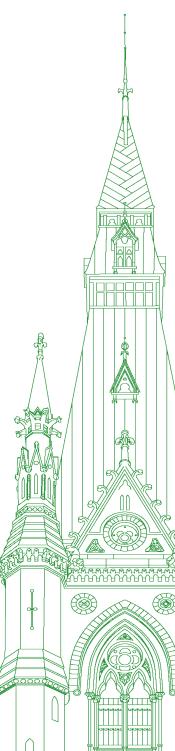44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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Chair: Mr. Robert Kitchen

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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● (1300)

[*English*]

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

Thank you everybody for being here. We're starting as quickly as we can.

I would like to welcome everyone to meeting number 25 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

Today, we will continue our study on the subject matter of supplementary estimates (A), 2022-23. During the second hour of the meeting, we will begin consideration of the interim report regarding our study on air defence procurement projects and our study of the national shipbuilding strategy.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House Order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in the room in person and remotely via Zoom. I would like to take this opportunity to remind all participants to this meeting that screenshots and taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

Recognizing 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.

If you have symptoms, participate by Zoom, as opposed to being here in person. Those that are here in person should keep a two-metre distance wherever possible. 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. These are things I've told you all before, so I know you're all aware of that. As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting.

I would like to welcome Minister Tassi today. I would like to offer her an opportunity to offer her opening statements.

Minister, please proceed.

The Honourable Filomena Tassi (Minister of Public Services and Procurement): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, committee members and guests. It's nice to see you this afternoon.

Let me begin by acknowledging that I'm participating from Hamilton, my hometown, which is situated on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabe peoples.

With me today is the president of Shared Services Canada, Sony Perron; Patrice Nadeau, assistant deputy minister of networks and security services; and Samantha Hazen, assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer. Also with me from PSPC are my deputy minister, Paul Thompson; and Wojo Zielonka, the chief financial officer.

I'm pleased to be here with you as minister responsible for Shared Services Canada to discuss the organization's supplementary estimates (A). Shared Services Canada, or SSC, is responsible for equipping public servants with the secure and reliable information technology infrastructure they need to support government operations. The work done at SSC also ensures that we can deliver digital programs and services to Canadians that are secure, reliable and easy to use from anywhere.

To support digital government, we need a high-performing and resilient enterprise network. That means moving away from individual department networks to a modern government-wide network. Shared Services Canada is responsible for managing the security and network infrastructure for its partner departments and clients. SSC is also responsible for securing the network perimeter and managing the government's secret infrastructure—50 networks enabling digital communications for about 400,000 users nationally and internationally.

SSC operates 336 data centres, including four enterprise data centres that provide secure, reliable hosting services for Government of Canada applications and data. To ensure the safety and security of Canadians' data and the services provided by the Government of Canada, the information technology infrastructure must be safe from vulnerabilities and able to swiftly and effectively respond to cybersecurity attacks. We take cybersecurity very seriously. Cybersecurity is a shared responsibility among Shared Services Canada, the Communications Security Establishment, referred to as CSE, and the Treasury Board Secretariat.

Shared Services Canada is an integral part of the cybersecurity tripartite. On any given day the defensive cyber-system of the Canadian centre for cybersecurity, a division of CSE, can block anywhere from three billion to as many as seven billion actions targeting Government of Canada networks. When it comes to government IT solutions, our government is looking for greater flexibility, mobility and efficiency. That means developing networks that are accessible any time, anywhere, by anyone on a trusted and secure platform.

With this in mind, SSC is providing the key building blocks for the adoption of cloud computing. Moving government services and operations to cloud-based services and cross-government data centres will reduce the risk of major IT failure, as well as ensuring safe and efficient services. The improved efficiencies will save taxpayer money as well as reduce the Government of Canada's carbon footprint. When it comes to directing the traffic on the network itself, SSC is looking to use software-defined networking technology as well as artificial intelligence to get better network performance and monitoring.

To support these key network modernization activities, SSC is requesting, through supplementary estimates (A), an increase to the reference levels by $86 million for a total of $2.7 billion. SSC will invest this additional funding in information technology services so that the Government of Canada can leverage new technologies and approaches to security for continued support to existing as well as new government programs and services for Canadians.

Thank you again for the invitation to join you today. I am pleased to answer questions related to the supplementary estimates (A) for Shared Services Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1305)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go into questions, and we will start with Mr. McCauley for six minutes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Minister, thanks for joining us today, along with your colleagues.

I want to start with some of the issues you brought up on the committee of the whole about contracts for companies that are linked to forced labour in China. There are a couple of them, and these are actual contracts that had been granted by the government through Shared Services. We found them through the proactive disclosure—Toshiba, for example, HP, Hitachi.

