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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)): Welcome, everyone. We'll get going on meeting number 40 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, a.k.a. OGGO.

We'll go from 11 o'clock.... Apparently, there will be a vote today at one o'clock. I'm seeking everyone's agreement that, rather than break when the bells go at 12:30, we will, because we're in the same building, go right up to, say, 10 minutes to one, and then we'll adjourn and go vote.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair:: Thanks very much.

In the first hour, we have Minister Fortier for one hour, and then we'll have Treasury Board officials afterwards.

Minister Fortier, welcome back. I understand you have a five-minute opening statement for us.

Hon. Mona Fortier (President of the Treasury Board): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and congratulations on your new role presiding over this very important committee.

Welcome to the other new members of this OGGO committee.

It's a pleasure for me to appear this morning to discuss supplementary estimates (B), 2022-23. Of course, before I continue, I'd like to acknowledge that we are here today on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

As you can see, I am with my senior officials from the Treasury Board Secretariat: Annie Boudreau, assistant secretary, expenditure management sector; Karen Cahill, assistant secretary and chief financial officer for the Treasury Board; Carole Bidal, associate assistant deputy minister, employee relations and total compensation; Monia Lahaie, assistant comptroller general, financial management sector; Samantha Tattersall, assistant comptroller general, acquired services and assets sector; Kelly Acton, assistant deputy minister, policy and performance sector; and Paul Wagner, assistant deputy minister, strategy and transformation. I am very glad that they are here with me, and I want to thank them for their hard work.

[Translation]

These supplementary estimates provide information on spending requirements that were not sufficiently developed at the time of the main estimates or that were subsequently refined to reflect new changes.

As several initiatives were not developed in time to be reflected in the supplementary estimates (A), this fiscal year was lighter than the one covered by the supplementary estimates (B), which requires more spending. Nevertheless, when combined, the voted budgetary appropriations in the two budgets are consistent with last year's. I felt it was important to start with that information.

This fall, the government is asking Parliament to approve \$20.8 billion in voted budgetary appropriations to allow 87 institutions to address issues of importance to Canadians. For information purposes, the supplementary estimates also include \$5 billion in statutory budgetary expenditures, which includes \$2 billion for a one-time top-up this summer to the provinces and territories as part of the Canada health transfer.

The amounts in these supplementary estimates are higher than usual. Most of this increase can be attributed to indigenous claims, settlement agreements and investments in infrastructure and essential services for indigenous communities.

I would like to provide an overview of some of the significant amounts requested in this year's supplementary estimates. For example, the following amounts are being requested by Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada: \$3 billion for out-of-court settlements; \$677.6 million to replenish the specific claims settlement fund; \$673.5 million to settle first nations Treaty 8 Land Entitlement specific claims; \$673 million to fund childhood claims, abuse, compensation and administration costs for the federal Indian day schools and sixties scoop settlement agreements; and \$458.2 million for self-governing and modern treaty first nation, Inuit and Métis housing.

Other key measures in these supplementary estimates include \$1.5 billion to the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness for the disaster financial assistance arrangements program. This program, which provides financial assistance to provincial and territorial governments, will cover the costs associated with the natural disasters that occurred in British Columbia, such as the 2020 floods and landslides and the 2021 fires, floods and landslides.

• (1105)

In addition, \$732 million was provided to the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development to support access by developing countries to vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics to fight COVID-19.

[*English*]

If you give me one more minute, I will conclude.

Mr. Chair, 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, of course, present easy-to-understand information to Canadians about the authorities that are approved by Parliament.

Mr. Chair, these estimates demonstrate our government's ongoing commitment to Canadians' priorities at home and abroad.

I will thank you again and be ready to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs. Kusie, you have six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Minister, thank you for being here today. I know there is a by-election coming up, but we're in a different role today.

[*English*]

I also want to thank your colleagues for coming here today. It's great to see such a power group of women. We really appreciate your coming today to discuss the supplementary estimates.

