvan Roy, Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, Legislation and House Planning and Machinery of Government, and Counsel, Privy Council Office, and by Mr. Bill Pentney, Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, Plans and Consultations.

My introductory comments pertain to the 2011-12 supplementary estimates (B) for the Privy Council Office and, as we have several distinct items, I will speak to these without further preamble.

PCO is requesting a net amount of \$11.4 million which is comprised of eight specific items.

[English]

The first item, in the amount of \$10.6 million, is for continuing these activities of the Commission of Inquiry into the Decline of Sockeye Salmon in the Fraser River. The commission was established by Order in Council P.C. 2009-1860, dated November 5, 2009, under part I of the Inquiries Act, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. The Honourable Bruce Cohen was appointed as commissioner.

The mandate of the commissioner is to identify the reasons for the decline and the long-term prospects for Fraser River sockeye salmon stocks and to determine whether or not changes need to be made to fisheries management policies, practices, and procedures. The commissioner's original terms of reference directed him to submit, on or before May 1, 2011, a final report or reports in both official languages to the Governor in Council. An extension was granted to the commissioner and he must now present his final report to the Governor in Council by June 30, 2012.

The second item, in the amount of \$1 million, is for the Office of the Special Advisor on Human Smuggling and Illegal Migration, created in September 2010. The funding will be used to coordinate the government's strategy and response to migrant smuggling by sea and to establish a governance structure to enable the Special Advisor on Human Smuggling to provide overall coordination at all levels: operational, policy development, and strategic development.

The successful prevention of human smuggling requires close cooperation with international partners. A multi-faceted approach is required that includes prevention and international cooperation. Since his appointment, Mr. Elcock, the Special Advisor on Human Smuggling, has met with officials in several countries to discuss cooperation to combat human smuggling.

The third item, also in the amount of \$1 million, is for continuing the activities related to the implementation and coordination of the government-wide communication strategy for Canada's economic action plan. This amount of \$1 million relates to PCO's 2010-11 EAP surplus that was carried forward to 2011-12 to enable PCO to continue to coordinate EAP communications.

The fourth item, in the amount of \$0.2 million, is to fund the advertising initiative "Advertising Corporate Identity" under the government advertising program. The purpose of this initiative is to reinforce the government's identity in print, broadcast, out-of-home, and new media advertising so as to ensure clear recognition and maximum take-up of Government of Canada programs, services, and benefits.

• (1640)

[Translation]

The fifth item in the amount of \$42,000 relates to an adjustment to savings identified as part of the reduction in the budgets for the Offices of the Ministers and Ministers of State, which were part of the 2010-11 supplementary estimates (B). The total reduction was in the amount of \$1,638,000. The original reduction amount was \$1,680,000 but the reduction was overstated by \$42,000; therefore, PCO's reference levels have been adjusted to reflect the accurate budget reduction.

The sixth item is a budget reduction in the amount of \$1.1 million for the 2010 strategic review.

The seventh item is a transfer in the amount of \$70,000 to the Treasury Board Secretariat for activities in support of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

And finally there is a transfer in the amount of \$139,000 to Foreign Affairs and International Trade to provide support to departmental staff located abroad under the Canada-Australia Exchange Program.

In closing, I would like to thank you for giving me this time to inform you of the ongoing initiatives in the 2011-12 supplementary estimates (B). We would be pleased to respond to your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bélisle.

The first questioners, then, will be from the official opposition.

Ève Pécelet.

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): In your presentation, you spoke about the government's communications strategy. Here, in the third item, is a request for \$1 million.

What does this communications strategy consist of? What is its purpose? In other words, how will this million dollars be invested?

The fourth item shows an amount of \$200,000 to fund the advertising branding initiative. So we are also talking about a government advertising plan totalling \$1.2 billion to be used to reinforce the government's identity through advertising in the media.

I'd like to know where this money will be invested. Will it really be used to reinforce the government's identity? Could you tell me more about this communications plan?

Mr. Bill Pentney (Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, Plans and Consultations, Privy Council Office): Thank you.

