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# Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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Chair: Mr. Robert Kitchen





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• (1305)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)):** I call the meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number eight of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

Today we will hear from the officials of PSPC and SSC regarding the supplementary estimates and the departmental results reports.

Members are aware that the Minister of PSPC was supposed to appear before the committee today as well, but unfortunately earlier in the week we were informed that due to medical reasons the minister would be unable to appear. On behalf of our committee members, I wish the minister a full and speedy recovery.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. Regarding the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether participating virtually or in person.

I'll take this opportunity to remind all participants in this meeting that screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from public health authorities, as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on October 19, 2021, to remain healthy and safe, the following is recommended for all those attending the meeting in person.

Anyone with symptoms should participate by Zoom and not attend the meeting in person. Everyone must maintain two-metre physical distancing, whether seated or standing. Everyone must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It is recommended in the strongest possible terms that members wear their mask at all times, including when seated. Non-medical masks, which provide better clarity over cloth masks, are available in the room. Everyone present must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the hand sanitizer at the room entrance.

Committee rooms are cleaned before and after each meeting. To maintain this, everyone is encouraged to clean the surfaces of their desk, chair or microphone with the provided disinfectant wipes when vacating or taking a seat.

As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting, and I thank members in advance for their co-operation.

I welcome the representatives of PSPC and SSC and invite them to make any opening statements. With that, I thank the officials for coming today and being here in person. It's nice to see you, as well as those who are on Zoom.

Mr. Thompson, are you going to start?

Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Paul Thompson (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Works and Government Services):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for the invitation to appear today.

With me in the room is Mr. Wojo Zielonka. He is the chief financial officer for PSPC. I have additional colleagues joining me online, including Arianne Reza, our associate deputy minister.

I am pleased to be here to address questions related to Public Services and Procurement Canada's most recent departmental results report, for 2020-21, and its supplementary estimates (C).

The departmental results report highlights the department's achievements in delivering on its diverse mandate. As a common service provider, PSPC works to support the whole of government as it serves Canadians, from procurement to managing government buildings to being the pay and pension administrator for the public service, and more.

Over the past year, PSPC has continued to play a key role in supporting Canada's response to the pandemic. An aggressive procurement approach early on resulted in a secure supply of vaccines and personal protective equipment, with much of that PPE now being made here at home.

With regard to testing, PSPC secured millions of rapid tests to support the work of the Public Health Agency of Canada and provinces and territories. Requests for these tests have increased dramatically as the pandemic has evolved. As of this week, more than 330 million rapid tests have been delivered to Canada, and hundreds of millions more will arrive in the coming months.

As well as being an important part of the fight against COVID, procurement is a powerful lever that can be used to support inclusive economic growth.

I'm proud to say that PSPC continues to modernize procurement practices to reduce barriers for under-represented groups. To this end, PSPC has launched a supplier diversity action plan that includes pilot projects and consultations with businesses led by Black and other racialized Canadians, women, LGBTQ2+ Canadians, indigenous peoples, Canadians with disabilities, and other communities. As well, last summer PSPC announced federal government-wide measures aimed at working towards implementing a requirement that at least 5% of the total value of federal contracts be held by businesses led by first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

The department also has other important work under way, including the renovation and rehabilitation of the parliamentary precinct. Major construction activities continue on this historic restoration project of Centre Block, including excavation work for the parliamentary welcome centre, demolition and abatement, and the development of concept designs. Last year saw the launch of the architectural design competition to redevelop block 2, the city block facing Parliament Hill and surrounded by Wellington, Sparks, Metcalfe and O'Connor streets.

PSPC continues to support the environmental sustainability of government operations. As outlined in our departmental results report, PSPC implements a range of clean technologies in building operations, among other actions.

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

In addition, PSPC continued with the ongoing delivery of defence procurements in support of Canada's defence policy: Strong, Secure, Engaged.

That included reviewing bids for the purchase of new fighter jets for the Royal Canadian Air Force. And I will note that we are still on track for a contract award later this year, with delivery of aircraft as early as 2025.

[*English*]

Mr. Chair, these are just a few highlights of our departmental results report.

I look forward to the discussion and entertaining any comments and questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Perron, did you have an opening statement?

**Mr. Sony Perron (Executive Vice-President, Shared Services Canada):** Yes, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Please go ahead.

**Mr. Sony Perron:** Thank you.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members. Thank you very much for the invitation. Samantha and I are really pleased to be here to represent Shared Services Canada and answer all the questions you might have.

Let me begin by acknowledging that I'm doing my work today on the ancestral territory of the Algonquin people. I would like to thank them for the possibility of doing that every day here in Ottawa.

Joining me today I have Sam Hazen. Sam is our chief financial officer and assistant deputy minister at Shared Services Canada.

Shared Services Canada continues to play a vital role in supporting government operations by operating and modernizing the Government of Canada's information technology infrastructure. The department had many accomplishments during the last fiscal year as we played a key role in the rapid transition for thousands of government employees and supported multiple departments on the front line of the pandemic response.

[*Translation*]

As a service provider to over 40 government departments and agencies, Shared Services Canada's work across the Government of Canada allowed us to rely on a secure and efficient digital infrastructure to deliver critical online services to Canadians.

Prior to the pandemic, Shared Services Canada was guided by a strategy focused on meeting the needs of government as a common enterprise, while still allowing enough flexibility to address unique departmental requirements. The department had been focussing on enhancing network operations, delivering new digital government tools, and supporting IT capacity for departments.

That focus ensured that Shared Services Canada was well-positioned for service delivery at speed and at scale upon the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Examples of key accomplishments to support the Government of Canada in response to the COVID-19 pandemic include rapidly deploying Microsoft 365, a cloud-based suite of business and collaboration tools, and increasing remote work capacity allowing public servants to continue delivering services to Canadians.

[*English*]

Shared Services Canada quadrupled bandwidth and tripled remote connections to support the Canada Revenue Agency's delivery of CERB and other emergency benefit programs that followed to support Canadians through the course of the evolving pandemic.

Shared Services Canada helped to develop the ArriveCAN application to support border controls and contact tracing and to ensure that travellers arriving in Canada receive timely and accurate information.

In 2020-21, Shared Services Canada continued to evolve its agile procurement process through improved training for procurement officers on agile and collaborative methods. We also continue to engage with industry regarding our network modernization way forward.

We will continue to advance government-wide initiatives to increase the diversity of bidders so that even more companies have access to government IT contract opportunities.

These are just some examples of the important work being done by Shared Services Canada. The departmental results report provides further details on accomplishments over the past year.

To fund the ongoing work for fiscal year 2021-22, we are seeking an increase of \$91 million for Shared Services Canada through the supplementary estimates (C).

One of the main contributors to the overall increase in funding includes the next-generation human resources and pay initiative. This will enable the NextGen team to carry out test pilots to assess the complexity of the government's HR and pay requirements, as well as conduct a feasibility study to identify the resources and level of effort to transition to a new system.

Other contributors to the requested increase include cyber and information technology security initiatives, workload modernization and migration, and funding related to re-profiling initiatives that experienced delays in 2020-21, mainly due to the pandemic.

We are proud of our work and happy to answer your questions.

Thank you very much.

• (1315)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Perron.

We will now go into our first round of questions.

We will start with six minutes from Mr. McCauley.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC):** Welcome, everyone.

I have a quick question. On the jet procurement, when is the decision going to be made? I'm looking for a timeline, not "later this year"—a timeline.

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With respect to the future fighter project, there was a major milestone achieved at the end of last—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'm not asking that. I'm asking a simple question: When will a decision be made?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** The process is advancing based on that last step, and we're looking toward—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** When will the decision be made?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** There will be a decision made in the coming months with respect to the final procurement decision, and the contract finalization is on track for 2022.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** PSPC put out a press release saying they're going to make a decision soon and start negotiating with the winner, or perhaps they're going to re-enter another competitive stage with Saab and Lockheed Martin.

Could you explain that? Who is driving this? We obviously see what's going on in the world right now. We've seen the threats from Russia. Who is driving this continual delay of a decision?

