



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 032

Wednesday, May 26, 2021

Chair: Mr. Robert Kitchen



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• (1615)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 32 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. The committee is meeting today at 4:15 p.m., Ottawa time, to hear from the Minister of Digital Government and officials on the main estimates 2021-22.

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind all participants at this meeting that screenshots or taking photos of your screen are not permitted.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. Interpretation of this video conference will work very much like a regular committee meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. When you are not speaking, your mike should be muted. To raise a point of order during the meeting, committee members should ensure their microphone is unmuted and say "point of order" to get the chair's attention.

The clerk and the analysts are participating in the meeting virtually today, so if you need to speak with them during the meeting, please email them through the committee email address. The clerk can also be reached on his mobile phone.

For those people who are participating in the committee room, please note that masks are required unless seated and when physical distancing is not possible.

I would now invite the Minister of Digital Government to make her opening statement.

Hon. Joyce Murray (Minister of Digital Government): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to join everyone here today. I was hearing the comments about the rain in Saskatchewan and thinking that we need that in British Columbia. We really don't want the fire risk hazard to be as high as it is.

I'd like to acknowledge that I'm joining you from my home in Vancouver on the unceded territories of the Musqueam nation.

I'd like to thank the committee for inviting me here to discuss the 2021 main estimates and the 2021-22 departmental plan for the digital government portfolio.

I'm pleased to be joined today by Marc Brouillard, acting chief information officer of Canada; Karen Cahill, assistant secretary and CFO; Paul Glover, president of Shared Services Canada; and Samantha Hazen, ADM and chief financial officer, Shared Services Canada.

Of course, after my remarks, we'll be happy to answer any questions members have.

As the minister responsible for the government's digital transformation, part of my mandate is to work with ministerial colleagues and provide federal public servants with the tools and strategies they need to design and deliver the services that Canadians expect in the digital era, services that are secure, reliable and easy to access.

We are focused on four areas. First is modernizing how the government replaces, builds and manages major IT systems. Second is improving the service delivery experience for Canadians. Third is coordinating government digital operations through collaborative platforms, tools and secure data sharing. Finally, we are removing organizational barriers to change by training and recruiting public servants with digital skills, diverse perspectives and other initiatives.

Work in these four areas advances my mandate to transform Canadians' experiences with Government of Canada services. While there's still much work ahead, we're making important progress. The investments we're discussing here today will play a major part in updating our systems and rolling out better and more powerful tools so that we can improve Canadians' access to trusted digital services.

In terms of the estimates and the main estimates, SSC is seeking additional funding to provide modern, reliable and secure IT infrastructure in support of government priorities and the digital delivery of programs and services to Canadians. This new funding includes \$93.2 million for enabling digital services to Canadians by optimizing the efficiency and performance of IT systems throughout government. We're also looking for new funding of \$37.3 million for IT modernization initiatives that will leverage the cloud and consolidate email, data centres and network systems.

Also, \$36.5 million is being requested for the cost of core IT services, including funding to support new full-time staff and partner initiatives; \$13.5 million for secure video conferencing; \$6.7 million to support IT services, infrastructure and our direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and \$14.1 million to enhance the integrity of Canada's borders and asylum system as well as respecting newly signed collective agreements and making federal government workplaces more accessible.

We're also seeking \$282,000 for the Treasury Board Secretariat to contribute to the Open Government Partnership, a leading global forum for advancing open government around the world.

With regard to the Shared Services Canada 2021-22 departmental plan, our digital government teams will work with departments on several important initiatives. For example, we're continuing to modernize government IT with new iterative methods to plan, procure and manage mission-critical legacy systems. Our SSC data centre closure program is making great progress towards the goal of modernization and has closed 335 legacy data centres to date, of which 143 have been closed since 2019 alone.

• (1620)

We're improving service by ensuring that public-facing digital platforms are consistent across the government and designed for the person or organization using them, such as with Sign In Canada.

We're continuing to implement a modern strategic enterprise management approach to IT operations, like supplying a portfolio of tools to public servants based on job profiles and practical needs and leveraging Office 365 as an example of that.

We're identifying and tackling long-standing barriers to digital innovation that are typical of our traditional siloed processes, and we're working with organizations like Technation's digital marketplace, which helps us access the innovation of more tech SMEs. In taking an enterprise approach, Shared Services Canada is working to solidify network capacity and security, equip and empower employees to collaborate and support partners in the design and delivery of their digital service offerings to Canadians.

From responding effectively in times of crisis to delivering benefits to low-income Canadians to timely service from Service Canada, digital capacity underpins our ability to deliver on every priority and policy the government implements.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd be pleased to take questions from the committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With that, we will now start our questioning.

We will start with Ms. Harder for six minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Minister, thank you so much for being with us today. I believe this is my first opportunity to have a conversation with you directly or to ask questions, and I very much appreciate this chance.

In your mandate letter, which I've read in full a few times now, you're instructed to—and I'll quote it directly—"Fully implement lessons learned from previous information technology project chal-

lenges and failures, particularly around sunk costs and major multi-year contracts."

The federal government in recent years has awarded internal contracts to technology company Cisco with high frequency. I don't think this is news to you, of course. It has made the national media. This is part of what some observers are calling "a pattern of dependency by Ottawa on a single network provider that has all but shut out competing bids."

Are you worried about lack of competition when it comes to Shared Services Canada and procuring IT equipment?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for that question.

I can assure the member that integrity and fairness in procurement is a top priority for me. We have a very collaborative process with industry, and SSC is working closely with key stakeholders to ensure that businesses can easily access and bid for government contracts. I am happy to ask Deputy Glover from SSC to provide more detail about the contract in question.

• (1625)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Minister, thank you. That won't be necessary. I've had the opportunity to ask Mr. Glover questions on a few occasions now. With it being your department, I was hoping that you could answer this question with regard to procurement and whether or not the fully competitive process is in fact followed.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'm happy to let the member know that neither I nor my staff are involved in any specific procurements, so—

Ms. Rachael Harder: Minister, thank you.

I understand that you're probably not involved in the day-to-day in terms of signing off on what gets procured, but as the minister, you are responsible for putting systems and procedures in place. I'm curious if you've talked to your lead management team—of course, including Mr. Glover—with regard to what that procurement process looks like and making sure that it's fair to anyone who would wish to bid.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I am very committed to our having a fair procurement system in SSC, and we have such a system. I also recognize that there are the occasional times when there is a need to have equipment that's interoperable with existing equipment.

I'd like to bring the member's attention to a statement by Technation, which works with the suppliers to the IT industry. They say, "Shared Services Canada has been a key government leader in working with Technation specifically in breaking down barriers to procurement. This includes leading an Agile Procurement pilot aimed at increasing the inclusion of SMEs, and a new initiative, ScaleUp that will target minority-led companies in government contract opportunities. We have also worked very closely together to assist SSC in resolving issues to its network strategy and related procurement practices."

I think the industry representatives are aware of the good work that SSC is doing and support that.

Ms. Rachael Harder: When the same company keeps getting the bids, does that sound like a competitive process to you?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I think I already explained to the member that we are very committed to having a competitive process in any procurement where that is practical, and there are the occasional situations where the existing equipment requires a particular brand of replacement.

Ms. Rachael Harder: It's interesting, though, because I'm not actually even talking about where you're acquiring new equipment for already existing systems. I'm actually talking about the establishment of new centres. Cisco is still getting the majority of contracts. I find that interesting, and I find it especially interesting when the interoperability was tested and the report found that Juniper Networks and Arista Networks were both cleared for procurement in 2019.

Maybe you could just shed light on any contracts that have been awarded to Juniper and Arista in the last, let's say, two years.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks. As I mentioned to Member Harder, I will not be commenting on any individual procurements. We have systems and processes in place—

Ms. Rachael Harder: I'm not asking you to give the details. I'm just wondering if you've procured any contracts with these two companies.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'm happy to have Deputy Glover answer that question.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Minister, I was really hoping you would understand your file and be able to engage with me directly.

Mr. Paul Glover (President, Shared Services Canada): Mr. Chair, I'm happy to answer the member's question. With respect to—

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Chair, I would prefer to have my question directed at the minister. If she's not able to answer, I'll just ask another question.

Hon. Joyce Murray: As I mentioned MP Harder, individual procurements are not something that I'm involved in. I can say that we have a clear set of processes to ensure the integrity of our procurement system, and we're working every day to figure out innovative ways to bring SMEs into our procurements. We work with associations of Black, BIPOC, indigenous and women-led businesses so that we can understand their areas of strength and interest and we can make sure that our procurement is as diverse as possible.

• (1630)

Ms. Rachael Harder: That's wonderful, but could you perhaps provide us—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Harder.

We'll now go to Mr. MacKinnon for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome the minister and the representatives of Treasury Board Secretariat and Shared Services Canada.

To begin, I would like to recognize the incredible efforts that have been made by Shared Services Canada during the pandemic to offer public servants flexibility by giving them the opportunity to telework.

Everyone is grateful for all the efforts that those employees have made, as have you, Minister. They have performed a remarkable feat. We were afraid at the beginning, but we have witnessed quite an achievement. We also thank all the people who are working so hard to make sure that their colleagues have access to services.

My first question is for you, Minister, and relates to the pandemic.

I would like to know your personal thoughts. Has the pandemic accelerated our efforts regarding the digital transformation in the Government of Canada? If so, in what way?

[English]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks so much for the question, but especially thank you for the shout-out to the public servants of Canada who indeed did respond very quickly and effectively to provide updated tools and systems for the public servants who were at the front lines providing services.

We have learned a number of things from this pandemic period. One is the importance of working across government in a platform approach, which then is a challenge because, of course, historically departments have been in their own silos and doing their own work to provide the IT systems [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] to their officials to provide their services. We're finding that we can avoid a lot of duplication by looking at a government-wide approach to systems and connectivity. Where that is especially important is in security, because more and more that's an area that is sophisticated and challenging. We are utterly committed to providing secure data for Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Thank you very much, Minister.

I am glad to know that you are continuing to consider this issue.

Regarding supply, strictly speaking, we saw somewhat rigid supply strategies under the previous government that imposed requirements and were not flexible, I would say.

Could you tell us about this concept of flexible supply? What does it represent to you, and how could we apply it more widely?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

Agile is certainly a transformation of the way we do procurement. Rather than have multi-year plans to do a major procurement, with a lot of holdups along the way while securing funds through Treasury Board, agile procurement is really working with the vendor community very collaboratively to ask them to provide solutions to a problem the government has, rather than going to them and saying, “Here’s what we want to buy. Bid on that.”