As you know, Canada's Economic Action Plan was created to react to a global economic crisis. The June 2011 budget continued to adapt the action plan, and the government adopted an integrated and coordinated communications plan. The purpose in this case was to better inform Canadians about the benefits and services provided by the government and about the economic aspects in the budget. So the \$1 million is the continuation of this integrated and coordinated communications plan intended to help Canadians know about the benefits contained in the budget. It's an adaptation, and its title refers to that of the budget. So it is...

• (1645)

[English]

the next phase of Canada's economic action plan. The communications activities are to coordinate and integrate in a continuation of the economic action plan.

[Translation]

As for the branding exercise, it is an exercise intended to verify whether adjusting our branding will make it possible to keep Canadians better informed.

[English]

Every federal government poster or statement advertisement has what's called the Canada word mark, according to the federal identity program: that little "Canada" word with the flag. Studies over the last several years have indicated that Canadians' awareness of and recall levels for advertising has remained relatively flat. One of the ways of delivering value for taxpayers' dollars is to try to ensure that when the government is buying advertising, Canadians are getting the information and are understanding that the information comes from the federal government and that it's talking to them about benefits they can get from the federal government.

This amount of money is being used to try to examine whether there are ways of enhancing that recognition so that Canadians will understand more easily the benefits that are being offered to them and will get greater access to them. It is an exercise to try to determine whether there are ways through advertising to make better use of Canadians' dollars.

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Since these estimates have been determined during the election period, I would like to know exactly whether this money was really used to reinforce the image of the government in power at the time of the elections or if it was used for the election campaign, to let people know about the government's plan if it were elected.

Mr. Bill Pentney: The expenditures are not linked to the election campaign. They are linked only to the Canadian government's advertising plan. It is a matter of benefits for Canadians. It is a study that we just launched.

[English]

There's no relationship whatsoever to the election campaign. This relates to the Government of Canada advertising that continues today and will continue for the remainder of the fiscal.

The Chair: That concludes your time, thank you.

Mike Wallace.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our guests for coming.

I don't have a huge lot of...the money is small, but interesting, let me put it that way.

In vote 1 you have \$10.6 million for the commission on the decline of the salmon fishery on the Fraser River. Has there been money already allocated to this commission or is this brand-new money?

A voice: You're talking about the...?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: This is new money.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay. That's point A. So B, why is it in the Privy Council budget and not in Fisheries?

Mr. Yvan Roy (Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet and Counsel to the Clerk of the Privy Council, Legislation and House Planning and Machinery of Government, Privy Council Office): Maybe I should take this one.

The commission of inquiry, as part of its mandate, actually has to look into how the fishery was managed in British Columbia around the sockeye salmon. It would be completely inappropriate for—

Mr. Mike Wallace: So it would be conflict of interest issues...?

Mr. Yvan Roy: Absolutely, for Fisheries and Oceans to be managing the commission, so to speak—not that we're really managing it, but we're getting the money and helping with how the money should be allocated.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay. Here's question number three, then. If I do the math here, we have the \$10.6 million for it and then, at the bottom of the page, we see that the contribution program for the same inquiry is included in that \$10.6 million. That contribution is coming from where?

I don't understand why there's a separation of \$3.1 million from this \$10.6 million. I don't understand what's going on there.

• (1650)

Mr. Yvan Roy: The \$3.1 million you're talking about, which is called the contribution program, is included in the \$10.6 million. The \$3.1 million we're talking about here is actually for the assistance given to groups that have been given party status before the commission so they can retain professional help to allow them to make their case in front of the commission. There are 15 of those groups that have been given grants and they have hired lawyers.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay. So of the \$10.6 million, we're giving to groups that are going to testify assistance to the amount of one-third of that, basically?

Mr. Yvan Roy: That's exactly right.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay.

My next question then, is that for the transfers to the Treasury Board and the transfers to Foreign Affairs and International Trade, I'm assuming that in the main estimates you asked for the money and now you're transferring the money over to those different departments. Is that right?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: We already had the money in our main estimates.

Mr. Mike Wallace: For those specific purposes or for other purposes?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: For the Canada-Australia program, we had that amount in our main estimates. The other amount we had in our budget for PCO, the whole budget of PCO.

Mr. Mike Wallace: So at the time when we approved your mains.... Here's my bottom line—

Mr. Marc Bélisle: Okay.