As a reference, in 2016, I was on OGGO. We asked much the same question six years ago, and we got the same answer: "soon, soon, soon". What is driving this continual delay, and whose decision is it to say that we are going to choose someone, but maybe we're going to go back into competitive bidding to further delay the process?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Mr. Chair, we have a robust governance process that involves three departments looking at the three pillars of the procurement. It looks at the mission capability and the requirements of DND, the economic benefits and the value, and the—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** The press release talked about improving the bid, not about changing requirements. The press release talked about improving the bid.

Whose decision is that, to potentially delay the decision even more?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Mr. Chair, there is a rigorous evaluation process. It is nearing completion toward the choices that the member outlined in terms of competitive dialogue versus contract finalization, and I can assure you that the process is—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** In terms of renegotiating, how much more will that delay it, if we go back to Saab and Lockheed and say that we want to go back to another competitive discussion? How much further will that delay the process?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** That would add a number of months to the process. There is—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** What's the number of months? Is it two months or 10 months?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** It would depend on the nature of the dialogue that took place in—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** What's your best guess?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** It could take up to a year, I suppose.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** We have rusted-out CF-18s. We have planes that cannot compete safely, and we're thinking that the government potentially could delay this another year, on top of the delay to get to the decision. Wonderful.

Who is driving that decision? Is this a political decision, is this a PSPC decision, or is this the air force trying to grind out a few extra benefits?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Mr. Chair, the process has an established governance involving three departments: DND, PSPC, which manages value for the Crown and—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Someone has to be driving this discussion to renegotiate or go back to a competitive bid, after six years of looking at the process. Where is that coming from? It doesn't come out of the blue. Someone is driving that.

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Mr. Chair, I would just give assurances that we have a rigorous process with teams from the three departments looking at the scoring, based on a very detailed and complex RFP, and that process is, as I mentioned, very close to landing on the next steps.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** That's not very reassuring. I'm not blaming you personally, but it's not very reassuring—seeing what's going on in Ukraine and the threats from Russia—that we could be potentially delaying this another year on top of several more months before a decision is made.

On the rapid tests, walk me through the arrival, please. You said \$330 million has been spent so far. How many rapid tests is that? There are Bill C-8 and Bill C-10, and there is \$4 billion more in the supplementary estimates (C). Walk me through the arrival time and the numbers, and what that \$4 billion covers.

• (1320)

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** The number of rapid tests that have been purchased is 530 million. The number of rapid tests that have been received and shipped is 264 million. There was a particularly intense period of procurement in the last couple of months—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I realize that, but could you walk me through the arrivals? The government has asked for \$4 billion for rapid tests. When will those four billion dollars' worth of tests be arriving? I know it's not one lump sum. Is it 20 million this month, 50 million next month? PSPC, I assume, has an idea.

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** We actually have posted online a schedule of all the deliveries to date, and I could certainly refer the member to that online posting. That's a tracking of the rapid tests received and delivered to provinces and territories, as well as the projected procurements that remain.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** In regard to the Auditor General's report on shipbuilding, on the CSC, what recommendations has PSPC acted on to speed up the process of our shipbuilding debacle, for lack of a better word?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** On that—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** In the AG report, it was logged that PSPC accepted the recommendations. What have we acted on?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** We continue to strengthen the governance process, and the key step in the CSC project at this point is landing on the final design process. Again, through the same governance that I mentioned, there is a process under way to land on those design requirements over the course of this year. That is targeted for fall of 2022 for this next phase—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Could you provide in writing to the committee the response as to which of the AG recommendations you've actually started on?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** I'd be happy to do that.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Perfect, thanks.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. McCauley.

We'll now go to Mr. Jowhari, for six minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for coming today. I'm hoping for a speedy recovery for the minister so she could join us next.

I'm going to be focusing on e-procurements, so I'm not sure whether it would be Mr. Perron or Mr. Thompson. Okay, great, it's Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Thompson, in supplementary estimates (C), the department allocated about \$21.6 million to continue to support the e-procurement solution project. Could you talk about the purpose of this funding? By way of background, could you talk about what the e-procurement project is all about, and how it is facilitating the use and inclusivity of the federal procurement process?

This is something that is within the mandate of the minister. I am really interested, if you could explore that angle for me.

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Mr. Chair, thank you for the question on e-procurement. This is a project we're quite excited about. We have a very large procurement footprint across the government. This is a rebuild of the fundamental platform underpinning a system that supports \$22 billion in government procurement.

This is a cloud-based approach. It's much more user-friendly, simpler and more accessible for small businesses, including equity-seeking businesses. It will reduce the burden associated with procurement transactions, and it will provide improved data from a better management system in terms of being able to look at the entire breadth of procurement in the government.

We have a phased rollout over the coming months, and through the ongoing engagement with user groups we're really hopeful that it will be a game-changer for businesses trying to do business with the Government of Canada.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you.

You mentioned some of the key functionalities. The one that piqued my interest was about data. As you know, we've been looking for disaggregated data from various aspects, for various reasons. Can you tell me how that's going to help us be able to get access to that type of data, and what is the timing? How much data do we need to collect before we are able to put those types of metrics out?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Data collection is a fundamental part of the agenda on e-procurement and part of our supplier diversity action plan as well.

A lot of the groups we're working with are helping us with definitions. There are different perspectives on what kinds of definitions should be used in terms of the different equity-seeking business organizations, but we are working with them. For example, "owned" and "operated" are two different definitional concepts. We are working with stakeholder groups to land on those definitions so we can better track our progress on supplier diversity.

• (1325)

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Hopefully, we'll be in a position to at least get some sort of better picture.

I'll turn my focus to the next topic that I'm very interested in: return to work. As you know, the provinces, especially the Province of Ontario, are relaxing a lot of measures. People are getting back to work. I have a lot of constituents calling and welcoming that news, as well as some who are calling and saying that, for whatever reason, they chose not to get vaccinated and they want to get back to work and get back to some normality.

Let's talk about what we are doing from our end. Can you give us an update on the return to work that you have planned for the department? As you know, the department is in a fortunate position of enjoying a large number of public servants. Can you give us some idea about the return-to-work plan and what changes you are planning to put in place to ensure that everybody can come back to work?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Mr. Chair, this is a very topical issue for us. It's on the minds of all our employees right now, particularly as public health measures are relaxed.

Over the course of the pandemic, we were very fortunate to be able to work remotely quite effectively and productively, including with support from our colleagues at Shared Services Canada to make sure we had the remote capability. It has made us a very productive organization, as demonstrated by the departmental results report.

Going forward, we recognize that work has changed permanently. We will be looking at hybrid work options. There's a lot of thinking still to be done on exactly what that means. We're working with staff to try to find some models that ensure we're able to deliver on our mandate while also meeting some of the employee preferences.

It's undeniable that there will be an element of hybrid work that will be more prominent in the future than it has been in the past.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you.

Aside from the element of hybrid work, there is also an underlying technology support that's needed. I know on the immigration side for a while we had to switch to online processing of some of those applications.

Do you see any need or any gap in the area that the department is working on?

Probably that's a good way to go to Mr. Perron.

**Mr. Sony Perron:** Thank you for the question.

In fact, we started back in June of last year to engage with all our client departments to see what their plans and needs are. Right now, we have all learned how to work virtually and we are highly dependent on, in this case, Zoom, but in most of our offices, Teams, which consumes a lot of bandwidth. Therefore, we need to be prepared to accommodate the same level of consumption when employees get back in the office.

The system was built at the beginning of the pandemic to allow people to work from home, but now we need to organize our office to allow the same level of velocity, because if we think about hybrid work, there will still be people at home. There will also be teams that are very distributed. This has changed a lot in the last two years. I have teams that are distributed across the country, and they work together. Even if we have people in the office, they will use these virtual tools to connect.

Therefore, we have engaged since June of last year on bandwidth capacity. We have 4,000 buildings across the country that we need to look at. A certain number need upgrades. We have started the upgrade of the core infrastructure to allow that. We probably have a number of months still to go in order to do that, but we are progressing really well. We are also equipping the boardrooms of these departments so they can use this technology together without going to the—

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I appreciate that. I'm going to come back to you in my next round.