Agile procurement is something, as the Auditor General has noted, where we’ve really moved a long way in that direction. It means we do pieces. We bite off a piece, we learn from it and then we tackle the next piece. We’re not locked into a train of activity that was planned years before, which may be out of date by the time a large procurement is finally completed.

Agile procurement is certainly what we’re doing with our replacement of the Phoenix pay system, working towards an HR-to-pay system that will serve public servants very well. Agile is a key fundamental of it.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Could you talk about the Canadian Digital Service, or CDS, and what this small agency contributes to Treasury Board?

What is the CDS working on? What will the funds allocated to it be used for?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for that question.

We received more funding for our Canadian Digital Service last fall.

What the CDS has been doing is creating applications, quite quickly, working in the open, that can help provide services and a better service experience to Canadians. An example of this is that, at the height of the pandemic, when our government was rolling out multiple benefits and programs very quickly, the Canadian Digital Service created a benefit-finder tool. A person could go to one place and put in some anonymized information and then have, on the spot, a complete list of services they might be qualified for.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Before we go to our next questions, I have a reminder. It has been brought to my attention that somebody has taken a picture of our screenshot and shared it. I indicated right at the beginning and I remind you once again that taking screenshots or photos of your screen is not permitted. I would ask that this be respected throughout all of our meetings.

Thank you.

That being said, I will now go to Ms. Vignola for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Ms. Murray. Thank you for being with us today.

Shared Services Canada has an enormous job ahead of it to modernize the network. It has to think in terms of not only current needs, but also needs over the next ten years, and this calls for taking a very broad, very innovative and very creative view. The 2018 budget allocated \$340 million per year to update information technologies, or IT. The 2021 budget adds \$100 million to that amount, about \$200 million of which is reserved for updating and modernizing the network. Of that \$200 million, approximately \$160 million has been awarded, untendered, to Cisco or one of its resellers, which ultimately amounts to the same thing.

Why has Cisco received favoured treatment, almost always by a non-competitive process?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for that question, Madame Vignola.

As I was mentioning earlier to MP Harder, we endeavour to have open and competitive procurement wherever possible, and we have very strong standards in that regard. There are the unique times when the equipment we are updating relies on some fundamental equipment from a sole provider, and in that case we will do a sole-source contract.

I’m happy to have Deputy Glover talk more about the specific situation you’re asking about.

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you, Minister.

I would just like to reiterate for all committee members that even when a procurement is targeted to Cisco—that is, the requirements necessitate that it must be Cisco equipment—there is a competitive process wherein a number of vendors are asked to compete for the supply of that gear. That ensures that the government obtains the best possible price when it is targeted.

A number of people implied that it is not competitive. I understand that and wish to clarify that even when it is targeted to Cisco, there is still a competitive process to ensure the government receives the best price.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Ultimately, whether it is Cisco or one of its resellers, it is Cisco equipment everywhere in the network and it is Cisco that gets the money.

The impression I have is that there is an attempt to portray this as a competitive process when, basically, there is no such process. It is the same equipment; it goes through an intermediary, but ultimately the same equipment is purchased.

I wonder whether there is nothing else compatible, that would mean that Canadians' and Quebecers' money would be put to better use.

As a last point, I have received information saying that Cisco was trying, one way or another, to twist the situation a bit in order to get \$100 million in contracts between now and the end of June, to make sure there would be no break in the supply chain. For most companies, June is the end of the fiscal year.

Is it true that Cisco is currently trying to pressure the Director General at Shared Services Canada and the Deputy Minister, Networks, Security and Digital Services, for them to expedite the purchasing process? Cisco hopes to sign an untendered 100 million contract by the end of June, to make sure that it has a completed procurement and achieves its financial objectives.

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: I can't speak to the objectives and timelines of the vendor community companies. What I can say is that Shared Services Canada is subject to very robust internal governance to make sure we have fair, open and transparent procurement processes. In fact, there has been an increase in network procurement awarded to other equipment manufacturers, such as Arista and Juniper, in the past two years.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: How much has Juniper received, as compared to Cisco or its resellers?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

I'll turn that over to Deputy Glover.

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you. I'm happy to facilitate an addition to the minister's answer.

There are a number of components within the network space. I apologize in advance if this is a bit of a long answer.

If you go back three years and look at how much we have increased to non-Cisco OEM providers, we went from literally nothing because most things were under a national security exemption. I lifted that. We had an increase of about \$10 million in the last year. That's more than doubled in the last two years to over \$22 million. We have seen a steady increase in the amount that has moved.

In some specific areas, it has been 100%. For example, in the firewall space where we relied solely on Cisco, that is now predominantly Fortinet. There are other vendors that we are slowly moving through that.

In the load balancer place, it was—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Glover.

Mr. Glover, I apologize for interrupting, but we do have to be cognizant of the time. If you could provide the further information in writing to the committee, it would be greatly appreciated.

We'll now go to Mr. Green for six minutes.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That actually prompted me.... There were some requests the last time Mr. Glover was here to submit some answers, and I can't recall if I received them or not. Through you, just to open up, has Mr. Glover been able to respond to all the questions of this committee from the previous one?

A voice: Yes.

Mr. Matthew Green: Okay, that looks good.

Through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister, welcome back.

How many sole-source contracts has network, security and digital services awarded in the past two years?

• (1645)

Hon. Joyce Murray: First, let me reinforce that we are committed to open, fair and transparent procurement. I will ask Deputy Glover to answer the numerical question about sole-source contracts.

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you.

The short answer this time is that 98% of our procurements were competitive in the network space, and 2% were non-competitive. The dollar value of that 2% was \$4.8 million.

Mr. Matthew Green: To which companies was that awarded?

Mr. Paul Glover: I do not have the breakdown for the non-competitive at that level at my fingertips.

Mr. Matthew Green: Just to be clear, so that we're on the record, is your interpretation of non-competitive the same as the generally accepted definition of a sole-source contract, or is there a semantic gap in what I'm asking and how you're answering?

Mr. Paul Glover: If I can follow up, I know the question is directed through the minister to me. There are no semantics here. We follow Government of Canada definitions around competitive and non-competitive, sole-source, etc., so I will be using the standard government interpretation consistent with policy.

Mr. Matthew Green: Is it only 2%?

Mr. Paul Glover: Two per cent were non-competitive.

Mr. Matthew Green: Would that be in terms of 2% of the contracts that went out or in the total spending? How does that compare with total spending from a budgetary perspective?

Mr. Paul Glover: That would be on the spend. We netted it up around the total dollar value, and 98% of the total spend was procured through competitive means, while 2% or \$4.8 million of the total was through non-competitive means. Again, I know this is controversial for the committee, but even when targeted, if it is competed amongst a number of vendors, that is considered competitive as per government policy.

Mr. Matthew Green: What would that represent in terms of the overall spend?

Mr. Paul Glover: I don't have that breakdown, but that would be part of the 98%.

Mr. Matthew Green: I think Ms. Vignola in her previous line of questioning certainly brought up some basic questions that average Canadians would also want to know about. So that we're not losing the plot in terms of where we are with Cisco and how some technologies tend to dominate the IT sphere, I think that it would be incumbent on Mr. Glover to return back with that. Within the 98%, I request that he return back with an analysis of how much of that would be related to the scenario that Ms. Vignola laid out. It doesn't just have to be Cisco. It could be others where the third party vendors are essentially doubling back to the same technologies.

I'll continue. How do we ensure that while we transition away from legacy systems we're looking at a wider variety of vendors?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that. A commitment that I have as a minister is absolutely that we have opportunities for open and transparent procurement right across the vendor space, and that's why, as I mentioned, we're working with some of the associations representing indigenous, Black, and women-owned businesses.

I also quoted the CEO of Technation, Angela Mondou, earlier, and here's another aspect of her thoughts about this. She said that the pandemic has been an instrumental catalyst to driving digital transformation and bolstering collaboration between government and the tech sector in support of our nation's economic recovery and resilience.

We work closely with the stakeholder community, and we're very interested in providing opportunities to a variety of businesses.

Mr. Matthew Green: If I could, as my time winds down...and I certainly wouldn't wish to be as sharp as our committee colleague Ms. Harder. I'll finish with a comment. It's not a question, so you don't have to respond. What I didn't hear there was a really compelling plan for how to move away from legacy programs.

This is an "I" statement. I feel as though given how far we are into this and given that the last time you were here and even in our first meetings we discussed just how redundant some of this old technology was, I would have hoped that two years into this we would have a clearer plan and not just the talking points. I'm just saying this as a comment. I'll share with you that it's my opinion that the talking points don't really fully address some of the substantive issues we're bringing up within this committee.

I'll hand back the rest of my time and hope that the minister can provide us greater clarity and higher specificity, given the technological nature of her file.

Thank you.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

There goes the timer for your six minutes at this very point.

We've finished the first round. We'll now go to the second round. We'll start with Ms. Harder for five minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, one of the things that you said earlier during my line of questioning was this: "We work with associations of Black, BIPOC, indigenous and women-led businesses so that we can understand their areas of strength and interest and we can make sure that our procurement is as diverse as possible."

I'm wondering, Minister, if you'd be willing to share with this committee information regarding any contracts that have been awarded to members of the list that you provided there.

Hon. Joyce Murray: As I mentioned previously, Ms. Harder, I am not involved in individual contract decisions or procurements.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you. I understand that, but through your department, can you not provide us with a list of individuals who would fit the description that I just read back to you?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'm very happy to ask Deputy Glover to provide any information that he can on that level.

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you, Minister.

In 2019, to indigenous-led businesses, we issued 117 contracts worth \$35.8 million. Our systems at that time did not identify businesses as being Black or women-led. We are working to update that so that we will have more complete information not just on the associations we're working with but also on the contracts awarded to them.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Glover, it's so good that you're here. Thank you.

Minister, one of the other things you said was that you're following a "clear set of processes" whenever a sole-source contract is granted. Mr. Glover echoed these words. However, my question is not for him; it's for you.

Minister, would you be able to provide the committee with a copy of this clear set of processes?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Absolutely.

Ms. Rachael Harder: That's perfect.

Maybe you could provide a short description of what that clear process looks like. What criteria do you look at in order to determine if a sole-source contract should be granted?

Hon. Joyce Murray: We're happy to follow up with that.

Ms. Harder, I think another impressive aspect of what we're doing from a procurement perspective is that in the fiscal year 2019-20, 97% of SSC contracts were awarded to SMEs. It was 97%, and I believe that—

Ms. Rachael Harder: I'm sorry, Minister, but my question had nothing to do with that. I was wondering if you could expand on what criteria you use in order to determine the granting of a sole-source contract. You said it was done only under exceptional circumstances. Why? What criteria do you use, then, to determine what, in fact, is an exceptional circumstance?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for that question. I'll ask Deputy Glover to provide the criteria that are used within SSC.