What is the government doing to end contracts with companies that are linked to using forced labour in China? This is information that comes directly from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, so this is public information.

What are we doing to end this?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Thanks for that question. It's an important question. I want to assure you that our government is taking action in this regard.

As you know, four ministers have mandates with respect to the eradication of forced labour in supply chains and eradicating forced labour. With respect to—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm sorry, Minister. Let me interrupt you—

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Yes, MP McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I appreciate that, and I'm aware of that. We started this a couple of years ago with our very weak rules, but these are companies that have been publicly identified. What are we doing to end the contracting of these companies?

It's not enough for us to just read off from a booklet of our rules that don't seem to be working. These are companies that are using forced labour. It's been identified by our allies, yet we are granting them contracts. What are we concretely doing to end this practice?

● (1310)

Hon. Filomena Tassi: First of all, I was delighted to see that there was unanimous support for Bill S-211.

With respect to the actions that we have taken, PSPC has actually taken action in this regard, as I did outline in committee of the whole. We have a code of conduct now that applies with respect to procurement. We have contracts that have clauses in there that require that the provider of the goods are not involved in any way with forced labour involvement. Those are in contracts—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Minister, let me interrupt you again.

These companies are clearly identified by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. These aren't just pulled out of the air. Will you say today that we will not continue to procure items, as Shared Services has, from the companies identified by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: What I will say is that we take forced labour allegations very seriously.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: If you were taking them seriously, you'd put this into practice, Minister.

Hon. Filomena Tassi: When in fact those allegations are made, there are due diligence investigations to determine whether in fact there is forced labour taking place. We are going to continue to work very hard to eradicate forced labour from our supply chains. We did expand the CUSMA obligations to all imports that are coming in.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm going to reclaim my time, please, Minister—

Hon. Filomena Tassi: There's absolutely work that we have done, but I will say that we look forward to doing more. More does need to be done. I think that's the point you're making, and I would agree with that. More work needs to be done.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Minister, what I'm trying to get at is that I've identified companies that are knowingly using supply chains...or directly using forced labour. I'm not asking for "we'll work harder on it". These are companies identified publicly. Will your department commit today to end the purchases from these?

As a follow-up question, we've given a million dollars in contracts to Lenovo, formerly owned by IBM and now owned out of China. The U.S. defence department has stated that they are considered a major security risk, but Shared Services is buying equipment from them. Will you commit to having Shared Services end the purchases from companies identified by our allies, the U.S. defence department, as security risks?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Again, MP McCauley, we take the allegations of forced labour very seriously.

I would like to turn it over to my officials to say what they implement when in fact those allegations are made. If allegations are made and warranted, then of course we follow up with those and pursue them to ensure that we will eradicate forced labour from the supply chain. I'm happy to be working with the Minister of Labour in this regard.

I would turn it over to my officials, because you're making direct accusations with respect to contracts. I think it's important that they provide input with respect to the contracts you're mentioning.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm going to interrupt you there. These are not accusations. These come straight from proactive disclosure from the PSPC website. These are not accusations. It's offensive that you would try to push such a serious issue away as an accusation. These come straight from your department's website.

Before we go to any witnesses, I would like to hear what they are going to do physically, and if they will investigate, look at the simple website of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and at the companies named using forced labour or Uighur labour, and end the practice of sending taxpayers' money to companies that are doing this reprehensible practice.

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Before going over to my officials, let me just clarify that when I'm saying "accusations", I'm saying that you're making the accusation that there is forced labour in the contracts we have.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I was referring specifically to Lenovo.

Hon. Filomena Tassi: That's the part where I was saying that there are accusations.

Let me transfer it over to my officials to give specifics with respect to the information they have received in this regard. I know that, when those accusations are made, we take it very seriously. I want to assure you that our government is committed to eradicating forced labour in our labour chains.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Unfortunately, we're out of time. If your officials would be able to provide that in writing to committee and send that to the clerk, we will distribute that to the members.

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

● (1315)

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

Welcome, Minister, and thank you for joining us today, along with your officials.

Minister, I'm going to focus my questions for you on the topic you highlighted in your opening remarks around cybersecurity. My understanding is that Shared Services Canada has to work hand in glove with the Communications Security Establishment and the Department of National Defence to ensure that the Government of Canada's networks are secure and protected against increasingly malicious and frequent cyber-threats.

Can you kindly clarify the role of SSC in the Government of Canada's effort to ensure that our cyber-defence is secure?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Thank you, MP Jowhari.

Let me begin by saying that Shared Services Canada works to keep our networks safe, secure and accessible for Canadians. SSC supports the effective design, delivery and management of priority IT security initiatives affecting government systems and government-wide operations. Cybersecurity is, of course, a shared responsibility. It's a tripartite responsibility or arrangement between Shared Services Canada, the Communications Security Establishment and the Treasury Board Secretariat.