Mr. Chair, thank you for your indulgence.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Perron.

Thank you, Mr. Jowhari.

We'll now go to Mrs. Vignola for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

My first question is basically about services in French and the translation of contracts.

The Commissioner of Official Languages has mentioned in the past that francophones have difficulty getting well translated contracts, or even contracts in French at all. The difficulty continues.

What specific measures have been put in place to ensure that francophones will no longer be discriminated against, and that they too will be included in the new solutions proposed for minorities?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Thank you for the question.

I would like to provide some clarifications.

First of all, there are two kinds of contracts, those for the department itself, for PSPC, and those for the other departments. For PSPC contracts, we use the services of the Translation Bureau. This guarantees the quality of the translations. It is important for the other departments to have good translations too. We encourage all our colleagues in other departments to use the same services. We provide the other departments with the tools they need to translate their own contracts.

In addition, the solution I have just mentioned, the electronic procurement system, will greatly improve the situation with translation, because more standard texts and fewer specific texts will be used in contracts.

• (1330)

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** How will you measure the effects of those strategies in order to ensure that francophone entrepreneurs are no longer disadvantaged and discriminated against.

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** We intend to gather feedback from all the companies with whom we work, in order to improve services and to answer questions about the quality of the translation. It is basically a feedback system. We work closely with our colleagues in other departments if one of their contracts is involved.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Yes, the problem came from certain departments.

Is it your impression that some departments are beginning to open up to the fact that it's important for francophone entrepreneurs to be no longer discriminated against, just as indigenous peoples, First Nations and other minorities must not be? Are they aware that everyone must have exactly the same opportunity? Do you see any openness from departments in that regard?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** That is precisely the goal of these new practices.

Perhaps my colleague Mr. Zielonka would like to add a comment.

**Mr. Wojciech Zielonka (Chief Financial Officer, Finance and Administration Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services):** I would just like to say that one of the major objectives of our electronic procurement system is to provide well translated contracts. With the use of good terminological dictionaries and standard contracts that are well translated, we can guarantee the quality of the translation.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Perron, in your remarks, you mentioned ProGen, a next-generation pay system. Where are we with that project?

We have been hearing about the Phoenix pay system for months. The system has been improved, it is working better, yet there is still a backlog of 141,000 pay transactions to process. That is in addition to the other transactions that the system normally has to process. I know that this does not represent the number of people affected because the same person can have, say, 20 transactions pending. Nevertheless, the number is outrageous.

Where are we with the tests of the ProGen system? To this point, are we encountering the same problems or are we managing to do better than—and I will tell it like it is—the Phoenix disaster?

**Mr. Sony Perron:** In 2020, when we started the ProGen initiative, the objective was to test existing commercial solutions, as already used by many large companies, public organizations and governments around the world. We wanted to see whether they could be a good fit for an organization like ours.

So we launched the process in 2020. We found three qualified suppliers, with international reputations, that provide the services around the world. Now, we are conducting trials to see whether the tools they provide meet our operational requirements.

We launched a first phase, an exploratory phase, with the Department of Canadian Heritage. We examined the needs of that group of employees to see how the solutions could respond. That first step showed us that there was a fit.

We are now in the second stage, an experimentation phase, where we are looking at discrepancies. In other words, we are trying to determine which parts of those systems do not fit with the way in which the Government of Canada pays its employees across the country. We want to know what the issues are. We call them discrepancies. That is the stage we have reached currently. We are working on ways of resolving the discrepancies.

We will also be doing a series of tests in the coming weeks or months. We are going to test the capacity of one of the systems to produce a payroll similar to the same payroll in Phoenix in order to see whether the results are satisfactory and what the error rate is. Normally, these systems should produce the pay correctly. However, we have complicated rules for pay, given the large number of collective agreements. So we have to see whether the results we achieve are conclusive.

We also have a plan—

• (1335)

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** We are going to have to continue this discussion in my next round.

**Mr. Sony Perron:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

We will now go to Mr. Johns, for six minutes.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Thank you.

I apologize in advance, because my questions are very much targeted toward the minister. Hopefully you can address them, though.

Following Mrs. Vignola, it's been six years since the Phoenix pay system debacle. How many more years will it take before this colossal mistake is fixed by the department?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Mr. Chair, I can respond to that.



Pay operations for the current system are within the responsibilities of PSPC, and my colleague is working on the NextGen pay model. We're working in very close collaboration, but this is an ongoing project, as members know. We are pleased with the progress we have been making. The backlog for pay transactions peaked in 2018, and we're at a point now that is 63% below that peak, so progress is being made. The service standards on new intake are being met 80% of the time. We want to do even better than that. We want to get above 90%, so that we are on top of the new intake of pay transactions as they come in.

Thankfully, the number of transactions with significant financial implications for employees has dropped dramatically. That was once at 13% of our caseload, the urgent escalations. That's now down to about 1%, so there is definite progress being made. Over the course of the next couple of years, we want to drive that backlog right down to what would be a normal load of work on the shelf. That is certainly the objective, and to have a better client experience as part of that.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** We had the President of the Treasury Board here earlier this week, and I talked to her about contracting out and the privatization of public services. It increases costs and risks to taxpayers, reduces quality of services, erodes the internal capacity of the public service, and creates precarious work. It also undermines initiatives that address pay equity and systemic racism.

With this government right now, we've seen the increase. McKinsey & Company.... We saw the threefold increase, a 465% increase. We're seeing an increase in outsourcing that is skyrocketing.

The President of the Treasury Board said that the government is committed to providing high-quality services to Canadians while ensuring the best value for taxpayers. Does the government not agree that the best value for taxpayers is investing in the public service?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Mr. Chair, I can speak to the member's question with respect to pay operations. There were indeed some outside services that were obtained to help with the operations at the pay centre. One of the challenges is maintaining the workforce of experienced pay advisers. We wanted to make sure that they're deployed on the actual processing of employees' pay, as that's what their skill set is, so—

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Can't you do that in the public service? Do you have to outsource it?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** We hired 120 more compensation advisers in the last number of months to help with the load. The outside help was with respect to re-engineering the business process, helping with some efficiency gains, and streamlining better management practices to improve our chances of dealing with the backlog.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** How has this debacle with Phoenix changed internal mechanisms and protocols in the department to prevent another Phoenix scandal, pay scandal, happening in other areas?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** There were a lot of lessons learned that have been documented with the Phoenix project, many of which are being applied in the case of NextGen, but there's also a lot of ongoing work to gradually reduce and stabilize the current system. We are very much on track to doing that. It's a system we now under-

stand a lot better than we did when it was initially launched, so the ability to work within the Phoenix system has improved.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I'm going to just keep beating this thing down forever, and hopefully the government will see that outsourcing isn't working.

With Canada Post, the Privy Council did their poll, and the minister had just started. They include shutting down rural post offices, ending home delivery in favour of mailboxes, and cutting back services and delivery—things that in 2015 the government had promised it wouldn't do.

Can you tell me how much money was spent on the poll, and how much money has been spent overall by the government on research regarding cutting services and privatizing in Canada Post?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Mr. Chair, unfortunately I'm not in a position to answer those questions. Canada Post is within the portfolio of the minister, but it's an arm's-length Crown corporation, so I'm not in a position—

• (1340)

**Mr. Gord Johns:** The government did the poll, though. The Privy Council Office actually did the poll, so that's my concern.

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** There is no PSPC funding, to my knowledge, provided for a poll. I'm getting a nod from my CFO.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay.

I'd like to ask about vote 10. My Conservative colleague from Edmonton West has done a lot of work on this. He's brought it up in previous committee sessions that vote 10 previously had around \$2 million to \$3 million a year, and then it jumped to almost \$400 million. Now we see in the estimates for 2022-23 that there's approximately \$150 million.

Can you tell me exactly what that money will be spent on?

**Mr. Wojciech Zielonka:** Mr. Chair, I'm not quite sure.

We at PSPC have two votes, which are vote 1 and vote 5. I'm not sure about vote 10. I think vote 10 may be something that pertains to the Treasury Board Secretariat.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay. Thanks.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Johns. That ends our first round.

