



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 024

Tuesday, June 7, 2022

Chair: Mr. Robert Kitchen



Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Tuesday, June 7, 2022

• (1615)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.)): Welcome to meeting number 24 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, OGGO. Today we will hear from the President of the Treasury Board and officials regarding the subject matter of supplementary estimates (A), 2022-23.

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 would like to take this opportunity to remind all participants to 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 a 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 masks 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 surfaces such as the desk, chair and microphone with the provided disinfectant wipes when vacating or taking a seat.

As the substitute for the chair, who is on his way, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting, and I look forward to the chair arriving here as soon as possible. I thank members in advance for this co-operation.

I would like to welcome the President of the Treasury Board and her colleagues.

I invite you to make your opening remarks. I believe you have five minutes.

Minister, the floor is yours. Welcome to our committee once again.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier (President of the Treasury Board): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for welcoming me once again to the committee to discuss the supplementary estimates (A) 2022-23. I am sure you have all received them.

Today, I am joined by an extraordinary team of senior Treasury Board Secretariat officials: Annie Boudreau, assistant secretary, expenditure management sector; Karen Cahill, assistant secretary and chief financial officer; and Marie-Chantal Girard, senior assistant deputy minister, employee relations and total compensation. With us online we also have Monia Lahaie, assistant comptroller general, financial management sector; Samantha Tattersall, assistant comptroller general, acquired services and assets sector; and Paul Wagner, assistant deputy minister, strategy and transformation.

[English]

Open, transparent and accountable government means ensuring that parliamentarians and Canadians know how public funds are being invested on their behalf. This is why, in addition to estimates documents, we continue to make use of reporting tools such as GC InfoBase and the Open Government portal. These tools allow users to easily see the authorities approved by Parliament.

[Translation]

I would now like to turn to the supplementary estimates (A) 2022-23.

These supplementary estimates present information on additional spending requirements which were not sufficiently defined at the time of tabling of the main estimates, or which have been subsequently refined to reflect new developments.

In these supplementary estimates, the government is asking Parliament to approve \$8.8 billion in voted budgetary expenditures in 26 organizations to address issues of importance to Canadians.

The supplementary estimates also show, for information purposes, planned statutory spending of \$860 million.

The major items requested in this year's supplementary estimates are:

[English]

There's \$2.1 billion for the Department of Indigenous Services for costs related to compensation agreements in connection with the first nations child and family services program and Jordan's principle, and for reforms to the programs.

There's \$1.4 billion for the Public Health Agency of Canada for the procurement of additional COVID-19 therapeutics to meet the needs of provincial and territorial health systems.

There's \$1.2 billion for the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs for settlements.

[Translation]

The budget allocates \$823.6 million to the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness under the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements program. This program provides financial assistance to provincial and territorial governments and will be used to cover costs related to disasters over the past decade, such as the Fort McMurray, Alberta, forest fires in 2016, the New Brunswick ice storm in 2017, and the spring floods in Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec in the same year.

Five hundred million in funding is earmarked for the Department of National Defence for military support to Ukraine to help defend its sovereignty.

There is \$329.7 million for the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority to support security screening at airports across the country.

Finally, \$322.5 million is provided for the Department of Transport to extend and expand the Incentives for Zero-Emission Vehicles Program. This will encourage the purchase of more vehicle models, including vans, trucks and SUVs.

● (1620)

[English]

While approximately \$1 billion of the planned budgetary spending presented in the supplementary estimates (A) relates to budget 2022 proposals, additional authorities to implement other budget 2022 initiatives will be sought in future supplementary estimates once implementation plans are further developed.

These estimates demonstrate our government's ongoing commitment to improving outcomes for Canadians. We are investing in public health, indigenous children and families, disaster response and recovery, and the fight against climate change. We are also supporting international partners that share our democratic values.

[Translation]

These efforts are all critically important, and I want to thank the members of the committee for inviting me here to discuss them further today.

We are ready to answer your questions.

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)): Thank you, Minister, and thank you very much for being here today.

I apologize for being late. Unfortunately, flights are the way they are these days and delays happen.

We'll now go into questions with Mr. McCauley for six minutes.

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

Minister, it's great to have you here.

Chair, it's nice of you to show up. Thanks.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I have some relatively simpler items than in the past.

My first question—you can get back to us on this—relates to the question I asked this week and last week about split contracts. Order Paper question 364, which we asked, showed hundreds and hundreds of obviously split contracts. There was OSFI and the Auditor General's office. They were very clearly split.

Would you get back to us on what the government plan is to end the practice of the government violating Treasury Board rules to split contracts? If you could get back to us, that would be wonderful.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Can I answer part of that now? I have that answer for you.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: If you have a quick one, please, go ahead.

Hon. Mona Fortier: The Treasury Board directive is clear that—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I read it in the House today.

Hon. Mona Fortier: —requirements should not be divided “to avoid financial approval thresholds or policy requirements, such as contract entry limits, regulatory rules and trade agreement obligations” and that all departments are responsible for contracting and “Establishing, implementing and maintaining a departmental procurement management framework, consisting of processes, systems and controls”.

Just so that you know, a firm getting multiple contracts is not necessarily indicative of contract splitting.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm going to interrupt.

The Order Paper clearly shows otherwise, and we have the proof. What is the department doing to prevent this?

I realize, department by department.... However, this is the enforcement of Treasury Board rules very clearly being violated. The same order from the same vendor was split up into four different contracts at \$24,999 each. They were all for the same thing.

Hon. Mona Fortier: I'll still under—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Maybe get back to us because I'm not getting the answer.

How is it being enforced?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I will finish, if I can.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Sure.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Samantha will also complement my answer.

Under the directive, when considering a new contract, departments must “verify whether a mandatory standing offer or supply arrangement exists that meets their requirements”. If one does, the contracting department must use it. Under the TBS directive, it is also mandatory for departments to use standing offers for certain commodities.

I will also ask Samantha to complement this.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: No, actually, I'm fine. I'm running out of time. I'm going to move on.

Just quickly, when will we have an updated mandate policy for the public service? I think it was due maybe a month ago. Do you know what date that will be provided?

Hon. Mona Fortier: First, thank you for the question. I know that we are currently reviewing the vaccine mandate for public servants. I'm hopeful that we will be giving more information very soon.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Do you think within a month, or do you think over the summertime...?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Again, I would prefer not to give a time frame at this time. We are studying it at this time. The review should be done as soon as possible.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay.

There is money in the supplementary (A)s for office accommodations. Do we have enough office space to accommodate all the new people hired during the pandemic?

• (1625)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you for asking that question. As you know, we are in a new form of the workplace, with hybrid being part of the solution.

I might have one of my colleagues answer your question more specifically, but I would say that, at this time, we are monitoring office space for the needs of public servants.

Marie-Chantal...?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Ms. Girard, do we have enough office space for all the new people added?