SSC continuously works to enhance the cybersecurity of Government of Canada digital assets by preparing for all types of cybersecurity incidents and for responses to threats. SSC is constantly working alongside its partners, including the Canadian centre for cybersecurity, to identify potential vulnerabilities and enhance protective measures. When a cybersecurity issue arises, SSC and its partners coordinate to determine root causes, limit impact and undertake recovery.

We know this is an important area. There is gaining expertise in terms of those who are hacking and getting into systems, so Shared Services Canada is working very hard with its partners to ensure that our systems are protected.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you, Minister. I'm going to move on to the digital privacy part of cybersecurity.

Minister, as you and I know, we live in an ever-growing digital world, where Canadians rely on digital services provided by their governments. Along with this reliance come concerns about the protection of privacy and increased cybersecurity challenges.

Can you please share with us what the government is doing to protect Canadians and their personal data? Further, can you tell us what impact investment in cyber-defence at SSC will have in the future?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Thank you for raising this issue. We know it's an important one to Canadians.

Ongoing investments have been and will continue to be made in IT cybersecurity to deliver enterprise services and solutions for the Government of Canada. As we grow more dependent on digital systems, the potential consequences of cyber-incidents continue to increase, and Canada needs to be ready.

Similarly, for the Government of Canada end points, the end point visibility and awareness project will allow SSC partners, clients and enterprise organizations to ensure that end points on SSC government networks are properly identified, tracked, managed and secured. The security enhancements that these types of projects bring to the IT infrastructure reduce the threat landscape and attack surface, thereby reducing the risk to government data.

SSC is also investing in the delivery of cyber and IT solutions, in support of the government's digital vision to move towards a zero-trust framework. Based on the premise of don't trust but verify, zero-trust architecture is a security framework that protects dataflow between the user and the device or application through continuous monitoring. That consists of applying behavioural analytics and other oversight monitoring to each access decision-making point to ensure full compliance with established security requirements.

Then also, in 2018, the government launched the national cybersecurity strategy, which is working to keep Canadians safe from evolving cybersecurity threats that target Canadians and Canadian businesses and our critical infrastructure.

Finally, in budget 2022, we propose to provide approximately $875 million over five years, beginning in 2022-23, and approximately $238 million ongoing for additional measures to address the rapidly evolving cybersecurity threat landscape.

● (1320)

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you, Minister.

I'll quickly move into cyber-attack responses.

Minister, as I'm sure you're aware, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians published a special report on February 14, 2022, focused on the issue of defending the Government of Canada's system and networks from cyber-attacks. There were were a number of calls made in this report around cybersecurity and recommended next steps.

What kind of investment can our government point to as it relates to addressing the issues raised?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: It is important to note that Shared Services Canada is committed to protecting the confidentiality, integrity and availability of digital services to Canadians. It is also important to note that a number of small departments and agencies recommended in the report don't fall under SSC's umbrella.

In budget 2022, it was announced that SSC and CSE will be allocated approximately $178 million over five years. That will be allocated to SSC and the Communications Security Establishment starting in 2022-23 to expand cybersecurity protection for small departments, agencies and Crown corporations, and to provide them with the most secure and cost-effective solutions to meet the needs and expectations of digital government.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the extra time.

The Chair: Thank you.

It's good to see Ms. Vignola back. We'll go to Ms. Vignola for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Minister, in your speech, you noted how seriously you take cyber attacks, and you just mentioned it again. You also mentioned that the government wants more flexibility and mobility in terms of information technology solutions. At the same time, it's trying to develop networks accessible at any time and place, by anyone on a secure platform.

But if a platform, even a secure one, is accessible to anyone, that means it can be accessible to people and networks that carry out cyber attacks.

Where do most of the cyber attacks on Canada come from?

[*English*]

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Thank you, MP Vignola. It is good to see you. I hope that you're feeling better. I'm happy you have made it to today's meeting.

I would reaffirm that cybersecurity is important to our government. We know that we want to have the protection that's needed.

That's a very specific question that I would like to ask my officials to respond to, with respect to the nature of the greatest area of attack.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sony Perron (President, Shared Services Canada): Mr. Chair, this question goes back to the point the minister was making a little earlier, which is that cyber security is a partnership within the Government of Canada. Our colleagues at the Cyber Security Centre are responsible for monitoring what's going on out there and informing us of the risks and vulnerabilities we face.

Shared Services Canada cannot easily respond to the source of attacks. Our work starts from the moment they affect our environment, and we...

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much.

Among cyber attacks targeting Canada, were there any ransomware attacks, yes or no?

Mr. Sony Perron: To my knowledge, when it comes to the services we provide in our department, no organization was targeted directly.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much.