We will now go to our second round. Starting with five minutes will be Mr. Lobb.

**Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC):** Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Perron. I think I remember Mr. Perron from my Health Canada days years ago. It's getting to be quite a few years ago now, but it's nice to see you here today.

Almost a year ago today, there was quite a bit made of the Cisco situation. It was sole-sourced, there were no tenders, and there was a comment made—it was in the news—about sufficient context.

I'm curious. Now that you're the person in charge, will there be transparency going forward on decisions like these, where you have a vendor consistently being chosen without opening it up and allowing other companies to provide their comments on whether they could fit the form and functionality of the goals?

**Mr. Sony Perron:** Last year, when we appeared in front of OGGO, we discussed the fact that we had published, at that time, what we call the network modernization way forward strategy. In this document, which was the subject of consultation and engagement with industry, there was a list of upcoming procurement measures that would be taken to modernize the network.

I'm pleased to report that most of these initiatives, which include a lot of competitive, open-generated procurement, have been launched and achieved. My numbers on this are that we have 37 completed or initiated, and six still to be started.

This document was subject to a lot of engagement with industry to give us a sense of where SSC, based on the engineering assessment, would be able to generate procurement or where we need to continue to use equipment-specific for some time. Even where we do equipment-specific—in this case you mentioned Cisco—we still allow competition among the resellers of the product. It's not going to Cisco; it's going to the market for bidding.

We have also put an internal review process in place at SSC for any equipment-specific requirements for networks to be reviewed by an independent group, including an external adviser, to make sure we have a sound rationale technically to go there. As we've explained in the past, our network, which is made of around 170,000 parts and pieces of equipment, is highly dependent on what we had before. We readjust it over time. The fact that we have a lot of Cisco means that sometimes we need to replace it with Cisco, but that's not always the case.

I have good news, and this is encouraging for me. We're seeing a progression, an increase, in terms of what is going to Cisco competitors. Three of them in 2021 got a major increase. Extreme Networks had an increase of 100%, from \$1.3 million to \$2.7 million for the year. Fortinet went from \$3.8 million to \$10.7 million. Juniper went from \$4.5 million to \$7.2 million. There is a signal of progression. We are not there. It's going to take multiple years, but we have the foundation of a very transparent and sound process.

The goal at the end is to have something that is reliable and avoids difficulty for critical applications to operate in the Government of Canada.

● (1345)

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** I understand.

I have another point and then I'll get off this topic. There were some comments that Shared Services Canada officials were working together with Cisco employees to develop rationale. I think that was the wording. I don't think the public is happy to hear those types of things, because it's not transparent and it looks like the fix is in.

As the CEO or president of Shared Services Canada, what are you going to do to make sure practices like this don't happen?

**Mr. Sony Perron:** Thank you very much. I appreciate the question, Mr. Chair. It gives me the opportunity to clarify this incident, which was covered by the media. I think everybody was affected by looking at this news.

One thing I need to say is that we are committed to transparent and fair procurement. In this instance, it was a junior officer who went beyond the expectations in terms of engaging and working with the industry. Our staff work with all of the industry partners all the time, because this is what we need to make the system work and to understand what we are using to fix the problem. This was not appropriate, but it was a junior officer. Measures were taken to make sure that the employee received training and proper guidance to avoid that.

I want to reassure committee members that there was no influence of this action taken by the employee on the said procurement. The procurement was the subject of discussion with the industry. We made some adjustments, but they were not related to the issue of this employee reaching the vendor. It did not affect the direction. The rationale that this employee developed has not been used to direct the future of this procurement.

I want to say that this is very important. We care about integrity and keeping public trust on this. It was really disturbing, and we have taken the proper measures in assisting this employee to understand proper behaviour.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Perron.

We'll now go to Mr. Bains, for five minutes.

**Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to our witnesses, and thank you for joining us today.

My question is coming from Richmond, British Columbia. I'm interested in the Seaspan shipyard because of its importance to the marine sector out here on the west coast. It's an important part of the national shipbuilding strategy. Can you tell us what Seaspan has been building for this government and what contracts they have going into the future?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

I see we've now been joined, after some technical difficulties, by Simon Page, our assistant deputy minister, who shares this responsibility.

I will just indicate that for the Vancouver shipyard, we have a very active program of work, totalling \$5.3 billion. There are a number of vessels that they have been involved with and will continue to be involved with, in terms of procurement.

I might ask my colleague Simon to elaborate.

**Mr. Simon Page (Assistant Deputy Minister, Defence and Marine Procurement, Department of Public Works and Government Services):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Deputy.

My apologies for the technical difficulties.

Indeed, as mentioned by my deputy, there is a very active program of work at the Seaspan Vancouver shipyard. There are numerous projects under way.

The first one to note for this committee would be the completion of the offshore fishery science vessels. This project is ending now. This is the first full class of ships accepted and delivered to the Canadian Coast Guard under the national shipbuilding strategy. The last of the vessels, *CCGS John Cabot*, was accepted and delivered in 2020. We are now completing the warranty period for this vessel.

In motion at the yard at the moment are two other projects. One is the joint support ships for the Royal Canadian Navy. This project will deliver two joint support ships for the navy. The first is in construction now and at a good stage of completion, and efforts are progressing. We expect to have a cut steel date for JSS number two. That's being discussed at the moment.

The other project under way at the Seaspan shipyard is the offshore oceanographic science vessel for the Canadian Coast Guard. This project started with the cut steel in March 2021. It is on the way now. It is also in a good stage of progress and is achieving a good completion rate.

In motion also, but at a lower degree of implementation, are two other projects. Up to 16 multi-purpose vessels will be delivered to the Canadian Coast Guard, and the polar icebreaker was announced by government last spring, in May 2021. These two projects are in definition, and some key design efforts are under way now. We are working towards some contract awards for construction, engineering and long-lead items in the very near future.

That completes the program of work at the Vancouver Seaspan shipyard at the moment.

• (1350)

**Mr. Parm Bains:** How many jobs are associated with these contracts, particularly for people in the Vancouver and the Lower Mainland areas?

**Mr. Simon Page:** At the Vancouver shipyard, there are over 1,000 employees. Those employees would be from the Vancouver and the Lower Mainland areas. Among those 1,000-plus employees, about 700-plus would be what we call the blue-collar workforce, people building the ships, welding and doing all the technical aspects of shipbuilding. Then there is the white-collar workforce and the management workforce on top of that, for over 1,000 jobs at the shipyard.

There is an effort under way at the shipyard to increase the workforce as more complex projects are now slowly approaching. They are either in implementation, in the case of the joint support ships, or approaching implementation, in the case of the polar icebreaker.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** On the growth you're talking about—there's going to be job growth—with the number of projects you've indicated here, how many years can we expect this work to be going on for all those employees?

**Mr. Simon Page:** This work will be for multiple years, for a really long time. The key projects here, after the ones currently in implementation—i.e., the multi-purpose vessels and the polar icebreaker projects—are in definition. The implementation of those vessels will be over quite a few years. We're looking at 15 or more years of work at the Vancouver shipyard if the entirety of the program of work is executed.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bains.

We'll now go to Mrs. Vignola for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I am going to go back to Phoenix.

I was looking at the plan for 2022-2023. The percentage of cases submitted on time to the pay centre was 70% in 2020-2021. However, the objective for 2022-2023 is 65%. So the objective is lower than the percentage that was already achieved in that year. The same goes for the percentage of cases submitted to the pay centre on time and processed on time.

Why are the objectives set lower than the percentages that have already been achieved?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Thank you for the question.

Two things must be considered.

First, there is an operational delay on the part of our colleagues in other departments in submitting cases, data and transactions to the pay centre. We are working very closely to improve that delay.

Second, there is the service rate. As I mentioned, we have obtained a rate of 80% for processing transactions.

[*English*]

This is the new intake, where we are achieving 80% service standard. That is critical to managing the intake side of it while we also have resources dedicated to the backlog.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** In the supplementary estimates (C), you are asking for \$17.3 million to eliminate the backlog of pay problems.