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Employee Relations and Total Compensation, Treasury Board Secretariat): Indeed, in terms of what departments are doing now, the health and safety guidance allows us to bring people back in—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: No, I realize that. It's a simple question. It's straightforward. Do we have enough office space for the new people added?

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: Currently, each deputy minister is bringing people in as per the model, the operational requirements and what they want to test as a hybrid format. We're not hearing about not enough space to do the testing model.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Will TBS be setting a return to work policy, if it's a hybrid setting, like the province does, with x number of days per week in the office and x at home?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you again for the question. We are currently, of course, encouraging departments to identify the needs they have—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Right, but are we going to set a directive as opposed to encouraging? Will we set a directive?

Hon. Mona Fortier: We have sent, with the occupational health and safety...they have the requirements to share. The department officials are the ones leading on what they need for their own departments. Therefore, we have a policy.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: There won't be a directive from Treasury Board—

Hon. Mona Fortier: There is a directive.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: —saying return to work x number of days, or...

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: The directive on the health and safety is provided in collaboration with our PHAC colleagues. What we are providing is guidance to make sure that it's done in a consistent, equitable way as per collective agreement requirements, but it's for each department and deputy minister to determine the model they want to test, and—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm going to interrupt quickly, just because I'm running out of time.

There's a lot less in the supplementary (A)s, as compared with previous years, from the budget. Is it just a change in process? Is it a slowing process or implementation issue that so little from the budget is in the supplementary (A)s compared to normal?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I will let Annie give you an answer on that.

Ms. Annie Boudreau (Assistant Secretary, Expenditure Management Sector, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you.

It is not a change in the process. Last year in the supplementary (A)s we had a big amount for COVID-19. That's why the amount—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Two years before, a lot more from the budget was in the supplementary (A)s as well, though.

Ms. Annie Boudreau: It was the year before budget 2020.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Two years ago....

Ms. Annie Boudreau: There was no budget 2020.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's what I said—two years before.

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Yes. It was budget implementation at that time. That's why it was 100% included for the two years before budget 2020.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Will you catch up in the supplementary (B)s?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Yes—in the supplementary (B)s and (C)s, absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

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

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

Thank you, Minister, for joining us today.

Minister, how is your office improving the efficiency of our regulatory system, and why is this important for Canadians?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you for the question.

As you know, we're making our regulatory system more effective and less burdensome. While we maintain our world-class protections for consumers, health, safety and the environment, at this time the second annual regulatory modernization bill is in the Senate. It's Bill S-6. It will reduce administrative burden for businesses, facilitate digital interactions with government and simplify regulatory processes. These changes will also support our economic recovery by helping businesses do what they do best—make it easier for Canadians to get things done.

That is what we're currently seeing with Bill S-6 in the Senate at this time.

Mr. Parm Bains: The PBO has criticized the misalignment of the budget and main estimates.

What is your response to that?

Hon. Mona Fortier: We talk a lot about this around this table, where there's confusion about the purpose.

The budget allocates the money in the fiscal framework for initiatives, and the estimates seek authority from Parliament to spend that money. The main estimates aren't meant to approve every item announced in the budget because it takes time to design the implementation plans that ensure good value for taxpayer funds.

In terms of setting a specific date for presenting the budget and the main estimates—and I know we've had that conversation before—it would unnecessarily restrict the government's flexibility to respond to global and domestic events. Look at what is happening with the war in Ukraine, which, as you know, began on February 24, just to give you an example. Therefore, new initiatives announced in the budget cannot be sufficiently developed to be included in the main estimates. Consultations are often required to prepare detailed implementation plans for review by Treasury Board and such consultations are not possible while protecting budget secrecy. Therefore, that is why we are presenting this way.

We are always very open and transparent. As you know, you can have access to many financial reports to better understand how the spending is done through our Open Government portal.

• (1630)

Mr. Parm Bains: How does the government prevent “March madness” spending, where departments try to blow through room in their budgets at the end of the fiscal year?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I'm sure members will be interested to know that as departments can't overspend their appropriated limits, keeping some reserve funds until late in the fiscal year is prudent financial management. A carry-forward process allows departments to use up to 5% of their operating budget or 20% of their capital budget in a future year.

The carry-forward process was introduced over 30 years ago, following a recommendation by the Auditor General. That is how I can explain the question that you just asked.

Thank you, MP Bains.

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, do I have more time?

The Chair: Yes. You have two minutes.

Mr. Parm Bains: Okay.

Bill S-6 amends the Canada Lands Surveyors Act so that it harmonizes with provincial and territorial law.

How will this change reduce regulatory burden and improve efficiency?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Again, I will just inform you that this annual regulatory modernization bill helps us to reduce red tape. It helps us to make sure that businesses can function without that red tape.

I know that we have Karen, who might want to go into the details of those we are presenting right now in the Senate with Bill S-6.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karen Cahill (Assistant Secretary and Chief Financial Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

In fact, Bill S-6 will also change the paper process to a more digital process. It will also enable business innovation through a regulatory sandbox. Finally, it will make changes to our zero-emission vehicles.

As the minister indicated, there are a lot of advantages to the regulatory process as it will enable our businesses to restart within the economy after the pandemic.

Mr. Parm Bains: Okay.

Thank you.

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

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your welcome. Indeed, I am here in place of my colleague Julie Vignola, who is listening, but who cannot be with us today.

Ms. Fortier, I am pleased to meet you. For me, you are a minister who represents the spirit of bilingualism well. You are probably the most articulate in both English and French, and it is very easy for me to understand you as a francophone.

On the other hand, this is not the case for all civil servants. We know that 81% of senior civil servants are English speakers, while 70% of new civil servants are English speakers. There is a disparity on this side. Wouldn't it be logical for the proportion of francophones among new civil servants to be the same among senior civil servants?

Why are only 19% of senior civil servants francophones, while at the bottom 30% of civil servants are francophones?

Shouldn't the proportion be the same at the bottom and the top?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you for your interest in official languages.

Since I am Franco-Ontarian, my mother tongue is, of course, French, and I am very proud of it. I even have the privilege, as President of the Treasury Board, of working in French with several of the francophone or anglophone members of the team, who are very proficient in both official languages. I am also very proud of that.

You know, over 40% of public servants are bilingual. So when we talk about bilingualism, we're talking about the ability to work in both official languages. I think it's important to continue to promote bilingualism and to increase the number of designated bilingual positions in the public service, as we will do in our department. I will let Ms. Girard outline some of our plans.

Assistant deputy minister positions, for example, are designated bilingual. Incumbents are therefore required to be able to work in both official languages. You can see that there is a willingness within the government to really offer, through our public servants, services in both official languages. We will also continue to improve that.

I don't know if Ms. Girard wanted to give other examples of what we do at Treasury Board.

• (1635)

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: Yes, I could add some points.