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you for the question.

It is operational requirements. It would have to do with the urgency and the criticality of the government infrastructure and the services to Canadians. If that infrastructure is at risk, or there are limited numbers of vendors who are able to provide the support and services, those are examples of the process that is used.

It goes through a governance committee, at which it is challenged and reviewed by people outside SSC to make sure that we are objective and transparent in what we are doing.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Minister, are the criteria used for granting a sole-source contract consistent each time a contract is awarded?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question. That's the purpose of having a framework for accountability on these matters. It would be consistent.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Minister, who determines the list of criteria or the framework that you're referencing?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question. It is Deputy Glover who can answer in detail how it was put together.

Ms. Rachael Harder: No, I just was wondering who signs off on it.

• (1655)

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'll ask Deputy Glover to answer your question.

Ms. Rachael Harder: No, I'm sorry, Minister—

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Obviously we can ask questions through you, Mr. Chair, but the minister can refer particular questions specifically to the deputy. Obviously the minister has repeatedly said she's not involved in particular and specific procurements. I'm wondering about the reason the minister keeps being interrupted.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

I will ask the minister to answer her question.

Hon. Joyce Murray: To answer the question about sole-source contracting, SSC follows Treasury Board policies on that matter.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay, so ultimately it's the Treasury Board that signs off on it, then?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Treasury Board Secretariat sets the policies, and they're followed by all the departments.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you. I'm so glad you were able to provide that insight.

I'm also wondering, then, about this matter. What we know is that granting sole-source contracts actually racks up the price, and ultimately this price is laid at the feet of taxpayers. Does that concern you at all, in terms of making sure you're getting the best deal possible for the Canadian taxpayer?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I am utterly committed to getting effective transformation at the best possible cost to the taxpayers, Ms. Harder. Every day we are thinking about how we can approach this very complex task of updating and modernizing infrastructure and connectivity, which was really in bad shape in 2016. We've invested billions since then as a government, yet we're not finished the updating that's required. We are working very hard to bring our infrastructure into the 21st century.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Jowhari for five minutes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Minister. It's good to see you. Thank you for the great work that you and your department have been doing over the last while, especially during the pandemic, getting the information that many Canadians need in a rapid way.

I'm going to continue the line of questioning that my colleague Mr. MacKinnon started. You started talking about the CDS, the Canadian Digital Service. In budget 2021, you were asking for about \$88 million for Canadian Digital Service over four years to continue to design and deliver digital government services. You touched on one of them, the benefit finder.

Can you provide us with some examples of projects that have already been done, saying what specifically some of the projects are that are planned to benefit from that \$88 million?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

At the heart, what we're trying to do is to improve the experience Canadians have when they do a transaction or receive a service from the Government of Canada.

There are many ways that we're thinking about what this goal is going to take and what we can do and how CDS's talents can be applied to it. My goal is that there will be no more need to have paper and PDFs and faxes to do a transaction with the Government of Canada. This is one of a number of changes I'd like to see.

A project that CDS is working on is called “Notify”. That is a solution whereby departments use an API, which is a platform. It can be used right across government to very quickly and easily email or text updates to Canadians. We’ve already used it now millions of time. The ministry of health has been using it to update people with health information on COVID, but it’s potentially a tool that all departments can use for something like 5¢ or 6¢ per communication. Rather than using mail or call centres to which people have to call in and wait online to get an update on their transaction, they can be notified in a timely way.

That’s just one of the projects that CDS is leading on.

• (1700)

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Great.

I just want to compliment you also on budget.gc.ca. I think that portal proved to be extremely beneficial during the budget consultation after the budget. It pointed the user right into the measures. There are 288 measures highlighted. They point to the amount, to the department and to the timing. I found that very beneficial. Most of my constituents in Richmond Hill are now avid users of budget.gc.ca.

You talked about the fact that we are now interfacing with a lot more Canadians. Canadians are using these applications. With the use of applications comes the sharing of data and with the sharing of data, specifically personal data, naturally comes the protection of this personal information. What measures are our government—especially your department—taking to ensure that we respect that privacy, ensure that their data is protected and also make sure that when we need disaggregated data, we have access to it?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

I think one of the things that we have learned from the pandemic situation is that we can move quickly, but also we recognize that cyber-attacks are becoming more sophisticated, so we have to continually update. That’s exactly what we’re doing. We take the cybersecurity of our IT systems incredibly seriously.

For example, one initiative is called the secure cloud enablement and defence project. As we move work into the cloud to be more cost-efficient and to utilize the data faster, we need to make sure that the connecting points between the departments and the cloud services are secure as well. That’s what the SCED project is about.

In this budget 2021, we’re also committing \$456.3 million over five years to Shared Services Canada and the Communications Security Establishment, or CSE, so that they can continue to work to keep Canadians’ information secure.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister and Mr. Jowhari.

We’ll now go to Ms. Vignola for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Glover, earlier you said that 98% of contracts had been awarded following a competitive process and that 2%, representing \$4.8 million, had not been. On May 11, we learned that Cisco had received an untendered contract for \$5 million.

I do not understand how 2% of the contracts could have a value of \$4.8 million, but a single contract awarded on May 11 be worth \$5 million. Can you explain this?

Does the network development and renewal plan exist or does it depend on Cisco’s financial needs?

Those are my two questions.

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you for those questions.

[*English*]

I would like to first reiterate that we do not work with Cisco on requirements. We work with departments on the requirements and that is based on their operational needs. We do consult with industry—all industries—to see what technologies they have available that can best meet the requirements, but it starts with the department, their requirements and their operational needs.

With respect to the \$100 million that seems to be floating around, I can assure the member that there are no specific plans in my department. We’re seeing that same chatter on social media and other places. Frankly, right now what we are moving forward that equates to that number is an IT refresh to replace outdated technology. That is not targeted just at network.

We do have 90 million dollars’ worth of procurement that we are looking to advance at this time. That is targeted at things like outdated Windows and Linux servers and upgrades to the mainframes. It is quite a comprehensive IT refresh program. That is based on the urgent needs of end-of-life technology that exists. That is really the major procurement that comes anywhere close. That will not go to one organization. That will go to many different vendors.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vignola and Mr. Glover.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: What is being done to properly determine how the money will be spent if there is no plan?

[*English*]

The Chair: Two and a half minutes go by very quickly.

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, that question didn’t come through translated in the last 30 seconds of Ms. Vignola’s intervention.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Matthew Green: I don’t know what happened there, but had I heard the question I might have offered an answer in part of my section of the question.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Clerk, can we just check with translation? Mr. Green was correct. I did not hear any translation while Ms. Vignola was speaking.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Paul Cardegna): I will check with our technicians.

Mr. Matthew Green: Let it go on the record I am an ardent defender of the francophone language here in the House of Commons.

With that being said, if we can find out about the translation, and at the appropriate time I would like to hear what her last question was.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, I've been informed the interpretation is working. You may just want to ask if the committee wishes for Madame Vignola to repeat her comment.

The Chair: Certainly, I will ask the committee.

Is there consent for Ms. Vignola to at least repeat her comment?

Ms. Vignola, would you just quickly repeat your comment?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: How can we be sure that the money will be spent properly if there is no deployment plan? We are talking about several hundreds of millions of dollars that are spent annually.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vignola. That's a great question. If Mr. Glover or the minister can respond to the committee in writing, that would be greatly appreciated, unless Mr. Green wants to follow up with that question in his time frame.

We'll now go to two and a half minutes with Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you for the indulgence. I will allow that to come back in writing.

I'd like to know a little bit more about what steps the department has taken to expand the interoperability and to ensure the government does not become overly dependent on one particular IT company.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I interpret interoperability to mean that we move past the era of siloed departments, where a department would be putting together its own application for providing a service that may be the same type of service that another department provides in a different context. We're trying to do what—

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm sorry. To be clear, it's not so much on the service. It's on the actual IT side so that the different technical aspects can work together rather than having, basically, a monopoly or a monopolized IT service.

Hon. Joyce Murray: We're working at that on both levels. For example, Sign In Canada would be a way that a person only needs to sign in and authenticate themselves once, rather than every time they are interacting with the government.

With respect to the infrastructure side of that, I'll turn it over to either Mr. Brouillard or Mr. Glover to answer the question about interoperability of equipment.

Mr. Paul Glover: Very briefly, we are attempting to increase the number that are truly open. We talked about targeted, where it's competed amongst. We have also been increasing the open, pure open, where we are agnostic to the technology that comes back. There have been quite a few areas where we have moved 100% off

of Cisco. Wi-Fi used to be completely Cisco. It is now predominantly HPE and Extreme networks.

Remote access was predominantly Cisco. That is now a service we get mostly through Bell, along with a few other providers. In-building we've added Extreme networks, Ruckus and Juniper. We are trying to expand the opportunities very deliberately to allow for that interoperability.

I would say that we are guided by the best practice, which is not to have too many vendors but to have a balance so that we are not reliant on one vendor. However, too many vendors create interoperability problems even when they claim to be interoperable. Maintaining that interoperability as they do upgrades and as the systems evolve over time tends to be a very real challenge. We want to make sure we are never reliant on one. We are deliberate in trying to expand, but we don't want to go to huge numbers either. We try to find a balance dependent upon the technology and who the leaders are in that marketplace.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Glover.

Thank you, Mr. Green.

We will now go to Mr. Paul-Hus, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Minister.

I know the questions can sometimes be complicated because they are technical, but I have a fairly simple one for you.

I would like to know whether you agree that Huawei is a threat to Canada's telecommunications infrastructure.

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: That's a question that our defence minister and public safety minister are investigating, as we make a determination with respect to aspects of Huawei's future service.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you.

I know that for several years we have been told that a report is expected. At the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security and the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, we have even received answers already from the security services. According to the 2020-2021 Departmental Plan for Shared Services Canada, you are responsible for modernizing telecommunications and you are going to eliminate all landlines except for essential services.

On that point, Minister, can you confirm today that the department will not purchase Huawei equipment to replace the telephone equipment, whether through Public Services and Procurement Canada or otherwise?

Can you make that commitment to me today?

[English]

Hon. Joyce Murray: What I will commit to is taking the security of our IT systems, networks and the information stored extremely seriously. I'm not going to comment on a specific company, but we do have a process in place to ensure that the goods and services that we buy are as safe from cybersecurity threats as possible. We also work very closely with the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security. SSC and the chief information officer are key partners in that centre.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I see that you are reading your notes. I do not need that. I will move on to the other questions.