Does the government use professional hackers to test the strength of the network and software that are supposed to protect the private information of both citizens and businesses, as well as the government's confidential information?

Mr. Sony Perron: Shared Services Canada doesn't use that kind of service. We have our own resources to check our networks and equipment and detect vulnerabilities.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you kindly.

Minister, in Supplementary Estimates (A), Shared Services Canada is requesting that $86 million be added to the total requested in the Main Estimates.

Among new security approaches justifying a request for an additional $86 million, are we talking about hiring professional hackers to test said security approaches, networks and software?

● (1325)

Mr. Sony Perron: Mr. Chair, with your permission, I'll answer the member's question.

No, that's not included in planned activities to use the $86 million mentioned in Supplementary Estimates (A).

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much.

Minister, on page 2-32 of the supplementary estimates, Shared Services Canada is requesting $40,489,098 in Vote 1(a), an operating appropriation, and $20,189,092 in Vote 5(a), a capital appropriation.

What is included in the term "network modernization"?

Does it refer to physical infrastructure?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

This will enable a digital-ready network that's critical to supporting a digital government, as well as network utilities. It's going to meet the increasing demand for higher bandwidth for users, reduce single points of failure and promote readiness to adopt emerging technology in response to persistent digital demand. It will ensure that SSC can deliver a response to modern network services that support government operations.

We know that of course there has been an increase since COVID-19 in demands with respect to the platforms and the programs that have been provided. We want to ensure that we have the supports so that these can continue to be provided.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Over the last 10 years, hundreds of millions of dollars were invested to modernize the network. How many tens of millions more will we need to finally modernize the network to the point where it will only need occasional updates, instead of a complete overhaul?

[*English*]

Hon. Filomena Tassi: What I would say in response to that is that this is of course an ongoing goal. We always want to make sure that we have up-to-date systems that are going to meet the needs of government.

With respect to the specifics on an end date and timeline, I would hand it over to my officials.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sony Perron: Thank you, minister.

Mr. Chair, there isn't really an answer to that question. We will never be done updating and modernizing networks. New technological opportunities, new demands and new expectations from the citizenry mean that what is needed today will be very different from what was needed five years ago and what will be needed five years from now.

The ongoing effort to modernize, refresh and reinforce our defences, as well as to modernize our infrastructure and make it more reliable, will never end. These are new projects, new initiatives. We want to stay connected to future technology. Take cloud computing, for example. We're only on the first few years of using it, and it requires constant changes.

Unfortunately, I can't give you an end date. We will continue to make sustained efforts in this area.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

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

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

Minister, part of what we're talking about today in the supplementary estimates is $26 million for the Privy Council Office.

Last year, the Privy Council Office paid for polling about possible service cuts at Canada Post. Is some of this money going to be used for polling at the Privy Council Office, and are you going to be doing polling regarding your strategies to address the toxic drug crisis, such as decriminalization?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Thanks, MP Johns, for those questions.

Let me say, just to clarify on the polling piece with respect to Canada Post, because I know this was a concern for you and you've raised it and voiced that concern, the polling is done really to get a sense of what Canadians feel the service they need from Canada Post is. We want to ensure, as do I particularly as the minister responsible for Canada Post, that the services that are most valued to Canadians are being provided to Canadians. That information piece is important, because it will help support the initiatives and measures that we put in place as we move forward.

I will say that I will commit to working with Canada Post to get to a point where they are self-sustaining.

With respect to the specific question, I would put that to my officials in terms of any dollars.

● (1330)

Mr. Gord Johns: I just want to be assured, Minister, that in terms of ethics, you're not doing polling using taxpayers' dollars to make policy from the Privy Council Office on really important decisions.

On remote work, is there any funding in the supplementary estimates intended to facilitate public servants working from home, and has the department conducted an analysis of how continued remote work may generate cost savings or emission reductions?

Lastly, in the same question, is the department exploring whether continued remote work may increase the supply of surplus federal properties that could be made available to meet some of the housing demands and needs that we have right now in our communities?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Those are excellent questions. Thank you for those.

With respect to SSC, I would say it continues to work with partners to implement the technology and network upgrades necessary to enable effective communication and collaboration tools for government employees.

I do want to take this time to commend them. We had to turn this around in very short order, and I want to thank all the officials who worked very hard.

Right now, we are continuing to make significant upgrades to networks and boardrooms to enable employees to collaborate from work sites, so that their remote colleagues will be able to have the bandwidth to have the intensive video-conferencing tools. This is to support the hybrid model. We know the return to work is going to be different. What we're hearing is that, with return to work, there is some preference for some form of remote work, so we are working and keeping a close eye on this and monitoring the situation.