First, given the current situation, could you not foresee those expenditures and ask for all the money you need right away, in the main estimates?

Second, how much money has been spent to date, to the last cent, to try to fix the salary backlog problem? Even if we have only 2% of the critical cases left, we are still talking about people, not percentages.

• (1355)

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** I will ask my colleague to add some comments.

We are working very hard to clear the backlog.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** How much money has been spent?

[English]

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Maybe I'll turn to Wojciech to answer on the—

**The Chair:** If it's going to be lengthy, you could provide it in writing, but if it's quick, then by all means go ahead.

**Mr. Wojciech Zielonka:** Mr. Chair, I can give a very quick answer.

To date, we've spent \$2.134 billion to respond to pay issues since the launch of the Phoenix system.

[Translation]

As for the other question, it is not always possible to know the entire cost of a program because there can be changes. We are making great efforts to improve the pay situation. It's a major effort for our department.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Johns for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Thanks.

PSP's "2020 to 2021 Departmental Results Report" says:

The department also completed a two-year pilot to assess the use of socio-economic criteria in procurement. The findings demonstrated that socio-economic procurement is a promising tool to increase the number of contracts awarded to underrepresented groups [such as indigenous peoples], create community benefits and provide employment and skills training opportunities for underrepresented suppliers.

Can you talk about what socio-economic criteria were selected and how they were selected? Also, does PSP have a plan to make the pilot project a permanent program? If so, when?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for this question.

This is an important area of work for the department. We've made the most progress so far in the space of indigenous procurement. We're trying to model some of that in working with broader diversity objectives within the supply chain. We have a supplier diversity policy that came into force a year ago, which gives us more latitude in how we run procurement processes. Now, we're turning that into an actual program of work as to how we use those flexibilities to increase the diversity in the supply chains. There is a lot of outreach that is being done with different groups to try to make it easier. I mentioned the e-procurement solution, which is part of this, to demystify and simplify, if you will, the procurement relationship.

We are working and will continue to work more intensively with colleagues in departments such as Innovation, Science and Economic Development and the regional economic development agencies, which have a mandate for economic development for underrepresented and equity-seeking organizations. Their investments in business development, combined with our openness on the procurement side, we hope will be a powerful combination.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Can you speak about the pilots and how many of these are ongoing?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** The Black business procurement pilot is one that we launched in January 2021. There are a lot of insights that were gained on that and that are now being implemented as part of the go-forward program of work. There's regular engagement with the broader supplier diversity council. I had an interesting meeting just a week or two ago with that group, so there's ongoing engagement that has advice that's feeding into the program of work and the design of our procurement model.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Do you see it being permanent, this program?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Yes. These are measures that we definitely want to make permanent, including our procurement assistance Canada program, which I should have noted, and which is a capability we've developed that provides coaching services for businesses that are trying to access procurement so they're not left on their own to figure it out. We actually have some pathfinding supports. That's been a successful model, and it's being continuously redesigned in response to the feedback we're getting from equity-seeking businesses.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we will go to five minutes.

Welcome to the committee, Mr. Gourde.

You have five minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for joining us.

My first question goes to Mr. Thompson.

Canada needs F-35 fighter planes now. Mr. Thompson, have you received a directive to speed up the process of procuring fighter planes?

• (1400)

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Thank you for the question.

As I said a few minutes ago, a process is under way. In the fall, the government announced that two proposals remain that meet the requirements for moving to the next stage of the process. We are still working on the next stage of the process. We expect to announce the results in the coming weeks or months.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Have you received a political directive to speed up the process?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** The process includes a governance system. A little more time is needed to evaluate the proposals.

My colleague Mr. Page would be able to complete my answer.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Mr. Thompson, we can't wait any longer. We must speed up the process. We need those fighter planes.

On another topic, Chantier Davie Canada is in a good position to build ships in the future. [*Technical difficulties*] Davie could be a partner in the national shipbuilding strategy.

Could the company be accredited as part of the national shipbuilding strategy right away?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Thank you for the question.

A process is under way to examine the possibility of Chantier Davie becoming the third company in the national shipbuilding strategy.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Forgive me for rushing you, Mr. Thompson, but we are in a hurry.

Is there an emergency procurement process to speed up the procurement of military equipment to protect Canadian soil in a time of war?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Yes, there is a process. We extended it for 10 weeks to complete the qualification process. The file is moving forward.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Mr. Thompson, what can you do to speed up any process involving the procurement of military equipment to protect Canadians, so that they feel safer?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** With regard to Chantier Davie, I would like to add that the shipyard already has a major work program.

Once again, I could ask Mr. Page to add some details.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** I have another question.

We are going to be sending combat body armour and night vision equipment to our allies in Ukraine. Will those items be taken directly from our reserves? If so, will they be quickly replaced?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Unfortunately, I have no details about that contract. I will let Mr. Page tell you about it.

**Mr. Simon Page:** Thank you very much for the question.

Discussions on a potential transfer of equipment are currently under way. The procurement strategies for that equipment are not yet developed. Depending on the procurement strategy chosen, it is possible that Public Services and Procurement Canada may be involved

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Are we running the risk that our army will be [*technical difficulties*]?

**Mr. Simon Page:** Thank you for the question. However, the question is more for the Department of National Defence, because they manage the inventory of all equipment and they know the operational needs of each mission.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** I have one last question.

We need—

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Mr. Gourde.

[*English*]

Can you put your mike down a little bit? Let's try it that way.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In terms of the strategy to protect Canadian territory in the Arctic, do the Arctic radar stations need to be modernized? Have contracts for modernizing those radar stations been awarded at this time?

**Mr. Simon Page:** Thank you for the question.

Earlier, in 2021, we awarded a contract to continue the maintenance and operational programs at the radar stations.

Once again, questions on the needs and plans for modernization are better directed to the Department of National Defence, because they control and manage equipment needs.

• (1405)

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** I understand that the Department of National Defence manages the needs, but the contracts are awarded from your department. Are you in the process of awarding contracts of that kind in the near future?

**Mr. Simon Page:** At the moment, no work is being done on contracts for modernizing and updating the radar system in the north.

However, as I have just mentioned, in 2021, we awarded a long-term contract for the maintenance and operation of the radar stations.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you.

Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** The buzzer just went off, so no.

Thank you very much, Mr. Gourde.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We'll now go to Mrs. Thompson for five minutes.

**Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to the witnesses.

I want to just touch on this omicron wave.

Clearly, so many people across the country are looking for rapid tests to keep themselves healthy and prevent further infection from the virus. PSPC played a key role in ensuring that there were enough tests to go around. Would you mind giving us an overview of the work that was done by your team to ensure there were sufficient tests available throughout Canada?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

Indeed, this was a full-on project for the department, an around-the-clock effort to look at every single available supplier. I mentioned the global numbers earlier—the 530 million rapid tests that were purchased, the 264 million that were shipped. This involved establishing contractual relationships with at least 15 suppliers that we now have—a range of global suppliers. As well, we're proud to say that we've worked with some domestic companies, Artron being one that's already provided over six million rapid tests domestically. Other companies, like BTNX, which is an importer, were doing important work within Canada in terms of labelling and finishing the product.

We were making efforts to have a domestic component to the extent possible, but really this was an effort to make sure that we had an abundance of supply from all available sources. It required not only the contracts, but also some logistic support. It's not only that they were manufactured, but there was such global competitive pressure in place that just getting access to airports and planes was a huge challenge. That was a big part, just on the logistics of the arrival, the warehousing and the delivery to the provinces.

**Ms. Joanne Thompson:** I'm going to switch to Centre Block. The rehabilitation project, of course, is incredibly significant for all Canadians. We hold the parliamentary buildings in high regard.

Could you please provide us with an update on the ongoing work on the Centre Block project? Some PSPC officials recently appeared at different committees mentioning that the project is on budget and on time. Is that still the case?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Yes, Mr. Chair, thank you for the question.