You should know, but do you actually know that there is infrastructure in northern Canada right now that uses Huawei?

Have you been briefed on this?

[English]

Hon. Joyce Murray: No, I haven't been briefed on that. At SSC, we are being very careful that the security of Canadians' data is not compromised.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Right.

I am telling you that in 2019, Huawei announced that it would partner with ICE Wireless and Iristel to provide high-speed Internet access to 20 Arctic communities and 70 rural and remote regions in Quebec by 2025. This will affect about 200,000 people who live in those areas.

Is this also information that you did not have? Did you know this, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Joyce Murray: We have no partnerships or contracts with Huawei.

I'm happy to have Deputy Glover speak more about plans in that regard.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: You are telling me that the government has no agreement with Huawei.

Do you know whether Huawei has deployed its network in northern Canada with ICE Wireless?

The Government of Canada had to give authorization for the deployment. Are you aware of that or not?

[English]

Mr. Paul Glover: Mr. Chair, I'll continue the minister's answer.

Through our supply chain integrity, on behalf of the government and the purchasing we are doing, there is no Huawei in our systems. With respect to other external providers, who may be providing services outside of what I procure for the government, we are unable to comment further. Within the government systems, there's none.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Mr. Glover.

The minister is not aware at all of how that is happening.

Can you tell us whether Huawei is going to be excluded from the process for purchasing the equipment for installing the new Government of Canada telecommunications systems, yes or no?

• (1715)

[English]

Mr. Paul Glover: Very briefly, we would use our supply chain integrity process, when vetting all providers who would bid on our equipment. We would not make a predetermined decision. We would look at the supply chain integrity of every vendor we work with, and that would drive the outcome of any and all procurements.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

Thank you, Mr. Glover.

We will now go to Mr. Kusmierczyk for five minutes.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister. It's always wonderful to see you at committee.

I wanted to turn the discussion to the future of work, and Shared Services obviously is very much a future-focused organization. How did COVID-19, in your opinion, change the priorities and the goals that SSC had in terms of supporting their public servants to work from home?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

First, I would say the COVID pandemic really intensified our determination to modernize and transform our IT systems and also showed what can be done when we're focused and are able to really throw everything at providing a solution—because that's exactly what SSC did.

I want to just reinforce how proud I am of the public servants in digital government and the type of commitment that they showed.

Second, I'm working up a strategy and a road map going forward. We haven't actually made that public yet, but we have a very coordinated and, I would say, strategic approach. We're not just looking at how we modernize big legacy systems—and goodness knows we inherited many of those—but we're also looking at how we can improve the service experience that Canadians have when they do their transactions.

Third, we have to shift to platform approaches, which I've spoken about a couple of times. That is a complex task that SSC is very involved with, and digital government provides direction and policy advice on that.

Lastly, we're tackling the barriers to change that are inherent in a siloed ministerial structure of government.

It's not one thing or another. We're looking to move down a path, a road map of change that will really transform how the Government of Canada operates with respect to digital. I think Canadians deserve no less. We want to be providing services with the kind of experience they have from some services in the private sector. We want to do that kind of job for people in Canada, as the Government of Canada.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: You pretty much answered my second question as well, which is how we will support departments as COVID-19 restrictions ease. You've answered that by talking about what a digitally enabled workforce means to you, and what you think the public service will look like after the pandemic.

Is there anything else that maybe you haven't had a chance to provide us with in terms of a glimpse of what that public service workforce could look like after the restrictions ease?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

I think we still have a lot of work to do to bring our systems, our tools, into the modern era.

One thing that happened because of COVID-19, when public servants overnight had to move to working from home when all of their tools and equipment were in their offices, is that we very quickly rolled out digital collaboration tools like Microsoft 365, which they hadn't had access to before.

In 2016, when we became government, it was shocking how many public servants were still using decades' old land lines and just didn't have tools to enable them to work together, certainly not remotely. That's one thing that will be different. People will be able to do their jobs, potentially, in a hybrid system, where they are sometimes in the office and sometimes at home.

I also want to point out that one of the big challenges has been the proliferation of data centres that are aging and create risk for the applications that are housed in them. This has been a very big priority for Shared Services Canada. It has been closing down many of those smaller data centres and creating enterprise centres or cloud services so that the applications can be more cost-effectively housed, more secure and more effective for the departments that are using them.

That work is ongoing and has a number of years still to go, but we have \$37.3 million in our estimates right now to continue that work.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

With that, we come to the end of the hour and, Minister, we'd like to thank you for your appearance before the committee today.

Hon. Joyce Murray: It's always a pleasure.

The Chair: With that said, we look forward to seeing you again when it comes to the supplementary estimates.

We will now continue with the officials for the second hour. As I look at the time and being respectful of that and the fact that we would like to cover the issue of the main estimates at the end of the meeting today, I'm going to say that we'll go with the first round of six minutes each, but in the second round, we will go to three minutes for everybody, and we will go the Conservatives, the Liberals, then the Bloc and then the NDP. That way, hopefully, we will be within our time constraints to move forward.

We'll start with Ms. Harder.

I'm sorry. I believe that she's changed that to Mr. Paul-Hus, if I'm correct.

Ms. Rachael Harder: That's correct.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Paul-Hus for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Glover.

I would like to come back to Huawei. The TVA network in Quebec broadcast a one-hour documentary entitled *La brèche*, in which experts explained the extent of Huawei's deployment in Canada. There were even national security experts who said in the report that the battle had been lost when it came to telecommunications and that Huawei had truly taken control of the network. I am not talking about the 5G network; I am talking about the network that is in place right now.

I would like to come back to the fact that you have to change the Government of Canada telecommunication systems.

Can you confirm that Huawei will be excluded from the network so the government can start protecting itself?

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you for your question.

[English]

I want to be as clear as possible. I know it's implied in the question, but my mandate is for government only, so there are other things going on in broader society I'm not able to comment on.

With respect to all procurement for the Government of Canada, our policy is to apply full supply chain integrity end to end, and only companies that are able to pass that supply chain integrity will be allowed into the government ecosystem. It would be inappropriate for me to predetermine the outcome of any of those supply chain integrity processes, but to date, I can reassure you that we have no engagements with Huawei.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you.

My second question is as follows.

Can you explain why a government like the Government of Ontario, which is inviting bids for computer networking, is accepting competitors of Cisco, such as Juniper and Extreme, but at Shared Services Canada you are still concentrating your purchasing with Cisco?

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you for your question.

It is not appropriate for me to talk about matters that involve other levels of government.

[*English*]

I feel it would be inappropriate for me to speculate on the motives of other levels of government. I'm happy to testify with respect to my mandate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Glover, excuse me. We often hear answers like this in various committees, but you are in the Government of Canada, in Shared Services Canada. You handle equipment renewal, computer and telephone equipment maintenance. When we talk about purchasing, however, you shift responsibility to another department.

The impression we end up with is that it is never the person's fault when there are problems.

Do you not have a responsibility? Your minister has left, but is your department, Shared Services Canada, not responsible for providing advice about purchasing and making sure that the Government of Canada gets the most effective equipment?

Is that not how it works? Do you work in isolation?

Please explain the situation quickly to me.

• (1725)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Glover: Absolutely. Shared Services is responsible for all IT-related procurement—email, telephone, compute data centres—for the entire Government of Canada. We do all of that on behalf of all ministries. Some things, like our cloud services, are available to other levels of government, and when they ask, we are happy to provide advice to them.

I might ask Marc Brouillard, who sits on the CIO council, which has the provinces and territories, if there's anything he would like to add.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I am coming back to my initial question about purchases. I am asking whether you can purchase equipment other than Cisco and you are telling me that it is not your responsibility. You are referring to Public Services and Procurement Canada, if I understand correctly.

For your part, however, you do not have a word to say about the equipment you need?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Glover: You have my apologies, Mr. Chair, if I didn't address that part of the question.

Without a doubt, we do not have a particular bias for any one vendor. We have a bias for the requirements and the outcome. Our responsibility is to keep the systems up and running.

I fully acknowledge, which was part of the material I shared with committee members earlier, that we inherited an awful lot of Cisco equipment from the departments—absolutely—so when it comes to break/fix, there is an awful lot of like-for-like Cisco replacement. I fully acknowledge that, but as I've pointed out, moving forward we are increasing the open competition.

There are four areas—Wi-Fi, remote access, load balancers and firewall—where Cisco was the predominant supplier. They are no longer the predominant supplier. In some cases, they are not a supplier at all in those areas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Could you give the committee the complete list of the contracts that have been awarded to Cisco over the last five years, please?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Glover: There's none. We do not deal with Cisco. We deal with resellers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Who are these resellers?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Glover: A number of vendors are resellers. We would be happy to provide that list. For clarity, we do not deal directly with Cisco. We deal with resellers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I would like to get the list of resellers so we can understand the organization and understand how the connection is made between Cisco and these resellers.

My time is up.

Thank you.

Mr. Paul Glover: Yes, we will do that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

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

Mr. Francis Drouin: Is it not six minutes, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You are correct. I apologize. Yes, it's six minutes, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you.

The Chair: I appreciate that clarification.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I want to thank all the witnesses for being before this committee once again.

Mr. Glover, I want to touch on interoperability and the challenges that are faced by SSC.

How do you see addressing interoperability and making sure that SSC is not locked into particular technologies that don't allow that communication-to-communication between technologies within the network?

Mr. Paul Glover: The first is through the digital standards that the office of the chief information officer, Marc's office, has established. There is a call to adopt open standards. That will be driving our work moving forward, so anybody who is able to comply with those open standards.... It's definitely a move that we are making, to comply with that standard.

The second, which I want to be very frank about, is that as an enterprise service provider, we don't want to be reliant on one vendor. That creates lock-in. That is a dangerous place to be. As I have shared, with previous advice from Gartner and others, the industry best practice is to diversify a little bit where you can, but it is a little bit. We would not want 30 or 40 different vendors that we are working with. While it may be interoperable, it requires different training and different skill sets. We have seen instances where it has not worked where things were said to be interoperable.

For mainframe memory that was certified, we went with an open competition. We plugged it in and it couldn't work. The vendor couldn't make it work. They tried and tried. At the last minute, with literally days before the department needed that mainframe memory working, we had to do an emergency purchase. There were other instances where the equipment throttled the backups and they were working at one-eighth the speed. While it was interoperable, the algorithm on the software was different. At one-eighth the speed, we were running out of time to complete backups.