Mr. Mike Wallace: —that you have to explain to me: how come TB didn't ask for this money in advance? I think they would obviously know about the conference. Also, why didn't Foreign Affairs ask for the money about missions abroad? I don't understand why we have to go to other departments, including PCO, and ask them to send money to these other departments because "we're now doing this..."

Mr. Marc Bélisle: It's always a question of timing.

In this case when we did the main estimates, we didn't know that the person was going to be staying an extra six months. We now know it; therefore, we're doing the transfer in our supplementaries (B), to be able.... The Canada-Australia program is an exchange program whereby people from Canada go to Australia for about 24 months to get an exchange of information between the two countries in how they operate. But their living expenses, those transfers, are all managed by DFAIT, so we need to transfer the money to DFAIT because they're the ones that maintain or do the necessary work internationally.

As for the other, for Treasury Board Secretariat, we had the OECD conference from October 18 to 20, and the secretariat expenditure was being paid by the host country. The mechanism to be able to transfer that money was the contribution program. PCO does not have a contribution program; TBS had the contribution program, so we were able to transfer the money to them.

Mr. Mike Wallace: You're basically refunding them for money they've spent?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: They were going to spend, yes.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Finally, why was the Old Port of Montreal Corporation in your bailiwick to start with?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: It's because of a transfer of minister. Minister Baird was transferred from the Transport portfolio to the position of leader of the government in the House of Commons, and he took that portfolio with him. Therefore, since we support that minister, it became part of the portfolio of PCO.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Well, that's ridiculous, but anyways, thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mike. That concludes your time.

Mathieu, it's your turn.

It's Ève...?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: I didn't speak in the first hour, so it's back to me.

My question is about the request for \$900,000 in funding intended to support the coordination of the government communications strategy as part of Canada's Economic Action Plan.

Given the gradual reduction in Canada's Economic Action Plan, how do you intend to spend this money?

Mr. Bill Pentney: That's a good question. It's true that the first stage of Canada's Economic Action Plan, so the response to the economic crisis, is wrapping up.

But the last budget, the one for 2011, continues to allow certain measures. And the government has announced a series of measures

aimed at economic recovery. This is an integrated communications plan that includes a continued effort to keep Canadians informed, through a website, mainly. It also contains other integrated communications exercises that will inform Canadians about the benefits provided in the budget. This is not just the first step.

• (1655)

[*English*]

It is true that the first stage of the economic action plan is winding down. A number of aspects of the website and other communication activities related to that stimulus part of the economic action plan are coming to an end.

The government's budget, which is the next phase of the economic action plan, announced a series of measures. There has been a series of advertising and other outreach and communications activities related to informing Canadians of those measures. That's what the coordination activity today relates to.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet: The Privy Council Office has reduced its spending by \$1.1 million, though the target was \$2 million. I am referring to the sixth item you talked about. So the Privy Council Office is the organization with the worst performance in reducing its expenses. By comparison, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada has reached 75% of its budget cutting objective.

Why did you not manage to reach your objective? How do you propose to do so in the next financial year?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: If I am not mistaken, you are talking about the amount of \$1.1 million for the strategic review.

We have put major budget cutting initiatives in place. We have three years to get the plan working: this year and the two subsequent years. We have started making changes that involve significant amounts of money. Those changes cannot come about overnight. Planning for them and implementing them will require some time.

Bill Pentney is leading one of those initiatives, in the area of communications. He may wish to talk about that initiative, which is one of our largest.

Mr. Bill Pentney: We have tried to modernize our means of communication by maximizing the use of resources.

[*English*]

I'll give you a couple of examples of the kinds of things we've undertaken so far.

I know that the House of Commons provides members with a daily press clipping service; I think it's called *Quorum*. The Privy Council Office is now providing to all of our employees, every morning, an electronic press clipping service, so we no longer photocopy press clippings or cut and paste press clippings. Through that process, we've saved a considerable amount of resources.

We've also consolidated a number of subscriptions to eliminate any duplication or overlap, and we've gone to eliminating newspaper subscriptions. We're using an online press service, something called Library PressDisplay. I shouldn't be advertising for it, but.... Every morning you can look up the front pages of about 1,000 daily newspapers, if you so choose, through a subscription that we're providing.