This is a project that we're very proud of. It's the largest, most complex heritage project ever undertaken in Canada. It's not only restoration, but it's bringing the building up to modern standards—the building systems, the seismic standards, the security posture of the building, making it green and accessible. These are very high standards relative to the nature of the building when it was constructed.

We're very pleased with the progress, the planning around it. As members know, there's a whole domino effect on the planning, of identifying swing space, moving, and then moving facilities back in. That's been a big part of it.

There's been \$4.2 billion in work provided to date as part of this project. Right now on the Centre Block, I believe there are 400 workers in place. As the long-term plans unfold, we would see, I believe, a peak of 1,500 workers as part of that project, so it's a source of employment for some high-skilled trades and other workers as part of the rehabilitation.

**Ms. Joanne Thompson:** To switch yet again, in the supplementary estimates you have allocated \$21.6 million to continue supporting the e-procurement solution project. Can you provide us with the

purpose of this funding and what new features will be added to make it more user-friendly?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for this question.

As I noted briefly earlier, this is a project we're very proud of—it's over five years, and \$197 million is the budget for it. It was announced in budget 2018. We do have a phased rollout over the coming months for this project. It will provide a cloud-based and much more user-friendly tool, which we think will make it much easier for small and medium-sized businesses to do business with the government. It will make it far less complex and reduce the burden that has been associated with procurements in the past.

It has other important features as well in terms of accessibility, so persons with disabilities will have a much easier time interacting, compared with the current platforms. It will meet the highest standards of IT accessibility as part of the project.

● (1410)

**Ms. Joanne Thompson:** Do I still have time?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Ms. Joanne Thompson:** Perfect.

PSPC has been tasked with ensuring that indigenous businesses represent at least 5% of procurement.

How have you been working to meet this target? What programs have been working and what challenges have you faced?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for this question.

As I mentioned earlier in the answer on supplier diversity, this is an area where we've made considerable progress through lots of engagement with indigenous business owners across the country. We have two types of engagement. One is generally across our entire procurement footprint to make indigenous businesses aware of the opportunities, and then we've been leaning in specifically on individual contracts where we think there are big opportunities.

One would be the north warning system sustainment project. This would be an example of where we've done special outreach and have translated procurement documents into indigenous languages and tried to make efforts to attract indigenous businesses into the procurement. There are specific efforts on individual contracts, and then there are across-the-board efforts to work with indigenous business associations to make them generally more aware of the opportunities.

We're optimistic with respect to PSPC's own procurement that we will meet the 5% target and exceed it when it comes into effect in the coming fiscal year.

**Ms. Joanne Thompson:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** I did give you a little extra time.

We're now going into our third and final round.

We will start off with five minutes with Mr. McCauley.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Time flies, doesn't it?

I want to follow up on a question from my colleague Mr. Gourde. Because of translation, I didn't quite hear the answer.

Since the December notice about how we may proceed with the jet fighters, we've had the Russian invasion. Have you or PSPC received any direction to change that December notice and go straight to an award of the jet fighter contract, or is this renegotiation still on the table?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** As I noted in my earlier answer, this is a procurement that is subject to rigorous governance and there's review. It's going through the governance process—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Has PSPC received any direction since the invasion to proceed directly to awarding the contract, or is there a chance of it being delayed for up to a year as we continue negotiations still on the table?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** We are still in the final steps of that process of evaluating the options from the previous step I mentioned before. There's no further update that—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** There hasn't been. Great.

What changes has PSPC made to ensure that the Government of Canada is not buying any goods made by forced labour or slave labour? We discussed this a couple of years ago and we had very, very flimsy—and I'll be generous using that term—oversight to ensure we're not buying goods made in Xinjiang and by forced labour. What has changed since then to ensure this is not happening?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for this question.

This is a very active area of activity in the department as we strengthen our efforts. There is a code of conduct that has been strengthened, which lays out very clearly the expectations of all suppliers in this area. In the fall, we—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Are we auditing them at all? My understanding was that it was self-attestation.

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** The policy allows for us to gather information as it's provided. If there are allegations, we take those into account.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Have we done that at all?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** I was just going to complete the answer.

In the fall, we added new clauses into all of the contracts we have that allow for termination when there's a credible allegation of any involvement with forced labour, so that is a—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Who is making these allegations, whistleblowers or the public?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** We have an integrity regime, and if the allegation is deemed to be credible, it will be acted on. There's information exchange with other governments around the world that have similar regimes.

• (1415)

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Are we, the Government of Canada, actively investigating or actively auditing any of the firms we are purchasing from?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** There is a regime in place that receives allegations and deals with them, and we have the mechanisms now in place to terminate their contracts.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** PSPC is not actively, proactively auditing any of them.

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** There is an integrity regime that actively looks at these issues.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I want to follow up on something I think Mr. Johns was asking regarding purchasing from indigenous people.

We did a study here three and a half years ago. Part of the recommendations was that PSPC was to start tracking contracts to indigenous people, women and people of colour. I have an Order Paper question we submitted, and the answer is that, apart from PSPC marginally tracking a few, government departments are not doing that. This is three and a half years later.

PSPC was only able to identify 80-some contracts to indigenous people and one to a person of colour. It's three and a half years later. Every year, the departmental plan said it is going to do something, and it is never done. How difficult is it to track or get going on this? We're never going to improve the system unless we can compare how we're doing, and every year the results are to be determined.

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Mr. Chair, on that, I alluded to the track of work we have on the indigenous side. That's where we're most advanced. We are optimistic that we will meet or exceed the target within PSPC. We've been very close, above and below it, in the last couple of years.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** The committee's unanimous recommendation was to track for all these equity groups. What's lacking in getting this done? Does it need a political decision, or does it need the deputy minister of PSPC to say "Start tracking"?

This is the will of Parliament. What's stopping us from helping these groups?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Indeed, this is an important track of work. One of the issues is the definitions based on which the data will be tracked. That's not an easy question. There are different perspectives.

I am joined today by a colleague who is leading this work, who can say a bit more about some of the challenges of data and definitions.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** The government has definitions, because we've gone through this. We've asked the witnesses how to define "women-led business", so we have our definitions.

Therefore, again, it's not in the matter of definitions. The government has definitions of "women-led" or "indigenous-owned". Why can't we? In the entire Government of Canada, one contract is noted to businesses of people of colour.

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Mr. Chair, with respect to indigenous businesses, there has been \$442 million in contracting over the last three years and 1,400 contracts with indigenous companies.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** There are 44 listed by the government. That's 44 out of, what, 20,000 contracts issued?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** I'm not sure of the data source that you have there, but I'd be happy to—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** It's an Order Paper question. It's from the Library of Parliament.

**The Chair:** If you could respond to that in writing, we would appreciate getting that.

Thank you.

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

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

In my riding, we have a constituent, whose name is Gurjeet, who follows very closely the happenings in Ottawa and on Parliament Hill, the different announcements and press conferences. Gurjeet depends on sign language interpretation as well. According to PSPC's 2020-21 departmental results, the department “implemented video remote sign language interpretation, ensuring accessible communications for deaf, deafened, and hard-of-hearing Canadians, especially during the Prime Minister's press conferences.”

How do PSPC and the Translation Bureau select events for which sign language interpretation is provided? Do they plan to increase that service in the coming years?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Mr. Chair, I might need to turn to one of my colleagues for the specifics on that. I'm generally aware of the offering we have in this space. Perhaps I can turn to Arianne Reza, our associate deputy minister, for any views on that.

**Ms. Arianne Reza (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Public Works and Government Services):** Thank you very much for the question.

Indeed, we have been working very hard to increase our slate of services along the lines of what we're offering in supporting the accessibility legislation that came into effect a couple of years ago. We're looking at offering the services for Canadians when there are official events, as well as to employees so that everybody can participate in the workplace.

● (1420)

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Just to follow up on that, are we looking to broaden those offerings as well? Is that the direction in which we're heading?

**Ms. Arianne Reza:** We'll have to come back on the specifics of that in terms of what the future suite of work looks like. At this stage, we're hopefully in a ramp-up, but we'll need to see what a steady state looks like.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** That's great. Thank you very much for your response.