With respect to your last question, part of the question was very important. Yes, we will continue to monitor the sites that we have, determine what the future workforce is going to look like and, if there's any room for efficiency, if there's room for us to use properties, for example, for affordable housing projects, we will closely take a look at that because it's an important priority for our government.

Mr. Gord Johns: It is an urgent situation for housing throughout our country, especially here in the nation's capital.

Minister, in this year's budget, the government announced a strategic policy review of the public service, hoping to find billions of dollars in savings. Your colleague, the President of the Treasury Board, said this review is meant to make the government smarter and not smaller. Meanwhile, public servants are being offered wage increases that don't keep up with inflation, which would amount to a pay cut.

Is the government looking for savings on the backs of public servants? The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance just cited in the House of Commons this morning that Canadians are seeing an average wage increase of 4%.

Is that something you're looking at for the public service, giving a wage increase of 4%?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: This is not my responsibility. This is not my file. It's more the responsibility of the President of the Treasury Board.

In terms of—

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm sorry, Minister. There are thousands of people who do fall under your department. I want to ensure that you're going to ensure that those employees are going to be able to pay their bills, given the increase in inflation.

Do you believe public servants deserve wage increases that account for the rising cost of living?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Employees deserve to be paid fairly. I've been an advocate for workers my entire life. They have opportunities to negotiate collective agreements where the terms of the contracts are made clear, and they can advocate for increases in those negotiations. I am a strong believer that workers should be paid fairly for the work that they do.

Mr. Gord Johns: How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have five seconds.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Minister.

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

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

I'll note Gord Johns had five seconds to mention dry docks and he missed out on that opportunity, so maybe at the next meeting.

My first question for the minister is really in regard to block two on Wellington Street. I wonder if she'd be open to answering a question on that today.

● (1335)

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Sure. I did not prepare for that for today, but of course, MP Lobb, go ahead and present your question.

Mr. Ben Lobb: The other day my staff and I stopped at the Senate on Sparks Street. We were looking around. The thing that we need more clarification on in Parliament is with regard to the announcement that says there will be an increase in the number of office spaces by 150 offices. I would have thought we already have enough offices for our area. You did mention residents and housing, and I'm not talking about MPs, but just the need for housing in this area.

How do you justify all those increased offices, when it seems to me we have plenty with Wellington, Valour, East Block, West Block and on and on. I am just curious if you could answer that.

The Chair: Minister, I appreciate it, and thank you very much for offering to answer that. If you feel comfortable answering that question, by all means, we would greatly appreciate it. If not, we will move forward.

Thank you.

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'll do my best. As I said, I'm not prepared for this specific appearance, but I'm happy to respond.

First and foremost, what I would say is that the planning of this is part of the long-term vision and plan for the parliamentary and judicial precincts. There is a lot of engagement with senators as well.

I know that my officials could comment and give more specifics with respect to the details of that, but I can tell you that there were many in-depth discussions with respect to how we can best use this space in the most efficient manner. There were high asks in terms of the space that would be used, but it was as a result of those discussions that final decisions were made, and I know many discussions took place.

I know that my official would be able to expand a little bit on that in more depth. That official is not with us today, but I would be happy to have him respond.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Fair enough. That's good. Thank you.

In regard to cloud computing versus data centres and just on cloud computing right now, is it a fair and open competition for hosting?

I have a lot of meetings with different suppliers and vendors who feel that it's skewed towards Microsoft. I wonder if there's anything you can clear up on that front. I have a lot of meetings that occur in my office because they're feeling that it's biased towards Microsoft.

Hon. Filomena Tassi: What I would say in response to that, MP Lobb, is that we always, wherever possible, want to have competitive processes in place. We know that when we can have competitive processes in place, we are going to get the best value because of the competition. That's what competition breeds. It breeds bidders to bring in the best price they can because they know they're competing for the job.

I would say that there are some instances where we are not able to do that. For example, with the systems we have, there isn't compatibility in order to allow that. That, I think, I will turn over to my officials, because you have given specifics. They could respond to the specifics that you've cited.

Mr. Sony Perron: Mr. Chair, we have a brokering service at Shared Services Canada that qualified eight cloud service providers based on their ability to meet security requirements. They were qualified back in 2018. When a department needs to access cloud services for protection of new workloads, the eight have to compete as soon as the department passes over a certain threshold. Some activities will consume, over time, a lot of space and costs, so they have to go through a competitive process among the vendors that have qualified.

You mentioned Microsoft. We have other vendors such as IBM, Salesforce and ThinkOn that are on this.

You're right, MP Lobb, though, that right now among all the vendors, Microsoft is the one that has received the most demand so far,

but this is, for most of it, as a result of a competition among the qualified vendors.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Lobb.

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

● (1340)

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

Thank you, Minister, for your excellent testimony here today, and thank you so much for being part of the OGGO committee.