However, I'm a little bit troubled. Inflation, of course, is at 6.9% right now. The numbers just came out last week. This is from the high of 8.1% that we saw in June. There are certainly many discussions internationally about the reasons for these high inflation rates that we're seeing. Of course, we see the price of oil increasing as a result of the war in Ukraine. Coming from the Prairies—Alberta—I'm always interested in the price of oil. We understand that it's as a result of China and supply chains.

Many economists, including Jon Hartley and John Cochrane, who wrote this article I'm referring to here, as well as one of my favourites, Jack Mintz, agree that the main cause of this inflation crisis that we're seeing in Canada is inflationary spending.

You, Madame Fortier, are responsible for the spending for the Government of Canada. Wouldn't you have to say that you are re-

sponsible for the inflationary crisis we're seeing now as a result of inflationary spending, as President of the Treasury Board in over-seeing this?

• (1110)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

Again, congratulations for being at this committee and for your new critic role.

As we know, in the last two years we've been through a very important pandemic, and there was disruption in the whole world. This is a global issue that we're facing. Canada did step up and we should be proud of where we are.

However, we also know that people are struggling in Canada, and the cost of living is something that is top of mind for Canadians. We also have this top of mind, and that's why we've done targeted investments in the last few months to make sure that Canadians can have the support they need to go through the difficulties they have right now. For example, we have the double credit for GST, and Canadians started to receive their cheques—

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Minister Fortier, I think we're familiar with the benefit—thank you very much.

Hon. Mona Fortier: That's why I'm very proud to say that we are looking—

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

Minister Fortier, one key mandate of the Treasury Board is “effective management of the public purse”, providing “guidance so that resources are soundly managed across government with a focus on results and on value for money.” If the public purse were managed effectively, we wouldn't be seeing the massive inflationary spending by your government, resulting in inflation rates that we haven't seen in 40 years. Wouldn't you say that's accurate?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I think you can see in the supplementary estimates how we are producing and showing Canadians that we are soundly managing our government's purse and supporting Canadians and the many—

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Minister Fortier, unfortunately the subtitle provided by the Parliamentary Budget Officer is that the government wants another \$21 billion. It's not very flattering.

If the Treasury Board was in fact not meeting its mandate of effectively managing the public purse, if there was no effective oversight of the billions of dollars that this government continues to shell out, resulting in higher inflation, can you not take responsibility for that, Minister Fortier? As the individual who oversees the public purse, which economists agree is responsible for the inflationary spending we're seeing and therefore the high inflation rates, can you take responsibility for that?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Again, I'd like to demonstrate the fact that in the last two years we've been in this very difficult pandemic. It has disrupted supply chains and also the cost of living.

We know inflation is high. Our country is in a better position than many other G7 countries. We have also made sure that we are bringing targeted supports to help those vulnerable Canadians who are having a hard time right now. We will continue to monitor this.

I'm working closely, of course, with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to make sure that what she has brought forward in the budget, we are spending accordingly, and that we have the necessary authorities to make sure the departments are moving forward with results.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: What she has brought forward, Minister Fortier, is \$6.1 billion of new spending and the \$36.4-billion deficit this fiscal year alone.

Now, the Parliamentary Budget Officer was actually being kind when he said \$21 billion, because your government, of course, is actually asking Parliament for another \$25.78 billion. Why hasn't the government adopted the pay-as-you-go model, or why haven't they looked at it until this point, do you think?

I know the Deputy Prime Minister is finally starting to consider this. She's mentioned this to your cabinet. Why did it take so long for you and the Deputy Prime Minister to consider the pay-as-you-go model?

The Chair: Give a very brief 20-second answer, please.

Hon. Mona Fortier: As I said, we are showing today in the budget estimates that we are looking forward to Parliament adopting this so that we can continue the work to support Canadians in all of the amounts that are in front of us today.

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Thompson for six minutes, please.

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

Certainly I want to welcome the minister to committee. Thank you for your support within the department.

I'd like to fall back on questions, Minister, that you answered the last time you came to OGGO, and really the ongoing support for public sector workers.

To begin, could you speak to whether any agreements with the bargaining agents have taken place? Are there any updates there?