We're also looking at how we can modernize our approach to media monitoring so as to reduce costs and still provide a quality of service that the Prime Minister, other ministers, and senior officials in the Privy Council Office require. That's a fairly significant modernization effort. It will take several years to implement it in full.

Through that process, we will be able to reduce our expenditures in a number of areas. We're finding that through some of the modernization we're actually expanding our services. Rather than the 60 or 70 people who are getting the press clippings now, all PCO employees will have access to the electronic press clippings that we provide. In a sense, we think we're providing a better service and a more general service. It is a pretty significant transformation exercise. That's just one of several exercises under way in the context of the strategic review.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Bélisle: Another of our initiatives involves combining our library services with those in other departments. That initiative is another one that is now underway.

Changes like that do not happen overnight. It takes a certain amount of time to put them in place, even to find partners to help us move forward with them. Unfortunately, some of them take time to get rolling.

• (1700)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bélisle.

Your time has expired, Ève. Thank you.

For the Conservatives, Scott Armstrong.

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

Thank you for being here today.

I think one of the most successful programs you have run is Canada's economic action plan—the promotional campaign for that, the signs and projects showing Canadians how taxpayers' money was used effectively to combat the recession—and really, the results of that program have been spectacular with Canada's economic performance so far.

Recently you've announced a large procurement, probably the largest military procurement in the history of the country, the shipbuilding procurement, and where I'm from on the east coast, this is probably one of the greatest opportunities we have to create jobs, to train people, and to keep people home who had to go out west previously for employment.

Is there any consideration by PCO in regard to employing a similar type of program to help educate the people on what training they can get and what is going to be offered by the federal

government, and how we're going to work directly with the province and the winning contractor, the Irving shipyards—we could also do it in B.C.—to make sure that the people who live on the Atlantic coast and the people who live across the country get as much benefit from that program as they can get? Is there any consideration of that?

Mr. Bill Pentney: I'll take that question as well, Mr. Chair.

There is a continual examination of the ways in which Canadians can be informed of the benefits and services that are available to them, now through the budget, and through exercises like the national shipbuilding strategy. As that unfolds, I think it reflects the modern world of communications. The government is no longer in the business of issuing a press release once a day or whatever. There's a much more active ongoing communication effort with Canadians and a two-way communication effort with Canadians.

I won't speak for the shipbuilding strategy but I would say that to the extent that the economic action plan website continues to receive on average about 3,000 unique visitors every day right now, there's an indication that Canadians continue to look to the Web for access to benefits and services. To the extent that there can be a degree of commonality, we found as well that the common look and feel associated with the economic action plan signage, advertising websites, and otherwise has increased Canadians' recall rate and just the basic understanding that this is a federal program and they can go and look for more benefits.

That common look and feel is an element that has proven to be very successful and that relates in part to the branding work that we're doing now to try to find out whether there are ways of simply continuing to reinforce for Canadians that there are benefits that are available to them.

So the shipbuilding strategy, as it unfolds, will be part of a wider communication effort to try to make sure that Canadians both understand the benefits that are available to them and have practical ways that drive them to a website or direct them to other ways of getting government information so they can learn how to get access to those benefits that interest them.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: I appreciate that. We look forward to that.

On the human smuggling issue, it's more of a horizontal issue. What is PCO's role in the horizontal issue of human smuggling?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: As you know, Mr. Elcock is the special adviser to the national security adviser to the Prime Minister. This initiative encompasses a lot of departments: RCMP, DFAIT, the Canada Border Services Agency, and National Defence, just to mention a few. When you have such a horizontal display of an initiative, you need somebody to coordinate all these efforts to maximize the mission you're trying to accomplish. That's one of Mr. Elcock's roles.

Another of his roles is to engage with the southeast Asian countries to foster cooperation from some of these countries and to educate and train them to help us combat human smuggling. Mr. Elcock travels a lot and goes to these areas to get that cooperation. He attends international fora where human smuggling is being discussed, along with ways to combat the problem, and he's also looking at ways to change our legislation or these types of things to make it easier to process any illegal human smuggling that would occur here.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: So basically he has a leadership role and coordinates all the other departments and agencies that are involved. It's basically a strategy that involves many people. It's great that we have some coordination at the top level so the right hand knows what the left hand is doing.

• (1705)

Mr. Marc Bélisle: That's exactly right.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Thank you very much.