Posts are designated according to the nature of the duties performed. Therefore, all positions that require service in both official languages are designated as such, and incumbents have the opportunity to develop their skills in their second language. We want to improve this aspect as well. Through the legislation currently under

consideration, the government is also seeking to increase its bilingual character across the country.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I'm glad to hear it. However, in several areas, we realize that it is more difficult for citizens to obtain services in French. We also know that several public servants confirmed that things are generally done in English and that francophones are even discriminated against when they speak French: their ideas are ignored and their opportunities to progress are limited. Obviously, the statistics on this subject tend to demonstrate this fact.

French speakers tell us that there are two official languages: English and translation. This is a quip you have heard before, surely. The reason is that English speakers often fail to understand the subtleties of the arguments raised by French speakers, and I see that this is indeed the case. As a result, francophones become discouraged from making interventions in French.

So here is my question. What explains why an idea expressed in French can be ignored, even discredited, while the same idea, expressed in English, could be put forward? Can anything be done to counter this within the various departments?

Hon. Mona Fortier: First of all, I want to say how our government is making concrete efforts to increase the number of bilingual public servants. Efforts are being made in staffing to hire people who can provide services in both official languages.

I am also very proud that there are over 200 official languages champions in the public service who promote official languages to senior management. Of course, we are always looking for ways to increase the capacity within the various departments to provide services in both official languages.

At this time, our government is also developing a new framework for language qualification standards, for supervision and for evaluation, so that we support a culture of bilingualism in the public service. So there are a number of efforts underway by Treasury Board, among others, but also by departments.

I will let Ms. Girard add some more concrete elements to this.

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: The reform planned by the bill under consideration will also seek to strengthen these efforts. The findings have been made, and there is a desire to enhance and strengthen bilingualism. Under this reform, the Treasury Board would have more power to establish, with the Treasury Board Secretariat, oversight to verify the compliance of federal institutions and to evaluate the government's effectiveness in this area.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I'll take the liberty of asking one last question. I may come back to you in the next hour.

Minister, you mentioned at the outset that you were an open and transparent government. The Privy Council is asking for just over \$28.5 million in supplementary estimates (A).

What will this money be used for, Minister?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Ms. Boudreau will give you the details of the \$28.5 million that the Privy Council is requesting.

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Thank you.

I don't know if you've had a chance to review the Blue Book we use, where all expenses are detailed.

First of all, there is an amount that is set aside for the emergency measures inquiry. If you give me a moment, I will find the page. It is on page 6. I will be able to read it.

• (1640)

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I think my time is up. You can send the information to the committee.

Ms. Annie Boudreau: The information can be found on page 2-7. The amount of \$28,518,211 is broken down there.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much.

I would also like to highlight an interesting initiative, the decentralization of jobs to the regions. This is a measure I would like to commend.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: If you have anything further that you would like to provide the committee, by all means please do that, Ms. Boudreau. We appreciate that.

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

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Thank you, Minister, for being here.

We know that COVID-19 still remains present in our communities. New Democrats and I are continuing to support evidence-based health measures to protect the health of Canadians. I also encourage Canadians to continue to get the vaccine doses that they're eligible for to reduce their risk of severe outcomes.

However, some of my constituents, as you're aware, have chosen not to be vaccinated and are presently on leave from their jobs, including Canada Post workers, because of federal vaccine mandates. In March, Dr. Tam communicated to the public that the Treasury Board was reviewing federal vaccine mandates. It's been almost three months now since the public was informed of that review. In my home province, a lot of people are back to work, and in the public service as well, whom this would have affected.

I want to underscore that decisions about public health measures should be based on the most current evidence available, and transparency about such decisions is absolutely critical to maintaining public confidence.

With that in mind, when do you anticipate that the ongoing review will be completed, and when will the results be made available to the public?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you for this very important question.

Last fall, we knew we needed to have a fully vaccinated workforce to make our work sites safer and also to make sure our communities were safer. That is why we brought forward the vaccine

mandates. Interestingly, we asked employees of the public service at the time to attest to their vaccination status, and they did step up. Almost 99% of employees attested to being fully vaccinated.

Mr. Gord Johns: I know, Minister. I just—

Hon. Mona Fortier: In answer to your question, we are committed to review this policy, as we mentioned, every six months, and we're currently reviewing this policy. We are making decisions and evaluations based on science and the advice, of course, of public health officials.

We know Canada Post's top priority is to also keep its employees and their communities safe while they continue to offer their services to Canadians. This is why we're reviewing, at this time, the mandate.

Mr. Gord Johns: I appreciate that, but I only have a little bit of time and you know that.

It's urgent that we get some transparency here. It undermines public health, when there's not transparency with the public. People have questions.

In terms of the Public Health Agency, it's requested \$1.4 billion through vote 1 to procure additional COVID-19 therapeutics. Has the agency sought funding through vote 1 or vote 5 to procure a safer supply of controlled substances to reduce drug toxicity, deaths and hospitalizations, which we know have accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Hon. Mona Fortier: As you know, this includes \$1.8 billion, as you said, to support our government's response to the pandemic and \$1.4 billion for the Public Health Agency of Canada to procure additional COVID-19 treatments.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm asking specific questions about the toxic drug supply crisis and about safer supply. I need a specific answer on that.

Hon. Mona Fortier: The amounts here are not dedicated for the opioid crisis that you are talking about.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you. I'm hoping you'll come forward with some amounts soon to rapidly scale up safer supply.

In terms of the toxic drug crisis that continues to take lives of Canadians each day across all walks of life, you may be aware that legislation has recently been passed in the Ontario legislature to require workplaces, that are at risk of a worker opioid overdose, to have naloxone kits on site and within the vicinity of a worker trained in their use. Naloxone is a medication that can temporarily reverse the effects of an opioid overdose and allow time for medical help to arrive.

Has Treasury Board conducted an evaluation of the risk of opioid-related overdoses for workers employed within different sectors of the federal public service, and does Treasury Board have a policy regarding naloxone placement and training in federal workplaces?

If not, will you do that? I've had some political staffers, even from the Liberal Party, who have had opioid and substance use-related disorders, and they've cited that this wasn't on site and needs to be.

• (1645)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Before I hand it off on the more Treasury Board-related policy work, I would like to mention the hard work that you have been doing on this file. I want to acknowledge that.

As you know, our government does understand the urgency of the crisis, and we're moving forward with an evidence-based approach to end this worsening situation. As you know, Minister Bennett announced the comprehensive B.C. proposal to decriminalize personal possession of small amounts of certain illegal drugs within the province—

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm not looking for that, just the answer.

Hon. Mona Fortier: I know. I just wanted to mention that is the government's work.

I will, though, ask Marie-Chantal to answer specifically on the Treasury Board question you have.