Interoperability is important. It encourages competition, but it is not a guarantee. That is why we will introduce it and we will embrace it, but it will be limited. I want to be very up front and transparent.

Madame Vignola asked a question about the plans. Again, I would point back to the documents I shared with you. We are trying to be incredibly transparent with industry about where we are going. The network way forward document lays out what we think the issues are so that industry can propose to us what they think are state-of-the-art solutions, and we can work with them to pick the vendors of choice that we will work with moving forward.

I know there's a sense that we're overly reliant on Cisco, but I again want to point out that we have moved away from that in four broad categories. There are also times when it's open and competitive and Cisco has won. We will continue to use those processes moving forward.

• (1730)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Just so I understand, when you say you've moved away from Cisco, do you have percentages in terms of those network blocks, like in the WAN space or in the LAN space? I think you and I chatted about this in November. What I'm hearing from industry is....

SSC shared with us back in 2014 their plans on networking procurement. Now we're back at ground zero, starting all over again, and SSC continues to talk about the legacy systems that they've inherited. Why should we believe SSC now? What measures are you going to put in place to ensure you can really have a two-OEM environment within the network blocks?

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you for the question.

First, we're going to be transparent and document it. That's why we have the "Network Modernization Way Forward" document. In addition to that, we have a lower-level, more technical reference document moving forward. We have regular industry days where we open these up. We work with industry to hear their feedback on it, to update them and to guide our processes moving forward. We're not just having meetings. We're documenting them, we're publishing the papers and we have regular interventions and discussions with industry. All industry is open to that.

Through the pilots with Technation, we're making specific efforts to reach vendors we haven't traditionally reached. Not stopping there—because I understand the concerns that have been directed at my organization—I instructed the organization not to apply the national security exemption universally but to do it on a case-by-case basis. The national security exemption was previously applied to everything. It's no longer the case. This has resulted in more open, transparent processes. It has also resulted in more open competition. That's how we've been able in the last two years to move away in the four areas.

Again, I go back to Cisco, which had 80% of the firewalls. It's now Fortinet that has 95% of the firewalls. Load balancers were Cisco. They have no load balancers. It's F5 and A10. I could go on. That's not to say that Cisco isn't a big player in our network, but when we see the opportunities, we seize them.

Last, through our governance, as I said earlier, we have a process wherein all the requirements for like-for-like are reviewed, and not just by my staff. We have an external industry expert who sits in on that process to make sure we are adhering to industry norms and standards.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

We will now go to Ms. Vignola for six minutes.

• (1735)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Glover, the pandemic has meant that a lot of processes have been accelerated and some mechanisms have been put in place very rapidly when we thought it would take several years to get there. We are now realizing that we are capable of making these changes rapidly.

What prevented us from doing this before the pandemic? What hindered this progress?

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

It's a very interesting question, in my opinion. I believe that in the past, we were focusing solely on scheduling cost risks. Everything was about "give me the perfect plan, contain the costs". We weren't behaving in an agile way, and we weren't focusing on the outcome risks.

Through the pandemic, we still managed cost, but we were far more aggressive on schedule. We didn't wait for the perfect schedule. We focused on the cost of not doing something, and that forced us to accelerate. I will be very candid. The early days were bumpy. They were messy. They were not perfect, but twice a week, we would literally sit down on the network and say, "What did we do on Sunday night? How did it work? Let's make changes on Wednesday." We iterated quickly to fix our mistakes, to make things better faster. If we can continue to behave that way, I think we will be able to keep up this pace.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Right.

So we are able to change things and get the machine going rapidly.

We know there are network and storage problems, as well as potential security problems. If the pandemic disappeared tomorrow and we continued to work well and do it rapidly in order to find solutions, how long would it take for us to solve a lot of our problems and modernize our operations?

Mr. Paul Glover: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for her question.

Unfortunately, my answer is not simple.

[*English*]

It's because of the complexity. In some areas, like on Microsoft Teams, where the OCIO had personas and we were able to move very quickly to deploy the technology, it was easy. In other areas where we have systems—not the hardware but the systems—that need to be modernized to be able to operate in the cloud in a cloud-native way, those will take longer. We've been working with the OCIO, under their leadership.

Marc, maybe you'd like to speak about the work we've been doing to understand the portfolio of applications that need upgrading and the plans to do that.

Some things, Madame Vignola, can be done quickly, but other things will take more time, particularly in the application space where we need to rebuild applications with departments.

Marc.

Mr. Marc Brouillard (Acting Chief Information Officer of Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you, Paul.

[*Translation*]

Good afternoon, Ms. Vignola.

Mr. Glover is talking about the condition or state of the applications in our organization. We have a database of all the applications and we monitor the shape they are in.

A few years ago, they scored about 23 or 24%, and they now score 36%. There has been progress in this regard. The progress is getting faster. However, this progress has to make the needs of businesses and Canadians the priority.

We cannot modernize everything overnight. That solution does not work; we will be sawing off the branch we are sitting on. We have to target the applications that need to be modernized in order to achieve better performance for the government and Canadians.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: What is the percentage of the network that has been modernized? I am not talking about applications, I am talking only about the network.

Mr. Marc Brouillard: I think Mr. Glover could answer your question better.

What I will say is that for our part, we are responsible for applications.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Mr. Paul Glover: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for her question.

This is a continuous improvement approach, because of security and technological progress.

● (1740)

[*English*]

For example, 5G is coming, so we will never be finished with the network. We are constantly introducing security upgrades and patches. We need to introduce two-factor authentication. The future is in zero-trust networks, the use of 5G and other technologies.

My answer to you is that my work will never be done in this space. It will constantly be improving to take advantage.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Was it the departments that asked to continue working with this technology, or was it suggested to them, strongly or otherwise, that they use it?

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you for your question.

In reality, we had a conversation with them to determine their needs and to talk about the state of the art.

[English]

We try to work with them to make sure that they understand what we believe is the best technology for them. They also have people who are used to operating that technology. We try to come to a common understanding.

There is a process that it then has to go to—through the enterprise architecture review board, particularly for new systems—to make sure that it is compliant with future direction. That is at the enterprise level.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Glover.

Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

We will now go to Mr. Green for six minutes.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

It's always a great opportunity to learn a little bit about whatever it is we're studying. Today, obviously, it's IT and digital services. I feel like, in some ways, having heard a lot of the questions and the juxtaposition, particularly with Cisco and Huawei.... Just so that I understand, would these not be competing interests? Does Huawei offer what Cisco offers in the international global market for IT, Mr. Glover?

Mr. Paul Glover: I am not all that up to speed on Huawei relative to the other vendors that we deal with on a more frequent basis. You have my apologies.

Mr. Matthew Green: No, that's okay because it appeared to me that....

I guess I'll ask this another way. What would be some other major competitors that could potentially compete with Cisco? What I'm trying to get to is this: Is this just a case of a company that has grown so big that it has monopolized, in some ways, the market? Has it cornered the market? What other direct competitors would be like-for-like if they were to come forward and offer IT solutions?

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you. I'm definitely more comfortable answering the question when it's posed that way.

I think it is generally accepted that, years ago, Cisco had a large share of the marketplace, and I think that is representative of what we inherited. I would again point members back to the documents that I shared with you, where we tried to be very transparent about when SSC was created and what we inherited.

We do see that the competition is improving. We do see the adoption of open source standards making it easier. People talked earlier about Juniper Networks, Ruckus and Extreme Networks. They are competitors. Those are people who are finding their way into our ecosystem.

In some cases, we consider some of these vendors to be very much world class, and we've moved entirely to them. I would use the firewall example I spoke to earlier with Fortinet, where they are the vast majority of how we handle our firewalls. That used to be all Cisco. It is now almost all Fortinet. We are seeing these niche providers, and they are quite capable.

It is a transition that is occurring in the marketplace—absolutely.

Mr. Matthew Green: As it relates to legacy technologies, I feel like it was one of the first meetings I had on the Hill, and I threw it out there because I had heard that it might be the case that some of our systems might actually still include DOS. Is it still the case that we have some IT systems that might still use DOS?

Mr. Paul Glover: Mr. Chair, I will ask Marc to elaborate if I can't help.

If only it was just DOS. There are some applications that are as old as I am.

Mr. Marc Brouillard: Thank you, Paul.

Yes, we joke that some of the systems that run the old age security are ready for old age security. These are mainframe solutions that were written way before DOS on COBOL and other legacy platforms. There's probably some DOS in there somewhere. I don't know of any specific examples, but it would not surprise me. We have some of everything somewhere within the government.

● (1745)

Mr. Matthew Green: Given that in the past several months we've seen major IT cyber-attacks against Microsoft and SolarWinds, and we've had significant impacts on governments and businesses around the world, how concerned should Canadians be that our aging IT infrastructure is increasingly vulnerable to these attacks, particularly referencing that we might have some old age, OAS-type infrastructure out there?

Mr. Paul Glover: Mr. Chair, I'll start, and I would ask Marc to complement my answer.

I really don't want to jinx this, but we are very fortunate, through the creation of Shared Services Canada many years ago, to have consolidated what we call our “perimeter defence”. We go to great lengths to make sure that it continues to be as robust as possible.

We have extensive programs to patch, and that is part of why, when we talk about interoperability, there are times when I become a little hesitant, because we need to move at speed at scale when some of these events take place. Having to work with too many vendors can compromise our ability to work at speed at scale.

That is an example of that balance that I'm constantly trying to strike between competition, value for money and the risks that come with that, with respect to interoperability and moving at speed at scale, but—

Mr. Matthew Green: I'll accept that, but what I do have a hard time accepting is that I'm almost two years in now and we're talking about these old systems, going back to the DOS and some of these old ones. How high on your priority list is it to have these switched over? Do they present a risk?

Mr. Paul Glover: They are some of our highest priorities. Security is the number one priority, particularly as we move to digital. Second after that is modernizing. These systems may be getting close to their end of life. They need to be replaced. They need to be upgraded. They may have single points of failure. We work to build redundancy and those sorts of things. It is absolutely, from SSC's point of view, the priority.

I know that the chief information officer for Canada probably has more to say.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

Mr. Marc Brouillard: Absolutely. Security is paramount. Monitoring for those risks is also paramount.

The interesting thing is that sometimes, when the technology gets so old, they become things that hackers don't go after anymore. The biggest risk is the things that are widely deployed but are not patched and are not on the current versions. That's some of the stuff that Paul's organization and the CCCS monitor very closely, because we have to be aware of what the threats are and make sure the systems are patched to accommodate them.

Mr. Matthew Green: Do we still have stuff hanging out on floppy discs? Are we still using the—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Thank you, Mr. Brouillard. I appreciate that.