I have a question regarding the procurement of electric vehicles. Obviously, climate change is at the top of all our minds and we need to be doing all we can to ensure that we're taking action

against climate change. What is PSPC doing to implement green initiatives? In particular, what are the developments around the electric vehicle fleet?

I ask that because I represent a riding that has over 5,000 workers at Stellantis, which produces the world-class, world-renowned, award-winning hybrid Chrysler Pacifica. One of my ambitions and one of my goals is to see a minister pull up on Parliament Hill in a Chrysler Pacifica.

What are we doing at PSPC to encourage the electrification of our fleets on Parliament Hill and in departments in general?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** This is another active area for the department. We have a very broad greening government agenda that we are supporting, and it entails buildings and building materials as well as vehicles.

With respect to vehicles, we've been significantly increasing the procurement of both hybrid and electric vehicles, having purchased over 1,200 in the last three years. We've made both hybrid and battery electric vehicles available on standing offers for other departments.

We've also been working on the infrastructure that supports the use of electric vehicles. We've installed over 260 charging stations in federal facilities so they're available not only for the government fleet but also for other uses in and around federal buildings. It's a multipronged effort. It's still hampered somewhat by the evolving capability in the industry and the production capacity, so we've had a few setbacks, but we look forward to doing even more in this space in the coming months.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** That's perfect.

Just building on that question, the Treasury Board of Canada is requesting approval for the transfer of \$350,000 under vote 1 to PSPC to support projects that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in government operations. What concrete action will PSPC put in place to reach carbon neutrality by 2030?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** One of the interesting initiatives we have in play is around green electricity. In those parts of the country where green electricity is not already available, we've been making efforts to either directly purchase these green alternatives or to purchase renewable energy certificates. These are two methods by which we are optimistic we will have a net-zero electricity carbon footprint by the end of 2022.

We are also working in the national capital area on leveraging centralized heating and cooling, which has considerable greening benefits as well. Those are a few examples in addition to the work I mentioned on vehicles.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mrs. Vignola for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to come back quickly to Phoenix, and to ProGen, the next generation pay system.



As I understand it, we are not expecting the Phoenix backlog to be cleared before ProGen is put into operation. Am I out to lunch on that?

**Mr. Sony Perron:** Our objective is to recommend a process of experimentation in the first half of 2023, a year and a few months from now. We will then know what we can do and which system we can adopt. The work that PSPC is doing to stabilize the system and clear the backlog is essential for the transition.

Now, the date when the systems come together has not been determined. We have to keep eliminating problem cases, stabilizing the system and working on the quality of the data. Of course, we already know that, if you import poor quality data into a system, it will produce poor results. That work is going on in parallel. Our work for the next year and a half will be to see when and how we will bring the two processes together. That is part of the work we are doing with ProGen.

I cannot speculate on the recommendation that will be made next year, because we have not finished the tests. Normally, however, if the recommendation is to implement one of those products, we will have to have an implementation strategy that recognizes that two sources of work are going to end up joining into one.

• (1425)

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** So the victims of Phoenix can live in hope that the backlog will be cleared in two years, if all the tests work out and everything goes well.

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** I would like to add a few points.

As I mentioned, it is our intention to reduce the backlog in the next two years. Furthermore, we are focusing on the transactions that have major financial consequences for the employees. That number is decreasing each month. In that respect, the situation will gradually improve in the coming months.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** How much has the ProGen project cost us to date?

**Mr. Sony Perron:** I will ask Ms. Hazen to give you the exact, current figures for the ProGen project.

[English]

**Ms. Samantha Hazen (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Chief Financial Officer Branch, Shared Services Canada):** Mr. Chair, thank you for the question.

As of February 10, 2022, SSC has incurred expenditures of \$30.6 million on the NextGen initiative.

**Mr. Sony Perron:** If I can add, this is about the staff internally to do the work, but it's also about the contracts we have in place with the qualified vendors to do their part of the work, which is to test their solutions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Johns for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Thanks.

Going back to a question earlier around Phoenix, what mechanisms are you putting in place to reduce the amount of outsourcing? I never got an answer on that.

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Mr. Chair, the contracts that were mentioned were with respect to business re-engineering and maintaining the continuity of the system itself. The focus is on public servants to do the pay administration. I mentioned that we hired 120 compensation advisers, for example, and we have a contingent of, I believe, over 2,000 employees working on pay.

The challenge is to deal with the retention issues in the workforce and maintain the skilled workforce that we need to deliver the services. That's what the focus is on now.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Going back to the question that Mr. McCauley, Mrs. Vignola and Ms. Thompson talked about, indigenous procurement, you're saying that next year you're going to meet the targets.

Where are you at right now? What percentage of procurement are you at for indigenous businesses?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** We've been up and down a little bit, but we've been very close to the target—within a very small margin, I would say. We're optimistic.

COVID was a bit of a setback, for a couple of reasons. It affected our ability to do outreach. It affected indigenous businesses. It changed the landscape of what we were actually procuring. As I mentioned, we did try to lean in on COVID procurement. We had 40 contracts in the COVID space that were worth over \$130 million. There were significant efforts made, despite the change in what we were buying, to still provide opportunities for indigenous businesses.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Mr. Page, you seem to be the expert on the shipbuilding part.

I don't know if this is the right venue, but we had the PBO testify at committee about the lack of capacity in shipbuilding in Canada and the fact that we don't have a stable long-term sector.

I live in Port Alberni. We have a deep-sea port on the west coast of Vancouver Island. We've heard that there are very few dry dock opportunities between Oregon and Alaska, and there's about \$3 billion a year needed to build....

Is there much communication between your department, Transport Canada, and rural and economic development Canada outlining gaps and opportunities? Are you working collectively on creating programs, so that Port Alberni, for example, which has these aspirations in working with indigenous peoples and the private sector, can get these initiatives off the ground?

• (1430)

**Mr. Simon Page:** I am very happy to report that the answer to this question is, absolutely. We have a couple of strategies that are specifically focused on working together, not only with other government departments but with the shipyards and the marine industry at large in Canada, to look at specific domains where challenges may be encountered. One of them is focused on human resources and the workforce, and building a marine sector. Another one, for instance, is focused on infrastructure, and we have others that are focused on skills development.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** The Port Alberni Port Authority is saying that they're not getting access to these programs. Transport Canada is saying they don't have a program that exists to help support those initiatives. I'm hoping you can create the program, so that when there are gaps, we can help create more opportunities so that it lowers costs overall for procurement.

**Mr. Simon Page:** I understand, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the note.

There are some associations outside of government business that are focused on integrating members into a larger marine industry discussion nationally. Every organization is entitled to join these organizations and to share its comments, so that we can have a greater understanding, a comprehensive understanding at the national level, of what's going on.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

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

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

I remember years ago, and I still have the scars to prove it, defending the procurement of the F-35. It's been over 10 years now. At that time, I believe the costs for the planes and all the ancillary costs were \$16 billion, and they were to be delivered around 2016.

Mr. Thompson, what are we talking about now, in terms of ballpark pricing, and how many would we be talking about at this time?

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** This, for me, is a very large-scale procurement. We have our expert right on the line here, so I might engage Simon Page with some further details on the contract.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Okay, sure.

**Mr. Simon Page:** Mr. Chair, I'm really sorry, but I had a breakage in audio. I wonder if I could get someone to repeat the question, please.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Yes, definitely.

I won't go into the big preamble with my song and dance, but I'll just say that back in 2010 it was announced that the government of the day would be purchasing 65 F-35s, and the cost, plus ancillary costs, was going to be about \$16 billion. I just want you to give us an update on how many you're looking at, potentially, and what the estimated costs are now, 10 or 12 years later.

**Mr. Simon Page:** The requirement we have from our client, in this case the Department of National Defence, is for 88 aircraft under this project. The current budget is up to \$19 billion.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Is there a delivery date on those? I know you have to make a decision, but what would be the estimated delivery date?

**Mr. Simon Page:** We are tracking some delivery dates. They're only estimated delivery dates now, because the project is in definition, as mentioned before by my deputy. The project remains in a very active procurement process. This procurement process is progressing well. We are still working very hard to be in contract in 2022.