The Chair: You're right on time there. Thank you.

Next, Liberal John McCallum is here.

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to our witnesses.

This is a bit rude of me, but I have a TV commitment in about two minutes, so what I'd like to do is ask a few questions and then rudely leave, probably before you give all the answers. But then I can read your answers in the transcripts.

I have questions in two areas, first on the expenditure of \$1.1 million in the Public Appointments Commission Secretariat. To my knowledge, that was brought into being by the Federal Accountability Act five years ago or so but has never been staffed. I don't understand why we're spending \$1.1 million on something that doesn't seem to be functioning, unless I have something wrong there.

My second set of questions is about another \$1.1 million, and this is in the strategic review savings for PCO. My first question on this is that you seem to be saying on page 117 that you saved that \$1.1 million, but then you're putting it back into other areas of PCO and effectively spending what you saved, which didn't seem to be the purpose of the exercise. Secondly, I think you were due in the budget to find \$2 million of savings, so are you going to find the extra \$900,000? Finally, are we going to receive information in some detail on what programs or functions have been eliminated or cut to achieve these savings?

Those are my questions. I regret that I have to leave. My apologies.

Mr. Marc Bélisle: I'll start with the first one, your question on PACS. We always budget \$1 million or close to \$1 million every year; however, \$1.1 million is not being spent. Only about \$300,000 is being spent, because the secretariat is there to be able to support a commissioner when the government decides to appoint one. At this point, they're working to be ready to support when a nomination comes. That money is being asked for, but we're not spending \$1 million; rather, it's around \$300,000 for the secretariat.

The second question was on strategic review. We have a lot of different \$1.1 million references. The \$1.1 million request in our strategic review, versus the millions we're asking for all these other initiatives, is really completely separate. We really did do a strategic review, identified the areas that we needed to address, and made some reductions to find efficiencies—and even the transformation activities, such as Mr. Pentney just mentioned. That exercise has been done.

However, there have been other activities that the PCO needs to support, and it needs the funding to be able to support them—such as human smuggling, which is housed in PCO. We need that money to be able to continue to do that activity. They are completely different items, because we have different roles and different responsibilities.

There was also a question on the difference between the \$2 million and the \$1.1 million for strategic review. It's basically because ministers' offices were subject to a cut of about \$1.7 million prior to the strategic review. Therefore, when the strategic review exercise was being done, we had some discussions with the Treasury Board Secretariat to say that we already had cuts for the ministers' offices, so we were able to receive a credit of \$0.9 million, from the \$2 million to the \$1.1 million, in order to not have double cuts in those areas. Because there was already a cut to ministers' offices, and the PCO supports several ministers.

The Chair: John still has almost one minute left, so maybe I'll ask a question that he would probably have asked.

Further to the Public Appointments Commission Secretariat, I know that it's a relatively small amount of money, but how do they spend \$300,000 when they don't exist? There is no Public Appointments Commission or commissioner.

• (1710)

Mr. Marc Bélisle: It's basically the secretariat. It's a couple of employees.

The Chair: What do they do?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: Again, they're preparing...they're working on —

The Chair: They're waiting for Godot.

Mr. Marc Bélisle: They're doing all the preliminary work, preparing a code.... I think they're working on a code for when appointments are being made—

The Chair: That's been years, though—

Mr. Marc Bélisle: Yes, but—

The Chair: It was 2006.

Well, anyway, maybe we could call them as witnesses some day and review their budget sometime. Perhaps committee members would be interested in that.

That concludes John's time, so we'll move on.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Peter Braid and Ron are going to share.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to share my time with Mr. Cannan.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here this afternoon.

I have just a couple of questions. The first question or two relate to the special adviser on human smuggling, just to sort of segue from Mr. Armstrong's line of questioning as well.

I would ask if you could just correct or confirm this presumption. I presume this is a PCO expense because the mandate of the special adviser on human smuggling is so government-wide that it's appropriate that it's a PCO expense, as opposed to CIC or CBSA. It touches such a wide range of mandates and departments. Is that correct?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: That is correct. It's also not the first time we've done that at PCO. The Afghanistan task force was another similar initiative.

Mr. Peter Braid: Is the mandate for the special adviser time limited or is this a new existing role?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: It's time limited for now. Funds were being requested for this year and the subsequent year—for now.