That ends the first round. We'll now go to the second round, which will be the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Bloc and then the NDP, with three minutes each.

We will start with Mr. McCauley, with three minutes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Witnesses, thank you very much for your comments. There were a lot better answers in this second half.

Mr. Glover, I have a quick question for you, and maybe you can provide it to the committee later, because I don't expect you to have it. I know you didn't set the definition of "sole source", but when we're directing suppliers to use a Cisco product, I know that's not included in the sole-source part.

Can you provide the committee with what percentage of that 98% is competitively bid but goes to bid with a named product, whether it's Cisco, Microsoft, etc.? You can just get back to us later.

I'm going to give you a break for the rest of my time, because I'd like to introduce my motion, which I have on order from Friday, please.

I can go ahead and read it into the record, or what would you like, sir?

The Chair: Mr. McCauley, if you want to read that into the record, please go ahead.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: This one we put on the Order Paper a couple of days ago:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the Committee send for, from Global Affairs Canada, the unredacted documents relating to the contract to Mr. Kyle Kemper for the Crypto Valley Blockchain Conference in Zug Switzerland; that

the documents be provided in both official languages no later than 6:00 p.m. ET, on Monday, May 31, 2021; and that the documents be posted on the committee's website.

I will note that Mr. Kemper has already commented on this motion and that he asks that the information be provided. In fact, he says it's a great example of how we need more accountability and transparency in government. I'm hoping that we can get this approved quickly and get it put on our website, so that we can move forward with the rest of today's committee meeting.

• (1750)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

With that said, I will ask for input. I see that Mr. Drouin's hand is up.

Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'm a little, not shocked.... I'll just say I'm puzzled as to why Mr. McCauley would want the details of those contracts. It's pretty old news.

It was reported, I think, in July 2020. I'm wondering if he believes there were some kind of shenanigans that happened. He knows the procurement rules around contracts valued under \$25,000. They are under a delegated authority. The minister does not sign off on that. If he has concerns, Mr. McCauley knows very well he could have written to the procurement ombudsman, who could have done an investigation.

In fact, we had them before committee not too long ago, and they clearly outlined the steps they can take in order to look at that.

If Mr. McCauley is advancing this because he believes that contracts under \$25,000 should be transparent, then I would challenge him and say, well, perhaps he wants to see all contracts under \$25,000. They are published on a website, which is why we know that the value was around \$12,000, I believe.

I am confused as to the—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'll be happy to respond really quickly, if you wish.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'll cede my time at some point, Mr. McCauley.

I'm sure you'll get to—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: It will take me 10 seconds to respond. I'm not looking for the contracts. We're looking for the unredacted documents regarding the contract. It's not the contracts. I'm sorry if you misheard or misunderstood the motion.

We have two pages of an ATIP with things that were redacted that we'd like to have unredacted. That's all.

Mr. Francis Drouin: If I can continue, I understand that Mr. McCauley may be interested in an account number, for instance, that would be—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: No.

Mr. Francis Drouin: —included in a purchase order. Obviously, that would be part—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's not the case.

Mr. Francis Drouin: —of a contract.

The Chair: Order please, Mr. McCauley. I'd ask you to allow Mr. Drouin to finish.

Mr. Francis Drouin: If Mr. McCauley is interested in cellphone material, then obviously that would be redacted. If Mr. McCauley is interested in the private address of an individual, then obviously, as he knows full well, that would be redacted.

I am confused about just what the opposition Conservatives are trying to do. We have just gone through months and months of their trying to tarnish the reputation of the Prime Minister's family. They've gone through months in committee tarnishing the reputation of Prime Minister Trudeau's family. When we give these particular issues to non-partisan officials of Parliament, then we can have trust.

I would strongly encourage.... If Mr. McCauley is trying to say that there has been something wrong with this particular contract, which ministers don't even see and ministers' staff don't see—deputy ministers don't see it, assistant deputy ministers don't see it and I would argue that perhaps the deputy director general may see or sign off on it—I'm confused. As the government is spending \$300 billion on recovery and whatnot, as we've heard the opposition claim in the House of Commons, he's interested in a \$12,000 contract. Out of all the expenditures of the Government of Canada, Mr. McCauley is interested in a \$12,000 contract.

Mr. Chair, I have to say that we cannot support a motion such as this. They're trying to go on a wild goose chase and to make false accusations, but I'm confident that the processes worked. I'm confident that there has not been anything...and if Mr. McCauley really wants to get to the bottom of this, then I encourage him to write to the procurement ombudsman, which is a non-partisan arm of government. They can do an investigation, if he feels that there has been some type of wrongdoing with a particular contract.

I'll just leave it at that, Mr. Chair, and I'll cede my time to my colleague.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

I see that we have Mr. McCauley up to speak.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I appreciate Mr. Drouin's concerns. Unfortunately, he is so completely off base I'm not sure whether I could possibly even bring him back around to the logic.

At no point does this ask for the contract. At no point would the procurement ombudsman even look at this. We're asking for the unredacted documents. It has no private information. Mr. Kemper even asks that it be released unredacted.

We've seen how Global Affairs, when awarding the Nuctech contract to a Chinese state-owned company, pushed back against concerns from PSPC over security issues. We've seen other redacted documents come through. Just at the last meeting or two meetings ago, we were discussing at great length the redactions of Shared Services on the Gartner report.

This is about transparency. The person it's concerning has even stated publicly, just about a half-hour ago in the media, that he'd like to have the unredacted version.

Some of the things the bureaucrats have redacted are ridiculous. For example, "Mr. Kemper is a [blank] speaker with good knowledge". Again, it's about transparency; it has nothing to do with the contract. Mr. Drouin, who has been with us for six years on this committee, should know better. It has nothing to do with the contract. It's about the unredacted documents.

It's just two pages of documents, which I can see, from which someone has redacted stuff that clearly has zero to do with privacy, phone numbers, emails, credit cards or commercial confidences. Again, Mr. Kemper himself asks that it be released unredacted.

That's all it's about.

• (1755)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

I see Mr. Paul-Hus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would first like to say to my colleague, Mr. Drouin, that the opposition may ask the questions it likes about contracts, whatever the amount, be it \$12,000 or \$12 million. That is our choice.

On that point, I wonder why the Liberals are so sensitive, and why it causes them so many problems, if they think it is a small contract. Why could we not get the documents, which have been extensively redacted?

We simply want to know what is going on. Mr. Kemper is, in fact, the half-brother of the Prime Minister and these are legitimate questions that the opposition may ask. Given the value of the contract, I do not understand why the Liberals are so afraid of providing us with the information.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, go ahead.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Yes, we do have the right to ask anyone to present the details of a contract. Mr. Kemper was asked to participate in a conference where he has a certain level of expertise that's recognized in the country. He's the president of the Blockchain Association of Canada, and was asked to speak at a blockchain conference.

Even though every MP has a right to ask for these contracts to be brought forward, the question that Mr. McCauley hasn't answered is, why? What is the reason behind this?

Is it simply because there's a relation there? Is that the reason? When you look at why that person was asked to speak at the conference, they clearly have an expertise that's established in that field. If it's just because it's family, I don't think that is a good enough reason, and Mr. McCauley has not provided any reason why we should ask for that contract to be brought forward.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Drouin, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin: My colleague Mr. Paul-Hus has clearly explained the reason why I do not want to get involved in these games.

For almost a year, I have watched you, one by one, in the House of Commons, attack the mother and brother of the Prime Minister even before the Ethics Commissioner's investigation and report were finished. You have continued to attack the Prime Minister's family.

There are rules in politics. You do not attack politicians' families; you leave them out of all that. Unfortunately, you are acting like the Reform Party of Canada, which I watched in action for a very long time during the 1990s.

Because the Ethics Commissioner did not find in your favour, you are continuing your attacks. The Commissioner has made his decision; he cleared the Prime Minister and said he had done nothing wrong, but you are going to keep bringing the Prime Minister's family into it.

Do you think we are boneheads?

I see your game; you have put your cards on the table. I can see them very clearly. That is what I object to. At some point, the process has to be followed. If there are issues or you want to raise questions, I urge you to write to the Procurement Ombudsman. He is responsible for verifying whether there has been a breach in contracts for less than \$25,000. He has appeared before this committee. I encourage you to write to him. That way, we will get non-partisan information and we will not need to go through two or three months of political mudslinging aimed at a politician's family.

That is what I object to. I can see in your game, and I object to it. I am going to object to it until we are finished with it, because it makes no sense. At some point, the process has to be followed. We have to agree, at least, to have values and to respect one another.

I agree with my colleague Mr. Kusmierczyk. Mr. McCaulley has given no reason why he wants to examine this information. What does he suspect?

You are going to raise questions and say that another document has been redacted, despite the fact that you made a request. I would ask Mr. McCaulley a question. Is he asking for unredacted documents? Can he at least include provisions that protect personal information? He seems to have the document already, because he says there is no personal information. He seems to be able to read despite the redacting.

I put the question to my colleagues: is this what is really important at this time? What do you suspect? What reason do you have for making a motion like that, if not to attack the Prime Minister's family again, even if you were completely wrong on the question of the contract with WE?

I see that Mr. McCaulley and several of my colleagues want to speak. I am going to yield the floor to them.

• (1800)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I see Mr. McCaulley's hand is up.

Mr. Kelly McCaulley: Thanks, Chair.

I realize that my colleagues across the virtual aisle have to protest, but I'm disappointed that they continue with this misinformation. This has zero to do with a contract. I've stated that before. The motion very clearly states it. Several members have been on this committee from day one with me, and it's unfortunate that they're pushing this misinformation about a contract. This has nothing to do with a contract. It's about documents that came through an ATIP request that I believe were inappropriately redacted. The person associated with this has said to release them. Apparently he believes they were incorrectly redacted as well.

This goes to what I will call the open-by-default lie that the government constantly pushes. We saw it again just recently with the Cisco and Gartner issue. They redacted information for this committee, even though they had already posted it on the PSPC website. We've also seen Global Affairs pushing through contracts with a Chinese state-owned company for security technology for Canada, against the advice of PSPC and despite security issues.

We've seen repeatedly from this government and from the bureaucracy within this government a desire to hide information and be anything but transparent. We just want the unredacted emails, not the contract or the details of the contract. We want the unredacted emails that the subject himself has said to go ahead and release. If there's nothing there, I don't see why the government continues to be unopen by default.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCaulley.

We will now go to Ms. Vignola.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Certainly, there is always a danger that an individual, rather than a lack of transparency, is being attacked.

From what I hear today, there are no attacks that target the individual. I would like this to be confirmed or denied. I want to be certain that these attacks are aimed not at the individual, but rather at the lack of access to complete information.