We have some delivery dates, initial delivery dates. Acknowledging that we don't have a signed contract and that the project is not in implementation, we are tracking some delivery dates of 2025 or 2026.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Okay.

Maybe this is also a question for you, maybe not. This is a question on the ground-based air defence procurement. Given what's happened in the last little while, is there an opportunity to move up those purchases? Where does that sit, given the current status in the world today?

• (1435)

**Mr. Simon Page:** The specific GBAD, ground-based air defence, project in DND remains in the later stage of option analysis, moving to definition. When it moves from option analysis to definition, we will be involved with the contract. At the moment, PSPC does not have a contract for the GBAD project or GBAD requirements.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Thanks very much.

This question is for Mr. Perron. On ArriveCAN, is there a cost that you can report to taxpayers? How much has the ArriveCAN app cost, all in, for Canadian taxpayers?

**Mr. Sony Perron:** I doubt we would have this in our records. We had a role in creating the conditions to implement the application.

Sam, do we have this? No.

Unfortunately, no.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** What about a ballpark?

**Mr. Sony Perron:** No, because the project was led by CBSA, the border agency. We were there to support them to launch the application. Probably the project cost will be contained within CBSA expenditures.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Okay, fair enough.

On ITHR, obviously all over North America it's very difficult to recruit people in all the different IT careers. I'm guessing you guys are having the same problem. How many people are you short today? Are you short any people today? How do you compete against all the largest tech companies in the world?

**Mr. Sony Perron:** This is an excellent question. In fact, this is one of the challenges. Digital became the norm. Everything we do is digital, so now there is a premium in trying to find people who have the qualifications and expertise.

We have been lucky, with SSC being a large employer, that we can still attract. We are growing the workforce on the IT side, but it requires a lot of energy. We have to compete with the rest in the private sector. Even employers who were not hiring IT in the past are there now.

If you look at our numbers, we are growing the public service. We are still quite dependent on some consulting firms, some external resources, temporarily, because at the same time as we are growing the organization, more demand is coming to us from projects from the client departments.

Sam, how much is our revenue this year, in terms of revenues coming from the departments?

**Ms. Samantha Hazen:** Thank you for the question.

SSC is anticipating revenue just shy of \$1 billion this fiscal year.

**Mr. Sony Perron:** This means that in terms of demand, we need to staff and equip ourselves to respond. Sometimes when projects come in, we have to rely on temporary services, but the objective when we have permanent demand is always to privilege increasing our staff. This is what we are doing right now.

In terms of IT positions, this will continue to be a challenge. We are training a lot of people internally. We are recruiting junior officers, doing the development internally and offering them a career path within SSC. If you're an IT person working at Shared Services Canada, it is exciting. This is probably one of the biggest IT shops in the country. These are the biggest data centres. We have an element to attract talent.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to our last questioner.

Mr. Jowhari, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll be staying on that topic, on attracting talent.

In his response to my question about the future of work, Mr. Thompson talked about moving to a hybrid model. One of the key topics that became quite apparent in the early part of the hybrid model was the security and especially the cybersecurity.

Mr. Perron, what role is SSC playing in that, especially given the current global climate around cybersecurity? How are we attracting the talent? How closely are we working with other departments? This is not going to be only a Shared Services issue.

I would appreciate your insight on this.

**Mr. Sony Perron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This question is critical. Cybersecurity is a team sport and it's an ongoing effort. We are never done when it comes to cybersecurity.

In the Government of Canada, three entities work really closely to ensure the protection of the Government of Canada network and

environment. Shared Services Canada operates and maintains the network infrastructure. The Communications Security Establishment does the vigilance out there with intelligence. They look at the threats and alert us when something needs to be taken care of. The chief information officer at the Treasury Board Secretariat owns the strategic policy direction and will also lead our response process when there is a successful attempt to attack the Government of Canada network. We work together.

At Shared Services Canada, our main focus is to keep the infrastructure current. We talk about patching and making sure that we are in sync with the industry providers for equipment, so we know what the latest threat is. We update. We take preventive measures.

When there is an incident and we are alerted by the Communications Security Establishment that we have to elevate our vigilance because there is a threat, we take measures there. When there is an incident, we need to be ready to respond. First, we isolate the threat, block it. Sometimes we disable some functions until we can re-enable them. Then we deal with the remediation, if there is a device or a portion of the network that has been infected.

We work really closely with the Communications Security Establishment and the Centre for Cyber Security. They will perform the intelligence analysis of all the artifacts we can provide them, and they tell us what the state of the situation is.

As I said, it's really a team sport, but it is really well organized and structured. So far, so good. We are working as a team.

You mentioned the situation right now. We have the highest vigilance because of all the threats. I think some of my colleagues may have appeared in front of this committee telling you that we have billions of attempts to poke the system at all doors all the time here. A lot of this is blocked automatically, but we have to keep the system current to make sure this continues to work.

● (1440)

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you.

I have only about a minute left. I'd like to come back to you, Mr. Perron.

This is regarding IT equipment purchased for the whole of government. Have there been any changes over the last while in the direction and the source of those types of IT purchases?

**Mr. Sony Perron:** No. For Shared Services Canada to operate, of course, we procure for ourselves to be able to deliver the services. We also have the procurement function for IT procurement. Client departments will come to us and we do most of their IT procurement for them. The expenditure related to this procurement will appear in their books, though. We will do the procurement on their behalf, but they will receive the invoice. We are the gate for a lot of the IT procurement.

We work with PSPC because there are some situations where it's not only IT procurement. We have a good collaborative relationship. We often provide expertise on PSPC procurement to make sure we benefit from the right information before we undertake important procurement—

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I apologize for interrupting. I have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Thompson, in our previous studies we talked about shifting to a lot of small businesses within Canada to be able to empower them when it comes to IT services. Have there been any changes, or do you have any update on that?

I will close on that one.

Thank you.

**Mr. Paul Thompson:** Getting more access for small and medium-sized companies is a big part of our procurement agenda. I mentioned the e-procurement solution, and that will be particularly important. You can imagine a company in the digital space that is small and wants to interact with government, so we're optimistic that our e-procurement solution will make it easier for small businesses in every area, including the IT space, to access procurement opportunities.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Jowhari.

With that, we have come to the end of our questions.

I would like to thank all the witnesses from PSPC and from Shared Services for being here today. It's so nice to see you here. This is our second meeting in a row where we have people here, and that's great to see. Hopefully soon we'll have everyone here, besides having this hybrid format.

On behalf of the committee, I'd like to express our hopes that the minister has a speedy recovery and that we are able to have her here sometime soon in the future.

Just so committee members are aware, we have now heard from the President of the Treasury Board, and we have not heard from the minister of PSPC, but the order of reference for the committee to study supplementary estimates (C), 2021-22 will expire on Monday, March 21. The committee can, if it wants, vote on the estimates now.

In all, there would be seven votes in the supplementary estimates (C), 2021-22. Unless anyone objects, I will seek the unanimous consent of the committee to group these votes together for a decision.

Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay. We will have a recorded vote.

Shall all votes referred to the committee in supplementary estimates (C), 2021-22 carry?

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Vote 1c—Operating expenditures.....\$157,824,798

Vote 10c—Translation Bureau Revolving Fund.....\$1

(Votes 1c and 10c agreed to: yeas 7; nays 3)

SHARED SERVICES CANADA

Vote 1c—Operating expenditures.....\$97,251,099

Vote 5c—Capital expenditures.....\$4,579,946

(Votes 1c and 5c agreed to: yeas 7; nays 3)

TREASURY BOARD SECRETARIAT

Vote 1c—Program expenditures.....\$9,557,262

Vote 15c—Compensation Adjustments.....\$205,962,726

Vote 30c—Paylist Requirements.....\$200,000,000

(Votes 1c, 15c and 30c agreed to: yeas 7; nays 3)

• (1445)

**The Chair:** Shall I report the votes back to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

That said, it's before three o'clock, so thank you, everyone. Have a good two weeks back in your riding talking to your constituents and working hard back there.

I declare the meeting adjourned.







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