Minister, as was mentioned previously, the question of the workplace and the future of work really is at top of mind for many businesses and governments. It's top of mind for communities across Canada. It really is across the globe as well. How the federal public service here in Canada will respond to these challenges is, of course, equally of interest.

There are some operational needs that have to be addressed and met. However, the future of work as a hybrid of in office and from home.... We know that this is the likely reality we are facing, the new reality today. Can you provide insights into how the Government of Canada's network bandwidth will handle this surge of large numbers of public servants returning to their physical offices?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Thank you for that, MP Kusmierczyk.

Work is ongoing, also, with respect to ensuring that the space is used efficiently, such as for shared space.

I think you're speaking more about the technological piece. SSC is working with its partners to implement the technology and network upgrades needed so that their return to workplace strategies will be effective and will work very well. Based on the department's prioritization of buildings, SSC is making significant upgrades to 35 government networks and boardrooms to enable employees to collaborate from work sites with their remote colleagues, as well as support the bandwidth-intensive video conferencing tools like Microsoft Teams.

This work is ongoing. We want to be preparing for the future and ensuring that, as more workers come back to work, those supports are there so they can get the work done. We want to do it in a way that provides the technological support that is needed.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you very much for that response, Minister.

Of course, during the pandemic, a wave of federal public servants migrated from in-person work to remote work, while at the same time keeping the work of government moving forward. This was really a Herculean task that was undertaken.

I know that it was incredibly important for residents in my riding of Windsor—Tecumseh to know that, even though this migration happened, the services were still being offered and the programs that were being undertaken were still functioning as normal. Again, this was an incredible task. I just wanted to compliment all the folks at SSC for that incredible work.

Can you outline for us, in short, how SSC supported those public servants who were working remotely throughout the pandemic?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Yes, thanks for that question.

I totally agree with you. It goes back to the comment I made previously. I think the work that was undertaken overnight in order to provide the supports necessary so that the government could continue with its work and employees could continue working remotely was just absolutely fantastic. A tireless work effort was made on behalf of SSC, and I join you in congratulating and thanking them for turning that around so quickly.

Shared Services Canada provided the Government of Canada with a partner for the support needed to enable effective and seamless remote work, so that we could continue serving Canadians. We know there was a lot at stake there. If the work stopped, Canadians would be impacted across this country and it would be difficult.

To enable virtual work, SSC quickly implemented major upgrades to the enterprise network, government-wide Internet and network security, and has continued to provide improved collaboration tools such as Microsoft 365. They continue to monitor this. They are constantly monitoring the situation to determine what they're going to need because they don't want to be reactive. They want to be proactive.

Again, I thank them for the work that they have done in this regard.

● (1345)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair: You have one second. There goes the bell.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Minister, I will ask you for a written response to the following question.

On page 2-27 of Supplementary Estimates (A) 2022-2023, there's a request for $18,798,000 to support the investigation under the Emergencies Act. It's under the Privy Council Office heading. There's a request for over $7 million to support emergency preparedness management and enhance departmental capabilities.

Personally, I think that $19 million to support the inquiry is a lot of money. It doesn't include the inquiry's costs.

Here's my first question: what actions would this funding support?

Secondly, there's a request for $7 million to support emergency preparedness management and improve departmental capacity. We are not even talking about preparedness itself, or even about emer-

gency management and response, but about actions taken to ensure that it's well managed, and even made possible. We're talking about $7 million, even though we do not even have the start of an initial emergency response. I think that's a lot of money.

What does this support include? Why does it cost $7 million?

When we talk about improving departmental capacity, what capacity are we talking about? Which department is it? How much of the $7 million is going towards improving departmental capacity? What is it about departmental capacity that needs improvement? How much money can improve that capacity?

I'm wondering about amounts that don't seem to lead to any kind of action.

Thank you.

[*English*]

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Mr. Chair, I'm happy to have my team provide written responses to MP Vignola to that after this appearance.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I appreciate your providing the written responses. You have 30 seconds if you would like to add to that.

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Okay. What I will do is just ask my officials if they have anything specifically that they wish to add.

Mr. Sony Perron: I would say that, from a Shared Services Canada perspective, we appreciate the time the committee is spending trying to understand the complexity of our operations and what we are doing, so it's always a pleasure to appear in front of you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and we look forward to the written response to that question.

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

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Mr. Chair

Thank you, Minister, for being here again.

The Auditor General's spring reports found persistent challenges to implementing gender-based analysis plus since 2015. Specifically, it found that the Privy Council Office and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat didn't share information with Women and Gender Equality Canada that would help it to monitor progress on implementation over time.

Is any of the funding requested by the Privy Council Office intended to support improving the implementation of gender-based analysis plus?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Again, Mr. Johns, I don't believe that this is my file, but I'm happy to have my team follow up with you after this and provide an answer to that.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you. I look forward to that.