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: Of course, we promote and foster a safe and healthy workplace. Impairment is prohibited in all federal workplaces. We're working very closely with the ESDC labour program—

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm sorry. This is about life-saving medicine. It's like having a fire extinguisher in the room. We have a toxic drug crisis. Twenty-seven thousand people are dead. I'm asking you to ensure that we have life-saving medication in all public workplaces that are federally run. I'm asking you to do that and to ensure that legislation comes forward and that you make that happen.

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: We're taking notes, and codes of conduct and related policies are updated as we monitor the situation on an ongoing basis.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

We will now go to the second round.

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

[Translation]

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

Hello, ladies.

I'm going to talk to you about the Quebec City tramway. In 2019, the Prime Minister announced in Quebec that the federal government was allocating \$1.2 billion to the tram project, which was then estimated at \$3.3 billion. In fact, we know that the federal government had assessed that the ridership of the Quebec City tramway was not sufficient to justify the investment of this amount. About \$500 million was therefore given directly to Quebec City

and an agreement was made with Montreal to take \$800 million from Montreal to make up the shortfall.

Now, the Quebec government has made a request, as a cost overrun of \$500 million to \$600 million is already expected. Do the 2019 conditions based on projected ridership remain the same or are things different now?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you for your question.

I think it's important to mention that we know very well that construction costs are rising in all sectors. So it wouldn't be surprising if there were an increase in costs for the Quebec City tramway project.

Unfortunately, I don't have all the information right now. I don't think my colleagues have it either, but if you'll allow me, I'll send you a written answer. That would be better.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I would appreciate that. We need to have a clear understanding of what happened in 2019, given that there was not enough ridership at the time. I'd like to know if that has any bearing on the next phases.

Hon. Mona Fortier: I will also contact my colleague Mr. Dominic LeBlanc. By contacting Infrastructure Canada, I will probably be able to find information to answer your question.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Perfect. All right.

I'm going to move to another topic.

At the moment we are approving spending, and there is a lot of spending. We know that your government has been spending, which is not a problem. However, I have a problem with the performance associated with the spending that is done. At the moment, we are experiencing a great deal of difficulty with airports and the issuing of passports.

There is a problem, and we are trying to determine the source of the problem. It is a staff management problem or a performance problem with situations that we think may be related to telework.

I've already asked Ms. Girard the question and she's answered it, but I'm coming back to it, because right now there's a huge amount of spending, but there's not enough output. How do you see that?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I think it's important to know that over the last two years there has been an unprecedented need to invest in helping Canadians, workers and businesses through the COVID-19 crisis. That is what we have done. We are obviously looking at how that spending is going...

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: You're talking to me about expenses related to COVID-19, but I'm talking to you about spending to reduce airport traffic and speed up passport issuance.

We hear about hiring additional staff, but at the same time, we know that some staff are on forced leave because they are not vaccinated.

Where is this all headed? It's all very well to vote for extra money, but if there's a problem with staff management, it's not going to get any better. The last directive on performance management was issued in 2014. Since 2014, there has been no update. It is precisely a directive that aims to monitor the performance of employees and assess the quality of management programs.

Why has Treasury Board not issued a new directive since 2014?

Hon. Mona Fortier: With respect to airport traffic, we know it's a very difficult situation. In these supplementary estimates, we are providing \$330 million to address the challenges at airports. This is one of the measures we are taking. Of course, Treasury Board is watching and encouraging the department to take this money to help overcome these challenges.

• (1650)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Minister, you keep saying that you are investing. Yet when you ask for money, it is because the return is less than before. It ends up becoming a question of organization.

For example, it was known that there would be an increased demand on the passport front. However, there was no preparation beforehand. Subsequently, hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent to catch up.

As a public service personnel manager, do you think we could do anything other than invest money?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I understand very well what you are saying and I think you are asking a very good question.

You always have to look at how the money is spent. When I'm at the Treasury Board table, we get submissions and we ask the department to explain how that money is going to be spent. The money has to be spent responsibly. We also have to assess where the needs are. After the process is completed, we can send the money that has been requested. So there are controls that are done at different levels.

I don't know if my colleague Ms. Girard wants to add anything about the concrete elements.

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: The directive, without being updated, is still relevant and still implemented. Realities and challenges change, but performance management continues.

In practical terms, each head of department or agency can work with the Public Service Commission to establish a specific strategy. There is a labour shortage across the country. Here, it would be easy to say that this is a headquarters issue in Ottawa. But that's not the case. It is a Canada Border Services Agency problem across the country. Even at the regional level, there is a labour shortage, hence the importance of the skills strategy that we are developing. It's also important to match needs with supply.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Girard.

[English]

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

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Good evening, Madam Minister.

We are very pleased to welcome you here to the committee.

I am going to talk first about a subject that is of concern to all of us and that is close to your heart, as it is to mine, and that is the issue of official languages in Canada. I am not just talking about bilingualism on a national level. We understand the importance of supporting linguistic minorities, both francophones outside Quebec and anglophones in Quebec.

Many concerns have been raised in relation to the issue of official languages in the federal government. How will Bill C-13 give more power to Treasury Board to ensure the equality of English and French within the various federal departments?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I think we have the same passion.

I thank you for your question and for the important work you are doing to modernize the Official Languages Act.

All parliamentarians are working on this issue, and I hope that we will be able to move forward quickly with Bill C-13, An Act for the Substantive Equality of Canada's Official Languages, so that this famous Official Languages Act can be modernized, after more than 50 years. This legislation should give us more ways to increase the relevance of official languages across the country.

As we know, French is in decline throughout Canada, even in Quebec. We must find ways to strengthen both of the country's official languages.

Bill C-13 will strengthen the Treasury Board's powers with respect to official languages, which will ensure compliance by federal institutions, as well as an increased monitoring, auditing and evaluation role. Before, we didn't necessarily do it formally, but now it will really give the Treasury Board the authority to do it. It's really important to continue these efforts and to clarify the role of the Treasury Board in order to strengthen official languages across the country.

With regard to the public service, I would like to mention that respecting official languages is not only an obligation of the government, but also one of its priorities. It is essential to provide services efficiently and effectively in both official languages. We are committed to providing federal services in accordance with our official languages obligations.

As I said earlier to Mr. Lemire, we will continue to increase the number of positions that will be offered in both official languages. We will continue to put in place language training programs for public servants. We even have a project for graduates and newcomers. We want to help them master both official languages and offer these services to Canadians.

A lot of effort and investment is being made, and we will continue to show leadership. With the help of all parliamentarians, we will be able to ensure that the new law is adopted. I personally hope that it will be passed soon.

• (1655)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Minister.

[English]

I have one more question for you.

This committee has delivered a very fulsome report on whistle-blowers. I think it's a priority for all of the members of the committee that the government strengthens policies and processes to support whistle-blowers. Can you talk a little bit about what your department is now doing to ensure that happens?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Yes. Thank you.