Mr. Peter Braid: For this year and one subsequent year?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: Exactly.

Mr. Peter Braid: *Merci.*

Moving on to the advertising corporate identity initiative, the supplementary estimates (B) request is \$200,000.

[Technical Difficulty—Editor]

Mr. Peter Braid: Sorry, I'm doing some advertising for Research In Motion, which is based in my riding—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Peter Braid: On the \$200,000 amount, I completely understand and completely support the need and the initiative to make sure that when the Government of Canada is advertising, Canadian citizens recognize that it is a message from the government. I think that's the purpose of the initiative. Is that correct? Could you just explain what the \$200,000 will be spent on?

Mr. Bill Pentney: Yes, I would be happy to. Thank you for the question.

As I said, the federal identity program has established a look and feel for the Government of Canada, and as advertising has diversified, as website presence and other government communication activities have diversified.... I have a very interesting slide presentation that sort of mashes together a variety of different government websites. Although there is an element of commonality around them, if you look at them closely enough, you would be hard-pressed, in some circumstance, to understand that they're all from the Government of Canada.

We're using the money to do some of our own in-house work but mainly to hire an outside firm that can give us some advice on the ways in which modern advertising and communication vehicles are

being developed, to try to attach more of a kind of a hook when you see something. It's advice on what works and what doesn't work.

I'll speak for myself and not my staff and say that we have a lot of amateur ideas about what might be useful as ways of grabbing Canadians' attention and having that imprint very quickly established for them. We're thinking probably of getting in some professionals who do this for a living. This is not a standing expertise that exists within my group and it should not exist within my group within the Government of Canada, but we're letting a contract to try to have some creative and professional expertise brought to bear to help us.

As I say, we have very interesting meetings with a lot of people that are generating a lot of good ideas not founded in any research science or experience, and we're trying to draw in some professional advice to say what kinds of adjustments could be made. I'll give you a couple of examples that have come from professionals. Some companies have found that having a common voice attached to their television ads is a way of simply reinforcing and reminding people—

Mr. Peter Braid: That's interesting.

Mr. Bill Pentney: —that this voice is attached. Some fairly simple visual identifiers and common looks can be useful in conveying that.

The Government of Canada is communicating with Canadians about dozens and dozens of different programs that really aren't related in any intrinsic way, other than the fact that they are brought to you by the Government of Canada. So finding the right way of capturing enough awareness so that people know this is a federal program and that this is where they can go to look, on the one side, and on the other side, accommodating that diversity.... We're unlike any private corporation in the diversity and scope of our reach across the country and in the diversity of services and products we're trying to communicate to Canadians.

It has been a bit of a challenge, but fundamentally we're hiring some outside expertise to help us.

• (1715)

The Chair: There's about a minute left for Ron if he has a question.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for your generosity and your compassion. I'll be very succinct.

Thanks, gentlemen.

I want to follow up on my colleague Mike Wallace's comments. I come from B.C. and used to be on the fisheries committee, so I'm very familiar with the Cohen commission. What was their initial budget?

Mr. Yvan Roy: Originally.... Well, you have to go back a little bit. The commission was created in November 2009 and was to report 18 months later. However, there was an understanding that there was a good chance it would become more complicated than originally envisaged, so an interim report was produced.

For the first year, around \$11 million was spent. For 2011-12, with the \$10.6 million we're seeking from Parliament, we believe the commission will be spending around \$11.5 million. So it's \$10.6 million plus \$800,000 that was already in the main estimates, for a total of about \$11.4 million.

Given that there will be an extension in the hearings of the commission for the reason that I'm sure you're familiar with—the virus—there is a possibility that they will go a little bit above the \$11.4 million and to the \$11.5 million I'm talking about here. But we will see how much it's going to cost once the hearings take place and we hear from the commission.

Mr. Ron Cannan: On those 15 organizations that are receiving funding, is it public information how much has been allocated to date?

Mr. Yvan Roy: I don't know how much public information has been given. If you're interested I can look into this and perhaps communicate that information through the chair if it's in the public domain.

Mr. Ron Cannan: If you can do that, I would appreciate it.