Shared Services Canada is requesting $60.7 million for network modernization. Would any of this funding support greening government strategy initiatives with respect to SSC's data centres or operations?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: I'm pleased you have asked that question, because in terms of the greening government strategy and the opportunities at SSC, we do have opportunities here and we are taking those opportunities seriously. We know that we, as a government, want to show leadership in this regard, and we are willing and able to do that.

I'm happy to talk about other things that we are doing in PSPC with respect to the greening government strategy, but I will hand it over to my officials to give a specific answer with respect to the dollar value.

Mr. Gord Johns: A quick answer please, because I do have one more question.

Mr. Sony Perron: The $60 million and, I would say, all of the budget at SSC is taking into consideration opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We are going towards certification for our data centre, eliminating legacy infrastructure that is not using energy efficiently. I don't know if Patrice Nadeau, our ADM of networks, can add specific examples under the $60 million that can produce the result the MP is asking for.

● (1350)

Mr. Gord Johns: Minister, earlier this week I wrote to you about the review of federal vaccine mandates, which has been under way since March. Some of my constituents are postal workers who have been placed on leave because of the mandates at Canada Post, and they're eager to return to work. We know the Americans lifted a number of mandates today. Can you please advise us of the status of the review and when a decision will finally be communicated to the public and to postal workers?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Unfortunately, two and a half minutes go by very quickly. It is an excellent question, but I would ask the minister to provide an answer to that in writing. We have to move on.

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

Mr. Ben Lobb: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The first question I have is in regard to licences for software, etc. Are there licences we're paying for on an annual basis for software we don't even use?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Thank you for the question, MP Lobb. I will have to pass that to my officials.

Mr. Sony Perron: This is an exercise we need to do on an ongoing basis. Some licences have been procured at a certain time, and they may not be the ones we need anymore. We have to keep hygiene around the using of a licence. I think it's an excellent question. Part of managing a complex IT infrastructure is really making

sure we are using what we have procured. We revamp our arrangement with the vendor if we don't need these licences any more.

Maybe Mr. Nadeau will have specific examples in his area of where he's keeping this under control.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I'll just add, if Mr. Nadeau is going to answer this question, that in addition to the meetings I get in regard to the cloud, I also have a large number of meetings with vendors who believe there are other providers out there whom the government is paying for licences for software that isn't being used and never has been used.

Mr. Nadeau, we know it's happening. Can you tell us if this is widespread and approximately how many dollars per year the government is spending on licences for software we don't use?

Mr. Patrice Nadeau (Assistant Deputy Minister, Networks and Security Services, Shared Services Canada): In terms of the wide use of that, I don't think so. It is difficult for me to answer, but from a network point of view, this is minimum.

Sometimes, what can happen is that there are multiple options as part of a software package, so we might not be taking advantage of every single option that we pay for. However, whatever the licence is for, specifically, that would be consumed.

In terms of answering on behalf of the GoC, unfortunately, I'm not in a position to do that.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Is there a way you can track this so that, for example, this committee will be satisfied knowing a certain percentage?

We'll take your word for it, but is there a way that you or your staff track it, so that we could have the knowledge that this isn't a widespread problem?

Mr. Patrice Nadeau: We could probably track it by department. Unfortunately, we do not have.... Many of those licences would be consumed by various federal departments. At that point, we would purchase the use of those licences on their behalf. We would have to go back to the various departments.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Do you know roughly how many Microsoft licences we have that use the Teams and 365? How many do we have, approximately, in the Government of Canada?

Mr. Sony Perron: I will take this one, Mr. Chair.

We have a multi-year arrangement with Microsoft for an enterprise licence that gives us, if I remember well, 400,000 licences for the whole public service. We don't have licences by department. We manage this on behalf of the government.

It's a 10-year agreement with Microsoft that has allowed us to roll out Teams but also a series of other elements, including email, to all of the public service. It's a common service, with core basic services for all of the GoC.

Mr. Ben Lobb: How many did you mention that you have?

Mr. Sony Perron: If I remember well, it's 400,000 that we have. I could come back on the specific number. I don't have the agreement in front of me.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I'm probably running out of time here, but help the committee understand. When you go from, say, Webex or Zoom to Microsoft Teams—in Parliament, we use Zoom—how does that happen?

If you're using Webex, you move to Teams, or you had Teams and you move to Zoom, how does that happen behind the scenes with Shared Services?

● (1355)

Mr. Sony Perron: I'm not sure I understand the question about movement. Is it the technical side or the selection of the vendor?

Mr. Ben Lobb: I think, historically, Webex was used and then during COVID, it switched to Teams.