You know that our government believes that those who disclose serious wrongdoings must be protected. The law provides a secure and confidential process for disclosing serious wrongdoings in the workplace and protection from acts of reprisal. Public servants' disclosures result in an average of 10 findings of wrongdoing every year.

As you know, Canada's whistle-blowing law is part of the recourse options that cover harassment, discrimination, labour grievances and privacy complaints. Our government has strengthened training, monitoring, reporting and policies on workplace harassment and violence. Budget 2022 funded the review of the act, which I'm hopeful we can launch later this year.

I hope that answers your question, MP Housefather.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you so much.

Mr. Chair, do I have any more time, or am I done?

The Chair: There goes the bell. That was perfect timing. Thank you very much.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: You should never ask a question you don't want to hear the answer to.

Minister, the main estimates did not include any funding for the Law Commission of Canada, which was re-established on May 16, 2022. Suddenly, just over \$4 million in funding has been allocated to this commission in the supplementary estimates (A).

What will this money be used for?

Please reassure me, because I fear that, under the guise of public consultations, the Government of Canada will re-establish this

commission to challenge the laws of Quebec and the Canadian provinces it does not like.

What exactly will these funds be used for?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you very much for asking that question.

I'm going to ask Ms. Boudreau to tell you in more detail what the \$4 million for this commission will be used for.

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Thank you for your question.

Indeed, \$4.3 million is included in the supplementary estimates (A). This investment, which was announced, comes from the 2020-21 federal budget. As you said, it's for the re-establishment of the Law Commission of Canada.

[English]

I'm sorry. All of my notes here are in English. If you allow me, I will try to answer in both official languages.

The Minister of Justice's mandate letter indicates that the law commission will initially focus on issues such as systemic racism in the justice system and advancing reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

We talked about the \$28.5 million for the Privy Council Office. There are two lines I'd like to get more information on.

What is the Emergencies Act inquiry? Can you elaborate on that?

I would also like a little bit more information on emergency management and preparedness.

• (1700)

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Thank you.

The amount is going to be used to prepare a report, one year after the act has been implemented. An order in council was put in place on April 25 this year. A report should be submitted on February 20 next year. This money is for part-time staff, about 15 people, who will do the analysis and submit the report by February of next year.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much.

Hon. Mona Fortier: This is one of the intentions we had when we passed the act. We are required to submit this report and to give an account of what we have done under the act. That is part of our obligations.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: We understand that it was impossible to foresee COVID-19, but there are consequences that can be better explained.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemire. Two and a half minutes goes by very quickly.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Johns, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Gord Johns: Minister, this government is increasingly spending money on expensive consultants, like Phoenix pay, while public servants are being offered wage increases that simply don't keep up with inflation.

Do you believe hard-working public servants, who have delivered for Canadians throughout the pandemic, deserve increases that account for the rising cost of living?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you for your question.

I know that the increase in inflation is something that everybody is living with right now. Because of many global and environmental situations, we are all faced with the—

Mr. Gord Johns: Minister, I'm sorry. We only have a little bit of time.

Do you believe that they should be getting wage increases that meet the cost of living and inflation costs that are happening right now?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I believe that right now we are actually having conversations during collective bargaining. That conversation is happening at that table with the Public Service Alliance, for example, and all the other unions. I would prefer that conversation happened at that table.

Mr. Gord Johns: We, as New Democrats, believe that they should.

Are you committed to reining in outsourcing to ensure Canadians are getting value for services and that we maintain institutional knowledge, skills and expertise in the public service?

Hon. Mona Fortier: One really important thing is that we have a labour shortage right now. We have a skills shortage for delivering many of the government services. One way to do that is to go find contractual work to help us deliver those services.

I can tell you that public servants are really stepping up and also getting the training necessary to bring those skills. We need to have that balance. That is what we're focusing on to make sure we deliver services to Canadians the right way.

Mr. Gord Johns: Are you committed to creating clear guidelines, so that outsourcing is only pursued as a last resort?

I know you're going to answer and I only have a bit of time left, so I want to thank you for being here. I want to thank your staff, especially the public servants, for the important work they do.

Hon. Mona Fortier: I want to echo that because I know that public servants are really delivering for Canadians, especially in the last two years.

We do have a lack of certain skills, especially in IT and our digital transformation. For example, for the next-gen that we're bringing forward, we are contracting with businesses that are helping us and public servants to have the next pay system that will work for Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you very much.

In April, the PBO requested some costing in regard to Bill C-13. To date, it has not received any information from the Treasury Board. It was a formal request. Is there a reason why? When can the PBO expect some costing information on Bill C-13?

Hon. Mona Fortier: As you probably heard, the minister responsible for official languages was very clear on the fact that we are on a path to adopt, I hope, Bill C-13, very soon. Then we will be able to have the necessary funds to see how this new law will be implemented.

I believe that probably at that time we'll be able to evaluate how we will implement the new Bill C-13—

• (1705)

Mr. Ben Lobb: Something caught my ear there. It sounded to me like it hasn't been costed. You're going to implement it and then cost it. Did I just mishear that?

It seems to me that you'd cost it first and then implement it, but maybe I'm wrong.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Again, there are some costs associated with developing Bill C-13 and in imagining how this will be implemented.

I can maybe ask Monia Lahaie, who probably has the specifics on the—

Mr. Ben Lobb: It's okay. Thank you. We'll maybe follow up at a later time and see if that information can find its way there.

On June 1, there was an article in the news about a privacy breach for hundreds of employees who were claiming Phoenix damages.

In a case like that, does the Treasury Board report that breach to the Privacy Commissioner? Do they proactively disclose that to the Privacy Commissioner? What date did they disclose that to him?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you for that.

It was very unfortunate that this administrative error was made. Yes, it was reported to the Privacy Commissioner.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Thank you.

I think probably by now I understand that part of your role as the minister for the treasury department is to work with your colleagues and cabinet ministers in a collaborative way, to help them streamline their operations and provide some guidance on that.

First, there are a couple of topics that continuously come up in the news and in question period. It's in regard to processing passports and immigration applications. I'm wondering if you or your department has had any conversations with Minister Gould or Minister Fraser on opportunities to speed those two up and perhaps hire more employees? Can you tell me about that?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I can tell you, yes, there is collaboration with Treasury Board and my colleagues on how to implement the investments for different projects.

With passports, I know that I've had many conversations with Minister Gould to find solutions to increase, for example, the number of public servants returning to the Service Canada workplace to open late at night and on Saturdays. There has been collaboration.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Thank you.

With regard to passports, how many employees have been added to try to catch up with the backlog in applications?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I don't have the number per se, but I can find it. I think I have 600 in mind, but I will get you the exact number of human resources in capacity for the passport delivery.

Mr. Ben Lobb: In your role, in your mandate letter, I think it talks about streamlining the hiring process. How long does it currently take to hire an employee, and what is the goal? What is your goal for the length of time to hire an employee?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I don't think it's a one-size-fits-all approach in recruiting employees.