I also want to make sure that the ethical rules of Parliament have not been broken. A parliamentarian may not hire their sister or daughter, for example. We sometimes say that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. The important thing, in my opinion, is that the person not be attacked.

I cannot do anything about the fact that an individual is a bitcoin expert. If he was advised to become a speaker because he was a bitcoin expert, that is fine.

I simply want there to be transparency, and no personal attacks.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

We will now go to Mr. MacKinnon.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me rely on Mr. McCauley's good faith and word and ask him perhaps straight up, as I begin my comments, if he would accept an amendment, friendly or otherwise, to his motion that would allow for any and all personal information to be redacted. I think I heard him offer that. I'm not sure, but surely if he's offering it in his remarks, he'd be amenable to including that level of specificity in his motion. If so, I think we would have a good faith motion on the table.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacKinnon.

I see Mr. Kusmierczyk's hand is up again.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Chair. I'm happy to yield the floor to Mr. McCauley to answer that question from my colleague.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes, that's fine.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: If the motion can be amended to say that redactions for personal information are permissible, then I think we could be amenable to something like that.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Sure, that's fine. We can move ahead and close the meeting, I guess.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Could you then just propose where you would insert that, Mr. McCauley, or would you like me to do that?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: It would be "the unredacted documents excluding personal information".

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Okay, I think we can live with that.

The Clerk: I beg your pardon, Mr. Chair.

May I ask Mr. McCauley to repeat the amendment so that I can have the text, please?

Thank you.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay, let's see. It would be "send for, from Global Affairs Canada, the unredacted documents excluding personal information relating to the contract".

The Clerk: Thank you.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks.

The Chair: Mr. Kusmierczyk, your hand is up again. I just want to make certain you still want to follow through now.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Again, I hear what the discussion around the table is. I really do appreciate what Madame Vignola stated about the fact that we have a responsibility here as members of Parliament. We have a serious responsibility to make sure that we're not going after Canadians, citizens, no matter their relationships, whether with members of Parliament or others.

We have a serious, significant obligation to make sure we're not going after someone just because of their name or because of their relationship. There has to be some basis for looking into this information.

I'm just asking my colleague Mr. McCauley to be forthright, to say why we are looking into this information in the first place. Clearly, this is outside of the bounds of any conflict of interest; the relationship is too distant. That's been made clear by the ruling of the Integrity Commissioner in his exhaustive report, after months of the Prime Minister's family—his mom, his brother and other family members—being dragged through the mud. The Integrity Commissioner's report was quite clear.

I'm trying to understand even a sliver of information. I'd like Mr. McCauley to just be completely forthright and clear. What is the intended purpose here? What is he expecting to find? What is the suspicion here? There has to be some basis for the actions of this committee. We have a limited amount of resources here. We have a limited amount of time. We have a limited amount of resources in terms of meetings, discussions and deliberations. We have to be careful how we utilize those resources.

I'm just asking Mr. McCauley to be forthright and put on the table what his motivation is here.

• (1810)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Before we go to Mr. Drouin, just to clarify, I want to make certain we have an amendment that has been proposed. Do we have an agreement on the motion to be amended?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Sure. Let's just move on.

The Chair: If anyone wants to speak against that, then please say so.

Not seeing anything now, I just want to make certain we're speaking on the amendment at this point in time, so that we're clear what we're doing, even though, Mr. Kusmierczyk, you had a question for Mr. McCauley.

Speaking to the amendment, go ahead, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On the amendment, the reason we raised the personal information is obviously that when we say "open by default", there has to be some framework that guides that. We wouldn't want personal information being released to everyone. Obviously, I don't think you or anyone on this committee would want to release their personal information about their address. I haven't seen those documents. I don't know what is wrong, what pertains to those particular documents.

I do know there is a non-partisan venue to deal with the redactions when either Canadians or members of Parliament are not satisfied with particular redactions. That is the Information Commissioner. I know Mr. McCauley, again, could have chosen to go to the commissioner to deal with those particular redactions. Now, here we are, having to put an amendment into the motion that was presented to deal with this particular matter. I'm hoping we'll be able to get to a vote on the amendment, but I'm still opposed, somewhat, to the rationale. Despite what Mr. McCauley may say, I have yet to hear a good reason in terms of the rationale for the motion being presented before this committee. I want to make sure that we protect the information of Canadians.

That's why we are asking for this particular friendly amendment, so that no information is being released. I wouldn't want to be part of releasing personal information so anyone can see it. The motion also calls for that particular information to be published on the website, I will remind this committee, in less than 48 hours, in business days. It has to be done by this Monday. I hope this committee will have some sense of passing the particular amendment. I think we should be discussing further the motion at hand.

Thank you.

• (1815)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

I have Mr. Paul-Hus and then Mr. Kusmierczyk.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Obviously, I agree with the amendment, since people's personal information must be protected, of course.

I would like to add something, because my anglophone colleagues may not have read the article published in *La Presse* this morning.

Mr. Kemper agrees with the Conservatives in calling for all of the information to be made public. He said that he thinks this is a great example of how we need more transparency and accountability in the government.

He went on to say that any expenditure of public funds should be recorded in a permanent register and the identities of the decision-makers should be associated with each entry.

He also said that in the case of the contract he was awarded, it would be clear who approved the decisions, the amount and the purpose.

Mr. Kemper himself said this to the journalist at *La Presse*. Mr. Kemper does not feel at all attacked by our motion; on the contrary, he thinks it would be a very good idea to really know what is going on and to record the information connected with a contract in a clear and unredacted manner, unlike what we have received.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

We have Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thanks again, Mr. Chair.

I think we, as a committee, have a responsibility to protect, in a lot of ways, a certain level of privacy for individuals. Whether a committee summons someone or asks for documents on a particular contract, that pulls that person into the public sphere. I believe that, as a committee, we should meet a very minimum threshold before we do that. Again, there should be a reason given, and I haven't heard one. I don't understand why.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Open your ears, Irek.

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: With all due respect, Mr. McCauley, you haven't given us a reason other than the fact that this is your

will. To me, there has to be an explanation. I think we owe it to Canadians that when we ask for something like this, we're looking into that. We should provide an explanation. Put it on the table and be very clear what that is.

What is the reason? We haven't heard it yet, other than the fact that this is something you are seeking. That's what I'm asking. I think that is the bare minimum threshold we're asking for, knowing that when a committee looks into someone it pulls them into the public sphere. Again, I think that there should be a minimum threshold and that minimum threshold is simply asking or answering the question of why. What is the purpose and what is the motivation here?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

We have Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you, Chair.

I think the purpose is quite simple. This is the government that has said that "sunshine is the best disinfectant". This is the government that has said that they are going to be open, honest and transparent with Canadians.

That's the purpose. The purpose is to help this government make good on their commitment to the Canadian public.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Harder.

I'm seeing that there are no hands up at this point in time. Therefore, as we move forward, we will first look to make certain that everyone votes on the motion as amended.

All in favour of the motion as amended?

Mr. Francis Drouin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

We are voting on the amendment.

The Chair: That's correct. It's the amendment we had agreed to between Mr. MacKinnon and Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Okay. We're voting not on the full motion, just the amendment.

The Chair: That's correct at this point in time.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Now we will vote on the motion as amended.

Mr. Drouin, I see your hand is up.

• (1820)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Yes.

Mr. Chair, the opposition continues. Now I'm speaking to the amendment itself.

I'm not too—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We voted on the amendment.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'm speaking to the motion itself, as amended.

I'm not too preoccupied with what Mr. Kemper has said or not. What I am preoccupied with is whether this information will be used to go on a wild goose chase while we do not use the proper venues that are available to members of Parliament. I have repeated this before. The procurement ombudsman is a good venue to determine whether or not somebody is screaming foul play.

I have heard accusations that we have to provide details of all the emails that are coming through because we want to make sure there is no foul play. Then write to the Ethics Commissioner if you are so certain that there is foul play. That way, we'll guarantee that there is a non-partisan approach to this particular issue.

I have to agree with my colleague, Mr. Kusmierczyk. Mr. McCauley, you have not provided a reason as to why you want to see that particular information. You've said that information has been redacted. Great, then file a complaint with the Information Commissioner.

Now you're asking for information that has been redacted. Thankfully we've amended that particular motion to protect personal information, but if other information comes back and is redacted, then I would strongly encourage you to file a complaint with the Information Commissioner. That's why they're there. These officers of Parliament are there to provide non-partisan investigations into these matters.

We've seen it with the WE affair. For six months, I've heard you guys, time and time again, make accusations about corruption and whatnot and calling the RCMP in July of 2020. It was a "nothing-burger". You've made so many accusations. You can understand why we are somewhat wary as to the reason and the rationale as to why you want to see this particular information.

Mr. Chair, I'll leave it at that, but I have to question the rationale for why Mr. McCauley and the opposition.... They can say sunshine is the best disinfectant. Yes, that's great, but they have gone after the Prime Minister's family before and we know the results. The Ethics Commissioner cleared him. Now, because they weren't successful there, they're going to try to go after Mr. Kemper.

I hope that we don't get to this point in politics. Especially if you are screaming foul play, then get the procurement ombudsman involved. We don't need to go through this committee to get a \$12,000 contract and wonder whether the emails and whether something smells fishy in there. Get him involved right away and he'll make that particular determination.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

We have Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you, Chair.

I'm sorry. I thought we were going straight to a vote, so I'll just say this now. When we do get to a vote, I'd like it to be recorded, please.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Harder.

We'll go to Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks very much.

Yes, let's just get to a vote, but I will say I'm very disappointed at the untruths pushed forward, this repeated thing that we're going after contracts, this misdirection. It's shameful.

Mr. MacKinnon, in good faith, put forward an amendment that we agreed to in good faith. If this is the process the Liberals are going to carry forward—good faith and then go and spend a half-hour badmouthing us with, frankly, lies—then this is going to change the whole forward look of this committee. I realize there are partisan games, but this is shameful, this action that came up after Mr. MacKinnon's good faith amendment that we agreed to. But, fine, we'll just get to the vote and move on.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: I was going to sit out this filibuster, but I do feel compelled to go on the record and state that there's a certain amount of sanctimony that I've heard here, trying to direct members of Parliament in terms of what they can and can't do at committee, as protected by our parliamentary privileges, our ability to send for documents and other information. To suggest that somehow the government is going to direct how other members of Parliament do their business is a bit sanctimonious, from my perspective.