I'm not asking it on behalf of Cisco. I'm not doing that. I'm just asking how that happens.

Mr. Sony Perron: We were rolling out the Microsoft 365 suite before the pandemic. We accelerated it. This was as a result of the study of the various products that were available to create an enterprise licence and negotiations that happened.

There are a couple of products on the market that provide that suite of products. This happened a couple of years ago, when the selection was going on with the multi-year agreement with one vendor, which was Microsoft.

There are some places where some products are being used, like you mentioned in the House of Commons. The House of Commons is not a mandatory client of Shared Services Canada, so they were at liberty to choose a different product. However, for other departments that are mandatory clients of Shared Services Canada, everybody's using the enterprise solution that at the time was selected as being M365.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to Ms. Thompson for five minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister, for coming today with your team.

I'd like to begin with a question on supplementary estimates (A). This indicates that SSC will receive additional funding for core information technology services.

Minister, can you clarify what this entails? How does it impact either the services accessed directly by Canadians when interacting with the Government of Canada, or public servants in their work, providing program support and services to Canadians?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Thank you, MP Thompson, for that question.

Federal budget 2021 proposed the following assessment of past funding levels and associated costs. The Department of Finance directed this access funding to support two items. These were the onboarding of 4% new or renewed government full-time equivalents, FTEs, to cover certain ongoing core IT service costs, and then for direct costs in support of two partner-led initiatives, providing standardized network services, software and hardware for workplace technology devices and technology-related services.

This funding ensures that the public servants have the tools they need to serve Canadians. Especially during the period where most public servants are working remotely, having the IT equipment and services they need makes it possible for them to continue offering the services on which Canadians depend, which I've mentioned previously, and processing the numerous requests that come in across government. It's really critical that those services and supports continue to be offered.

The majority of this funding supports the onboarding of new employees into the federal public service. It ensures that they have access to the IT services they require to do their work, including, for example, access to mobile devices, email and telecommunications services.

That's a breakdown in response to your question.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

Minister, like you, my team and constituents were deeply impacted by the broad impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and certainly that was in all aspects of life. I realize this was referenced earlier, but I'd like to be a little more specific in my question.

Government services and programs, existing and new, continued throughout the pandemic to serve Canadians. Public servants across the board were able to work remotely and to continue to be there to serve Canadians, and I want to absolutely recognize their invaluable contribution and the accomplishment of the SSC public servants in overcoming unprecedented technical challenges. It was really quite remarkable what was able to happen in a very short period of time.

This highlights that the modern workplace will be a hybrid workplace. I realize that was referenced earlier. This workplace will be one where IT capacity not only allows for but encourages a broader cross-section of Canadians to pursue careers in the public service without having to pull up stakes and move to Ottawa.

Minister, how will the investments and learnings of the pandemic contribute to the modernization of workspaces, services, programs and program delivery for the Government of Canada?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Thanks, MP Thompson, for that and thanks for acknowledging the work of Shared Services Canada. I agree completely with your comments.

I think it's important to understand the magnitude. We've talked about the work that has been done, the pivot, where overnight we had to transform systems, make it so that the work could continue to be done. To give a sense of the magnitude or scale of this, prior to the pandemic, there was an average of 20,000 simultaneous remote connections, and that's daily. During the pandemic, we saw the daily average exceed 240,000 simultaneous remote connections during the first year. Based on the last six months, the average remote connections have now stabilized at around 230,000.

To enable virtual work, SSC moved very quickly and implemented major upgrades to the enterprise network, government-wide Internet and network security, and enabled the deployment across the enterprise of digital communication and collaboration platforms enabled by Microsoft 365. This was key to employees' ability to collaborate remotely in support of critical services to citizens. This platform further improved the Government of Canada's ability to support accessibility and official language needs.

Now SSC continues to make significant upgrades to networks and boardrooms, as I have mentioned, to enable employees to collaborate from work sites with their remote colleagues, as well as support the bandwidth-intensive video conferencing tools. This is going to support the return to work work site, which a number of people have asked about, and enable a hybrid workforce, as well as prepare the foundational infrastructure and platforms that will modernize program and service delivery to Canadians for the future.

● (1400)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With that, we've come to the end of our hour. We greatly appreciate your being with us and answering questions and being so open to answer them where available. As indicated, if there are further responses that you would like to make and that need to be done in writing, you can submit them to the clerk and he will distribute them to all members.

I would like to thank you, Mr. Perron and Mr. Nadeau, for your remarks, as well.

Finally, Minister, thank you once again for being with us.

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: This ends the public portion of the meeting. We will now be going to the in camera portion of the meeting. As you are aware, you will have to leave the Zoom site you're on right now and then come back in. The Zoom instructions were provided to all committee members in advance.

With that, I'm going to suspend the meeting temporarily.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]