Mr. Ben Lobb: That's fair enough.

Hon. Mona Fortier: It depends on which level it is. If it's part time—

Mr. Ben Lobb: Let's say somebody who would process passports. Would there be a time...?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Again, as we know, we're in a difficult situation right now because there's a surge in demand. I understand that Minister Gould found ways with her department, of course, to get some contract workers to help in processing passports.

There are probably part-time workers who are coming to supplement and help in getting those passports done. Then there is, of course, recruitment done for the public service full time in, for example, passport Canada. That's another process. I know that probably Marie-Chantal will be able to complement that answer in the next hour, if you wish.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

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

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

Minister, welcome again to the OGGO committee. It's always a good day when you and your team join us at OGGO to testify, and thank you so much for your thoughtful responses and insights this afternoon.

Treasury Board plays an important role in gender and diversity impact reporting across government. We know that GBA+ is really important in identifying gaps, for example, in how diverse populations access key programs. It's critical for us to design better pro-

grams that have a bigger impact. We know that, during COVID, the pandemic has only really accentuated the discrepancies, for example, amongst women and diverse populations as well.

Minister, what is your reaction to the recent Auditor General's report on gender-based analysis plus?

• (1710)

Hon. Mona Fortier: As you know, we are committed to making sure we leave no one behind. This is where gender-based analysis plus policy development helps us focus on how to make sure everybody is considered in the different services and programs we offer. It is now mandatory to have GBA+ in all budget proposals, Treasury Board submissions and MCs—memoranda to cabinet. We're investing over \$200 million in disaggregated data and research that will help us better understand how we can bring forward the tools we have—through Treasury Board or budget proposals, for example—to make sure we represent and leave nobody behind.

I can say that, according to the OECD, Canada is a global leader in gender budgeting. We know our work is not complete. There's always a possibility to improve. I know my colleagues around the table, especially Minister Ien, are providing leadership to improve GBA+. Of course, the Auditor General did a very important study. Her report gives us recommendations on how we can improve further, and we welcome these recommendations. Across government, from policy design to program delivery, we will be using her recommendations to improve GBA+.

One more thing I'd like to add is that, as you probably know, I had the privilege, in my former position as associate minister of finance and minister of middle-class prosperity, to develop a quality of life framework. That is another tool to make sure we don't look only at the GDP indicator for budget decisions or creating programs and services. We look at all the outcomes and make sure we represent well-being in our providing services to Canadians.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I appreciate that answer. I'm glad you pointed out that Canada is an OECD leader. Only about half of OECD countries actually incorporate GBA+ into their budgeting and policies, and even fewer are legislated to do so. I believe Canada is one of a handful of countries that does this, so I really appreciate your highlighting our leadership role in that, globally.

I want to now switch gears.

We know that racialized individuals, especially Black Canadians, are among those who are really disproportionately impacted by mental health struggles due, for example, to their lived experiences of systemic racism.

Could you speak to what the government is doing to support the mental health of Black public servants in government?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

As you probably know, in my mandate letter, I am working—our government is committed to this—to support a more inclusive workplace for Black public servants. As you probably also know, in budget 2022, over \$3.7 million is dedicated to Black-led engagement, design and establishment of a mental health fund for Black federal public servants. That will be a game-changer for our public service.

We are having consultations with Black employees, experts and mental health service providers that will inform the design of this new fund. The engagement process is expected to be completed this fall or winter, hopefully, and will inform options for implementation. It will also complement other measures we've taken, like legislation, support and development programs, outreach and, as I said earlier, disaggregated data.

• (1715)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We've now finished our second round. The minister has been with us a little over an hour. I appreciate her being here, as we always do. I've learned that, over the last 24 hours, we've had weather issues, mechanical issues, equipment problems and personnel issues that sometimes change time frames, timelines and so on.

If the minister wishes to stay with us for a bit longer, we're more than happy to have her. We will only be going one more round, which will be roughly 25 minutes. Recognizing the minister's time, if she wishes to stay, I would appreciate it.

Hon. Mona Fortier: I'm sure I'll come and see you again very soon for supplementary estimates (B).

Thank you very much for having me again today, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now, we'll just go into our third and final round with Mr. McCauley, for five minutes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks, everyone, for sticking around.

Would you be able to provide us a breakdown—I've asked previously about this—for the money in Bill C-8, Bill C-10 and the supplementary estimates (C)s for the duplicated funding request for the rapid tests? Just provide it for the committee. I don't need it right now.

In the supplementaries, there's \$823 million for Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. In the supplementary (A)s it mentions it's for disasters, etc., over the last 10 years. I'm curious why it's in the supplementary (A)s now for items going back 10 years? What would it be addressing?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: This is based on the requests that we've received from provinces and territories. We need to get the supporting documents in order for us to do our due diligence, and we—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You haven't gotten the supporting documents. You're asking Parliament to approve almost a billion dollars, but the department itself doesn't have the supporting documents. Are you not putting the cart before the horse, asking for the money when you don't have the supporting documents for the ask?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: I'm explaining to you why it's 10 years. Once we have all of the information, the department goes to Treasury Board with the submission and we are able to do—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You do have it all, okay.

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Yes, exactly. Thank you.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: There's \$26 million that's included, I think it's on page 8, for operation of the Prime Minister's residence. I think it's on page 8 of the legislation. Can you break down what that \$26 million is for? How much is for day-to-day operations and how much is for any upgrades?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Are you talking about supplementary estimates (A)?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes, it's the supplementary (A)s. It's in the legislation that came out to us, for the spending authorities that came out today.

Ms. Annie Boudreau: I will need to check and come back to you on this one.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay.

There's money in the budget for the whistle-blower initiative, but it's not made it into the supplementary (A)s. Do you know how far along Treasury Board is in developing that program?

On a second question, a similar issue is that there's been a long-standing issue with the access to information problem that we have, ongoing. I notice oddly that we've doubled the work of the Information Commissioner and the government has dumped an acting Privacy Commissioner on her as well. I'm wondering where that idea came from. We're drowning with ATIPs right now and we throw her an anchor by adding more work for her. When will the results of the review be made public?

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: I'll turn to my colleague, Paul Wagner, for that second part.

On the whistle-blower act, yes, we are working on the reform. What we're developing is a review. We're doing the research and preparing for the consultations. If they're not in the supplementary estimates (A), it's because they haven't actioned the funding. When they start they will action—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: When will we see it?

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: In (B) or (C), but it's happening in the coming months.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay.

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: Paul, maybe you want to take part too?

Mr. Paul Wagner (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategy and Transformation, Treasury Board Secretariat): Yes, absolutely.

The Information Commissioner taking over while the process is completed to appoint a new Privacy Commissioner is seen as an interim measure through to October of this year. As for your second question regarding the report on the access to information, that will be tabled before the end of this calendar year.