I would also state that the public is not stupid. People who are tuning in.... If there's anybody tuning in to this livestream, I don't know. To simply disregard the fact that the person in question has called for it and then to spend this time in a filibuster, that's the waste of time, quite frankly. This should have just been voted for and moved on. We would have gotten the information. I don't know. I'm sure Morneau doesn't tune into this stuff anymore, but to call his resignation a nothingburger is a bit of stretch, in my opinion.

I'll be supporting it. I think I would love to see a government that actually is open by default, and on these simple matters that we not just get bogged down in procedural shenanigans.

I think half the committees that are in operation right now are filibustered. That's the waste of time. I want to go on the record and just say that we retain certain rights as members of Parliament, which does not preclude our having to explain every single aspect of our line of thinking to anybody in this committee, quite frankly. When the information comes back, surely there will be fulsome debates if there's relevant information to this committee. If it's a nothingburger, then McCauley's got to eat it.

I just think back to that saying, thou doth protest too much.

• (1825)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I think what's shameful is just the persistent attack on the Prime Minister's family. We've seen it over the last year with the ethics probe, and we've seen the family—

Mr. Matthew Green: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, this has been brought up by this particular member on multiple occasions already, and I would ask that he not repeat it.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Yes, I think I'm going to repeat it because it bears repeating, because it's important.

Mr. Matthew Green: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, this is redundant, and that is a procedural point of order. Members in their filibuster at least have to introduce new information. If the member would like to read from the newspaper or do something else, I'm all for it, but to simply just continue to repeat comments is redundant and against our rules here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

I would ask all members in the debate that they debate on point, but on issues that preferably have not been repeated and are on the issue.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, you have the floor.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I was just going to say that, again, to me what is shameful is the attack on the Prime Minister here. What we're asking of the members of this committee is this: If you're going to ask us to again commit resources and time, if you're going to bring somebody into the public spotlight, there has to be a reason and an explanation. We haven't heard it. It's a basic, minimum threshold, and we haven't heard it. The answer that we've heard, that I've heard from my colleagues is, "Mmm...just because." We've put a family through hell over the last year.

Mr. Matthew Green: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to ask that you actually rule on the point of order and not allow for the continued.... This is the third time he's repeated this exact same statement. I don't know if he has it written down and he's just rereading it, but I would ask that he enter in new information to the debate.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, please get to the point.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: My point is that I believe—and here's the new point—we have a responsibility and I think it's a matter of principle that there has to be a reason that's provided before we pursue these wild goose chases. Again, we've inflicted that stress upon a whole family for the last year. I see the same thing happening here, being repeated. What we're asking for is a simple reason, which we haven't received in this committee.

Mr. Matthew Green: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Respectfully, if we're going to be in a filibuster, I ask the member to introduce new information. He's repeating the same phrases over and over. At least with the other members of the government they're creative enough to bring in and enter into some new discourse. If we're going to hunker down here and I'm going to miss time with my family and everything else, I would ask that in this filibuster he introduce new information.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, do you have any new information to enter?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I think it was important for me to emphasize again that I disagree with the principle of what's taking

place here, and what I'm seeking is a response, again, a basic response. That's all I'm asking for from my colleague. I don't think it's disrespectful. I don't think it's a waste of this committee's time, but I think we should have a reason for pursuing this proposal. I haven't heard it yet. I'm hoping to.

● (1830)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

We will go to Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will be brief, as we do want to get to a vote on this, but Mr. Green made some comments and I'd say I would accept the committee's wishes to look at any contracts, and I would. The problem is that they've done a drive-by smear for almost a year and didn't apologize. The Ethics Commissioner cleared the Prime Minister and nobody apologized. I didn't hear Mr. Green stand up in the House and apologize to his family—

Mr. Matthew Green: How's it working for Morneau?

Mr. Francis Drouin: —for going after them.

I never heard Mr. Paul-Hus stand up in the House and apologize, or Ms. Harder or Mr. McCauley apologize for smearing the Prime Minister's family. That's just the basis of this particular motion, which we.... I will stop there, but if they had apologized, we would have a different conversation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: The discussion is going in circles. Can I ask for the vote now?

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for that, Ms. Vignola. We can't call the question. There are still people who have questions and comments.

Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Through you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Drouin seems to want to direct the members of this committee as to how we should or should not conduct business, and how we should or should not use our parliamentary privilege. I find that extremely rich and inappropriate.

This is not a place to try to bully other members. This is not a place to try to shame other members for rightly using the tools that are at their disposal. When it comes to the investigation with regard to the Prime Minister and his family, I welcome the member to find a quote where I smeared the Prime Minister. I actually would ask for an apology because that's a wrong smearing of my name and a false accusation against me.

To do an investigation and to be the chair of the ethics committee during that investigation is a right understanding of my responsibility and a right function as a member of Parliament and chair of that committee. I welcome that apology from the member.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Harder.

Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you again, Mr. Chair.

The only other thing I wanted to add—a bit of new information, I guess—is that all along this whole year at committee we have gladly agreed to any number of investigations, documents to be produced and order papers to be provided. Absolutely, we've always done that. We welcome it. We welcome providing and getting information, but at every juncture, whenever we've made a decision to get order papers or to look at Nuctech or to look at this or to bring this person here or to invite that person, there's always a reason.

Here, there is an absence of an explanation, an absence of a reason, other than just because. I don't think that's sufficient to pull someone into the public sphere, into the spotlight, for whatever reason, but that's what we're asking for.

At every single juncture this year at this committee, we have absolutely agreed to get information, to provide information, to get additional information and to have witnesses come in, all of that stuff, but there's always been an explanation as to why we're doing that. It wasn't willy-nilly. It wasn't just a whim. We owe it to these folks that, if we're going to shine the spotlight on them, we better damn well have a reason why. I haven't heard it, and that's what I'm asking for. It's basic decency. What's the reason? I haven't heard it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

I see no further hands up. Is there any further discussion?

Seeing none, and as we do not have consensus, I will call for a recorded vote.

• (1835)

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, that is five yeas and five nays. It is a tie vote.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

I vote in favour.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: With that, we will now move forward. Looking at the clock and bearing in mind the time commitments, I respectfully want to thank the witnesses who truly, I know, understand the process and the procedures. I appreciate their attendance and their responding to our questions today.

Mr. Glover, Ms. Hazen, Ms. Cahill and Mr. Brouillard, thank you for attending and for your presentations. With that said, I will dismiss you today. Thank you.

We do have a couple of things as a committee that we need to continue. I will remind committee members to keep in mind that we are still sitting in a public meeting while we're doing committee business.

Right now, I would like to discuss the main estimates for 2021-22. The order of reference for the committee to study the main estimates expires on Monday, May 31, 2021. As this is the last scheduled meeting before that date, the committee can, if it wishes, proceed to taking a decision on the votes that were referred to the committee.

Does the committee wish to vote on the main estimates? Do we have unanimous consent to vote?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, I assume we'll be adopting those on division.

The Chair: The answer is basically yes. We have 23 votes on the main estimates that were referred to the committee. I see that there's no objection, although I do believe it would be asked that we consent to that on division.

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Vote 1—Payments to the Corporation for special purposes.....\$22,210,000

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CANADA SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$63,006,675

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$5,596,230

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN TRANSPORTATION ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION AND SAFETY BOARD

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$31,156,943

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$2,704,667,883

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$1,632,968,893

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

Vote 1—Payments to the Commission for operating expenditures.....\$71,036,181

Vote 5—Payments to the Commission for capital expenditures.....\$84,945,549

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR GENERAL'S SECRETARY

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$20,427,563

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$6,520,482

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$5,118,271

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$172,348,874

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$80,160,078

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

SENATE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$79,080,673

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

SHARED SERVICES CANADA

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$1,603,400,792

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$209,982,042

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

TREASURY BOARD SECRETARIAT

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$281,146,231

Vote 5—Government Contingencies.....\$750,000,000

Vote 10—Government-wide Initiatives.....\$111,151,120

Vote 20—Public Service Insurance.....\$3,048,119,626

Vote 25—Operating Budget Carry Forward.....\$1,600,000,000

Vote 30—Paylist Requirements.....\$600,000,000

Vote 35—Capital Budget Carry Forward.....\$600,000,000

(Votes 1, 5, 10, 20, 25, 30 and 35 agreed to on division)

The Chair: With that said, shall I report the votes back to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The next thing will be on the supplementary estimates (A) 2021-22. Just so that you're aware, we think that they will be tabled in the House of Commons soon and referred to committees. The President of the Treasury Board has already confirmed that he will attend to discuss this on Wednesday, June 16. We are still waiting to hear from the other ministers.

One of the issues we need to recognize is that, concerning the agreement on the supplementary estimates, we have to do that three days prior to the last allotted day. I'm going to ask the clerk to clarify my short version of it for you, so that you truly understand.

● (1840)

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What you're referring to is, in fact, the deadline for the committee to consider the votes related to the supplementary estimates. It's not a hard and fast deadline such as for the main estimates, which is written in the Standing Orders.

The deadline is determined by when the government chooses the last allotted day will be, and unfortunately, we don't know what that day will be. When that day is designated, the committee will lose its order of reference three sitting days prior to that day. This is why we recommend that committees try to do the supplementary estimates sooner rather than later to ensure that they still have the vote before them.

That being said, if the committee has the opportunity to hear from the minister and wants to, it may still do so if the order of reference has lapsed, because that information falls under the subject matter mandate of the committee. It doesn't prohibit the committee from hearing from the minister; however, if it's after the date, the committee cannot put the question on the actual votes.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

As I indicated, we're still waiting to hear from the Minister of Digital Government and the Minister of Public Services and Procurement Canada, and hopefully we'll hear from them soon.

One last thing I want to cover is that we sent out to the committee last week the letter we received from Tango, indicating that they were declining attendance to our meeting. We had that scheduled for June 7, and we still have that scheduled. At this point in time, we have confirmation from PHAC and PSPC.

With that said, and recognizing the shortness of time that we're dealing with, I'm going to ask the committee if they would be prepared to give the chair permission to write a letter and draft it in consultation with the law clerk to indicate, remind and clarify to the witnesses that any testimony before the committee is protected. That's in the hopes that they might reconsider their denial. Do I have consent for that?

Mr. Drouin, I think you want to say something.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Just to clarify, Mr. Chair, we will ask for the advice of the law clerk to write back to the witness to say that the information that he may or may not provide at our committee is protected so that it cannot be used in the court of law.

The Chair: Basically the letter would be written by us to ask them to reconsider, but in doing so, we would run it by the law clerk to make certain that we're not saying something that is contrary to the issue. Is everyone in favour with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: With that said, I would like to thank everyone for being with us today.

The meeting is adjourned.

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