I have a quick question on the \$1.1 million on strategic review. It's always good to see savings. Approximately what percentage of your budget is that?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: The total exercise generated a 5% reduction in our budget.

Mr. Bill Pentney: The \$1.1 million is—

Mr. Marc Bélisle: —a portion. It's over three years, so it's \$5.7 million in total, and it's 5% of our budget.

The Chair: Ron, I gave you half a minute there. Could you wrap it up, please?

Mr. Ron Cannan: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we'll go to Denis Blanchette.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to go back to the matter of the Special Advisor on Human Smuggling and Illegal Migration. While you have explained that a number of organizations are involved, this is first and foremost an immigration issue. Why is the Privy Council Office handling it? Why is someone from the Department of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism not doing this kind of coordination work between organizations? Why is this a Privy Council responsibility?

Mr. Yvan Roy: Mr. Blanchette, I understand that you are focusing on immigration, but the issue is a huge one that really goes well beyond immigration. The international crime aspect is no small matter. That is why so many countries in the international community are interested. Mr. Elcock's role is not just with immigration. It is also with law enforcement, with the RCMP, CSIS and other organizations. That level of government-wide coordination was necessary. That is why the coordinator was placed in the Privy Council Office.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: I understand all that, except that, in Canada, we find ourselves affected by way of immigration. That is

how it comes to us. I understand that there are other aspects, but I am interested to see how that coordination is viewed, especially when departments are equipped to do the work and to coordinate themselves. Departments are perfectly capable of talking to each other, you know. I am a little surprised that the Privy Council Office has inherited the responsibility for this.

You are asking for more money for Mr. Elcock and his office. Could you tell me how many people he has working with him?

• (1720)

Mr. Marc Bélisle: Six people work in his office.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: What is the total amount of the budget you anticipate?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: We are asking for \$1 million for Mr. Elcock's budget.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Is that \$1 million more?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: No. At the beginning of the year, there was nothing in the budget. This is the budget for the whole year.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: It was established in September 2010 but there has been no money up to now.

Mr. Marc Bélisle: There was money last year to cover the operating expenses from September to March. Now we are asking for money from April to March this year.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: How did you pay him from March until now? If there was no money in the budget as of April 1, you had no money to pay him.

Mr. Marc Bélisle: That is correct. At the moment, we are reallocating funds internally so that we can pay him until we get funding for the organization.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Okay.

I have one last question. Then I will yield the floor to my colleague.

In terms of Mr. Elcock's work with various departments and organizations, each is autonomous. What is the real added value of his work with those various departments and organizations? What value are we getting from the budget allocated to Mr. Elcock and his group?

Mr. Marc Bélisle: We have always felt that, with a central coordinator, we maximize the efficiency of our horizontal initiatives. In so doing, we sometimes avoid the duplication you find in some departments. It makes sure that the message is clear for everyone involved. As a result, the work that goes on is much more harmonized.

In the past, when we did not have this kind of coordination, there was all kinds of duplication, both in costs and in programming, because sometimes there is not all the dialogue there could be. Now we are trying to give ourselves every chance to succeed.

Mr. Denis Blanchette: Thank you very much.

Over to you, Ève.

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Could the witnesses give us the details of the costs on page 64, for vote 1b. The request is for an adjustment of \$11,620,963. The description is pretty long, so I will not read it. But I would like to know where the money will be spent. Where is it going to go?

Mr. Yvan Roy: Could you repeat the page where you are finding that information?

Ms. Ève Pécelet: In the French version, it is page 64, vote 1b. It asks for an adjustment of \$11 million, plus a few hundred thousand.

Mr. Marc Bélisle: I don't have the French version.

Ms. Ève Pécelet: I can give it to you, if you like.

Mr. Marc Bélisle: Okay.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat: What service!

Mr. Marc Bélisle: This is the total amount for the entire initiative that I mentioned in my opening statement. The amount of \$11,620,963 is for the eight items I mentioned: the Cohen commission, Mr. Elcock, and all the rest. Those initiatives combined give a net total of \$11,620,963.

Ms. Ève Pécelet: Okay.

[English]

The Chair: That concludes your time. Thank you very much.

I think that's it for questioners, so I'd like to thank our witnesses from the Privy Council Office for a very useful and informative session. Thank you, gentlemen.

Upon that, we will adjourn.

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