• (1720)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Calendar year, but not Parliament.... Do you know when that would be? Again, we're in a crisis right now with access to information, and the public's access and Parliament's access to documents. It seems like there's a real lack of urgency around that.

Mr. Paul Wagner: I don't have a specific date on the publication. What I can say is that there's work under way while that report is being finalized. There's work to support departments. We've just completed a request for proposals and we have contracts in place now so departments can actually avail themselves of a common ATIP solution, which will allow obviously departments to have common processes to speed up the work on that. We actually have an online request system that's going to go live in the coming weeks. We're not simply waiting for the report before we act. We're acting on things that we know are the most critical while the report is being drafted.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

We'll now go to Ms. Thompson for five minutes.

Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome.

I want to touch on a couple of things you spoke about earlier. If you want to, just elaborate and provide more detail, if that's possible.

The first is around the return to the workplace. Could you just reference a little more specifically the program and the work that you're doing around return to work?

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: With pleasure.

A lot is going on at this current time because the health and safety guidance was last updated on May 12 and it now allows us to return to full occupancy of the buildings with, of course, ensuring that we apply all of the necessary preventive measures such as wearing a mask if you don't have the two-metre distance or hand-washing, sanitizing, and so on and so forth. Now that we have a green light to return to occupancy, deputy heads are currently assessing and testing various models of flexible work, because there is more than one approach. We know that, for an employer such as

the Government of Canada, which is the largest and is also extremely diverse and complex in its operations, one model won't address the needs and won't allow us to provide the quality of service to Canadians that is required.

Because we're all starting new on this endeavour of a flexible workplace, we are currently testing, and the office of the chief human resources officer is gathering some data and information and providing useful tools to departments to undertake those models. In the coming months, we'll assess the successes and the best practices. If all goes well, let's hope that in the fall we can benefit from those lessons learned and give ourselves a more consistent pace.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

Again, I'll circle back to another point. Could you speak about promoting equity, diversity and inclusion, and what the office is doing to ensure that the public service accurately reflects the diversity in the country? How are we addressing barriers for under-represented populations?

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: On that front, there's a whole suite of initiatives that is currently under way. Across departments, we have developed mentorship programs. We have also developed recruitment strategies to make sure that we attract and retain talent in the public service.

We also work very closely with the Privy Council Office on the call to action on anti-racism, equity and inclusion. In budget 2022, you have an announcement of \$3.7 million over five years to make sure that we also undertake the consultations that we were referring to with various groups but particularly with Black employees. We are bringing forward an approach that the communities have asked for, which is nothing for us without us. We're putting in place consultation and engagement with the communities that will put them at the heart of the solutions that are being brought forward by the administration.

Finally, I would like to also speak to the "nothing without us" initiative by the accessibility office to hire 5,000 new public servants with disabilities by 2025.

I could go on, but I will stop here.

• (1725)

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

The budget included new measures to find efficiencies in government through a strategic policy review. Can you explain what that work will do?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: We have two streams of work on the strategic policy review. The first stream is to look at ongoing programs and ongoing processes. The second, as indicated in budget 2022, is to be able to find efficiencies from the post-COVID era from real property, from travel and from working from home, and we'll be able to provide an update in budget 2023.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies, you're free to tell me who is best suited to answer my question.

In the supplementary estimates, the Department of Finance is requesting \$191.6 million in vote 1a as a Net Profits Interest for the Hibernia offshore oil project for the year 2021. This is called a Net Profits Interest in an offshore oil project.

How does this grant allow the Canadian government to preserve the environment, to ensure carbon neutrality and to participate in saving the only planet we have?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Thank you for your question.

I was prepared to provide an answer on the mechanisms used and the reasons for their use. However, I am not in a position to answer your question on carbon neutrality. So we will send you a written answer.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: That's fine. I would be very grateful.

The NextGen Team is conducting tests and, as the minister said, they are in the process of making contact with managers. What difficulties has the new payroll system presented so far?

Can we expect any solutions to avoid a disaster as great as that of Phoenix? What have we learned from this experience?

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: I will answer briefly.

Indeed, at this stage, we are taking note of everything we have learned from Phoenix. We remain absolutely determined to pay employees correctly, making as few mistakes as possible, although it must be recognized that, in an organization as large as the government, there are always adjustments to be made.

However, until now we have not been looking at these types of problems, but rather at systemic problems. We have taken note of the lessons learned. We are working with the successful supplier to see how such a complex organization can simplify its payroll activities as much as possible. In fact, this is the result of decades of additions. We need to simplify things so that we don't ask the system to do complex things—

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Let me ask you one last question before I run out of time. Were the unions involved in the process? Were they consulted in the search for solutions?

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: Absolutely. A labour-management steering group meets on a regular basis. We also have agreements with the unions to work on simplifying payroll activities.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much.

It's reassuring to hear that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

The Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness is requesting \$823 million under vote 5 for the disaster financial assistance arrangements contribution program that was announced in budget 2021. This funding would be used to address costs incurred by provinces and territories for large-scale natural disasters that occurred over the last decade. The eligible expenses include emergency services, security measures, repairs to public buildings and infrastructure, cleanup, as well as businesses and farms.

I think it is important. We've seen the government help out with forestry, agriculture, climate mitigation and disasters, but they have done nothing for fishers. They shut down 60% of the fishery on the north coast in British Columbia and abandoned those fishers. Why is fishing not included in this fund? Will it be?

● (1730)

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Thank you for your question.

I don't have the answer to why fisheries are not included there. We see what was included in the budget 2021 policy decision. I cannot answer that question.

Mr. Gord Johns: I just want to relay that a warming ocean is having a huge impact on wild salmon. Lee Sylvia, a constituent of mine from Parksville, has no EI and no eligibility for EI. These fishers have been abandoned. They need help from the Treasury Board.

The Department of Citizenship and Immigration is requesting \$247 million under vote 1 for operating expenses, grants and contributions for immigration settlement measures, temporary accommodations and income support for Ukrainians. This funding would be used for initial costs of the special immigration measures for Ukrainian refugees, including charter flights, temporary hotel accommodations, application processing, settlement and transitional financial support programs.

Can you talk about how many Ukrainians would benefit from this funding, and also would additional funding be allocated to Afghan refugees?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: If you look in the document, there is an amount for Afghan refugees. If you give me one minute, I will be able to find it.

We have an amount for Ukrainians, and we also have amounts for Afghan refugees under supplementary estimates (A).

Mr. Gord Johns: How about this? How many Ukrainian refugees has Canada welcomed since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: As of June 1, 2022, the department has received over 278,000 Canada-Ukrainian authorizations for emergency travel applications and has approved over 127,000 of them.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Ms. Boudreau, if there is any other information that you feel you need to supply for that answer, if you could provide it to the clerk, it would be appreciated.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I have a question, and I see that several people are attending the meeting virtually. This leads me to make the following comment. According to the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, the new Treasury Board guidelines on hybrid work do not meet expectations.

What comment do you have on that?

My question is for Mr. Wagner or Ms. Girard.

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: You say that they do not meet expectations, but what expectations did the institute mention to you?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: It simply said that the guidelines on hybrid work do not meet performance expectations. That's a bit like the questions I asked the minister.

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: It's interesting, because we don't have any yet. We are providing guidance and support to test the different models. It's more flexible on a fixed date and on site, in the workplace, depending on the mission and operations.

I'll just mention this: within a bargaining unit, there are employees who work in different departments. If some employees have to work with a different security clearance, they may be in the same group and at the same classification level, but the operational requirements of the job will mean that one person will be able to work more or less remotely, for example, but that it will be more difficult for the other.

This is where we say that there can be no one-size-fits-all solution. Each department is currently evaluating the formula that works best in its organization.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: A year and a half or two years ago, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee received tables showing the number of people working remotely. I would like an update on that. I would like to have a breakdown for each department of how many people are now teleworking and how many people are working on site.

I know it's all decentralized, but you must have that information. Is that the case?

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: No, I don't have that information, but I do have information about employee vaccination.

At this time, the various models are being tested. The figures may therefore vary from one week to the next. In order to make these assessments—

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: However, if we want a report on the current situation, there must be a way to get one.

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: Each department could provide you with this report. Then again—

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: As far as Treasury Board is concerned, don't you have a responsibility to know where the employees work from?

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: No, it's up to the managers and executives of each department to establish which model is the most effective and efficient for fulfilling the organization's mandate. That is what they are evaluated on.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Do you have any idea which department currently has the most employees working virtually?

• (1735)

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: No, I have no idea.

However, I can say that, within the same department, there may be people who are allowed to telework while others are not. There are office workers, who use a tablet, and there are people who work behind a counter or at customs.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I'll turn it over to my colleague Mr. Lobb.

[*English*]

Mr. Ben Lobb: I have one question, which goes back to some of the stuff with Ms. Fortier. It has to do with regard to immigration and passports.

Has the Treasury Board worked with these departments to identify how many workers they are short and need to catch up? What is the number? When do they expect to catch up?

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: I don't have that number, but the head of a department facing some specific labour shortages in specific regions can work with the Public Service Commission to develop a targeted strategy based on their needs. As we said, in that case, we're looking at decentralized operations, so they will be looking across the country.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I think from what I read in terms of the Treasury Board, with Madam Fortier's mandate letter, it's to make sure that all departments are streamlined and provide help and consultation.

Has anybody from Treasury Board had discussions with ESDC or had discussions with IRCC? Is that number out there, and is there a date when our constituents will be able to get their passports processed in three to four weeks, like they used to?

Ms. Marie-Chantal Girard: The President of the Treasury Board has been mandated to bring forward a future of work model to ensure that the government is well equipped to deliver on services. The location of work is part of that, but the skills strategy, ensuring that we have data and we understand the trends and the skills that are going to be required in the future to do those jobs, is part of her mandate.

Now, for the very short term, I would, again, mention that there is a possibility to develop initiatives to address those needs, but I don't have the details on the passports, per se.

The Chair: Thank you.

We started with Mr. Jowhari at today's meeting, and we will end our questioning with Mr. Jowhari, for five minutes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome back. You were dearly missed.

Thank you to the minister and the officials for joining us today.

I'm going to put my question to Mr. Wagner.

Mr. Wagner, if you're not the right official to respond to this, please redirect to your other colleagues who are here.

I, specifically, want to talk about the strategic policy review. There have been many interpretations around what the scope of this review is and there are also many various points of view. We've had points of view around rationalizing the size of the government or, as the minister said, this is not about a smaller government, necessarily, it's about a much smarter and efficient government.

I understand that the scope of the TBS and the responsibility of TBS is always to ensure the best use of, naturally, taxpayers' money while making sure that the operation of the government is very efficient. This is one of the reasons that I decided to join OGGO with my background as a management consultant. I really understand and I really embrace the work that OGGO is doing.

Can you explain how the strategic policy review, as introduced in the budget, will work towards a smarter government that runs more efficiently?

Mr. Paul Wagner: I'll let my colleague, Madam Boudreau, answer that question. I think she's better positioned to respond to you.

Ms. Annie Boudreau: The review will ensure programs are effective on challenges like climate change, the pandemic and growing the economy. It will also adapt government to our postpandemic, like I was explaining earlier, reality, such as digitization. It's obviously about getting value for taxpayers' dollars. We're going to be focusing on priorities and making sure that we are doing them better while delivering the goal of sustainability.

Again, using words that were used in budget 2022, it's about looking at our footprint, at real property, at travel—we're doing less and less travel—and at virtual work, which we discussed with you today.

● (1740)

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you for that.

You gave us an understanding of what the scope is and what was added. Can you tell us a little bit about the process and what are you trying to achieve through that process? What are the steps that you are going to go through in that process and the end goal you are trying to achieve?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: If we look at the stream one, it's about the ongoing review of programs. Every year the process will be to select a thematic that we're going to be looking at and making sure that there is no duplication, making sure that we are investing where we should.

I can give you some examples, as well.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: That would be great.

Ms. Annie Boudreau: We can look, for example, at housing.

We know it's a big priority. Food security could also be another example or high-speed Internet, innovation, skills, youth programming. Every year we're going to be adding a thematic that we're going to be looking at, obviously, in concert with departments and agencies to make sure that we have a good understanding of those programs comprehensively. We're going to be doing horizontal reviews. It's not only one department, my department. We're looking at the spectrum.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: As part of that review, do you look at the benchmarks? Do you look at the targets that you set and whether those targets have been achieved, i.e., the departmental results?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Yes. We're going to be looking at that. We're going to be working with external partners, with people who really know the subject matter that we're looking at, to make sure that we have looked at all the angles of a specific program.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you.

I have about 20 seconds, which I will yield back to you, sir.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jowhari.

With that, I would like to thank our witnesses today for being with us for the whole time: Madam Boudreau, Ms. Girard, Ms. Cahill, Mr. Wagner, Mr. Greenough, who I saw in the last second or so, Ms. Tattersall and Ms. Lahaie. I appreciate all of you for being with us today. Thank you for that.

I would like to thank Mr. Jowhari, vice-chair, for filling the position of chair to start the meeting.

As well, I'd like to thank the interpreters and our technicians for all the work they're doing and also our analysts.

Also, as you may have noticed, we have a third clerk here who is filling in for us because our clerks have so many different tasks to do.

Thank you, Alexandre, for being with us.

Thank you. With that, I declare the meeting adjourned.

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

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

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

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

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

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

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

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

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

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

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>