• (1115)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

As you know, we are continuing in current negotiations with 27 different tables. I'm very glad to say we have a tentative agreement

on collective bargaining with one of them—ACFO—which is the financial officers. This is a group of 6,500 public servants.

I think we did a very good job together to have representation to what taxpayers will accept, and also making sure we recognize the hard work of these public servants. We will, of course, continue to work with all the other tables, because we have public servants who have been reliable and working with our government, and we will continue to do these negotiations together.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

Minister, would you update the committee, please, on the work to protect whistle-blowers?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Yes, of course. That is a very good question, Ms. Thompson.

Our government, of course, believes that those who disclose serious wrongdoing need to be protected. The law provides a secure and confidential process for disclosing serious wrongdoings in the workplace and protection from acts of reprisal.

Public servant disclosures result in an average of 10 findings of wrongdoing every year. You know that Canada's whistle-blowing law is part of the recourse options that cover harassment, discrimination, labour grievances and privacy complaints, and our government is supporting with some training, monitoring and reporting on policies on workplaces and harassment.

Budget 2022, as you probably recall, funded a review of the act, which will begin this year. I'm pleased to say that we're currently finalizing the panel that will help us do this work. Therefore, I can say that we will be doing that review very soon.

Thank you for asking the question.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

Would you please provide information on why the International Bar Association ranked Canada's whistle-blowing protection last?

Hon. Mona Fortier: If you don't mind, I can answer that one in French to balance things.

[*Translation*]

You asked why the International Bar Association ranked Canada's whistleblower protection last.

The association's report contains many errors. For example, it ignores the fact that the constitutional separation of powers in Canada prevents Parliament from imposing a whistleblower regime on provincial and municipal governments and most of the private sector, which falls under provincial jurisdiction. The report also ignores provincial and territorial whistleblower regimes and other mechanisms for redress in the event of ethical breaches. Therefore, this report makes many errors.

We're actually very proud of what we offer to Canadians and public servants.

[English]

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

Regarding bilingualism, how are we improving supports for bilingualism among public servants, and why is that so important?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I can tell you that it is very important. We have to be proud of our official languages and how our public servants serve Canadians from coast to coast in both official languages. We have been effectively delivering those services.

As you know, we are currently revising and modernizing the Official Languages Act, which, when passed, will give Treasury Board a new role as a central agency that can evaluate and better monitor the work being done with the departments.

The other thing is this: We will, of course, continue to develop different tools, such as training tools and ways to make sure that new second-language training is offered to public servants to better serve Canadians. That is another highlight of the work we're doing at Treasury Board.

• (1120)

The Chair: I'm afraid that's time.

Go ahead, Mrs. Vignola, please.

[Translation]

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

With the supplementary estimates (B), the Government of Canada has increased spending for 2022-23 by \$19.2 billion, or 4.6%, over 2021-22. This budget can be roughly divided into three parts: a third for measures in the 2022 budget, a third for reconciliation with indigenous peoples, and a third for new measures authorized by the government outside the usual fiscal approval process of the federal budget and the fall economic statement.

We know that supplementary estimates provide information on spending needs that could not be specified in previous budgets. We also know that supplementary estimates are tabled after the public accounts, which show the unused, lapsed appropriations that departments had been given in previous fiscal years. We see that about one-tenth of the funds provided have not been used. In 2020-21 and 2021-22, the amount of unused appropriations more than doubled over previous years.

We understand that the increase in unused appropriations in health is the result of uncertainty and increased spending related to COVID-19. It was probably safer to vote in more money than not

enough, since no one likes to get caught with their pants down in a crisis. However, and here's the rub, no information was provided about appropriations unused by other departments, appropriations unrelated to the pandemic, especially since these explanations should have been included in departmental results reports and the public accounts.

I'm going to ask two questions related to this lengthy introduction.

First, why didn't you explain the reasons for not spending the voted appropriations in the departmental results reports and the public accounts of Canada? In fact, why didn't you force the departments to do it?

Next, how is it that the departments aren't spending the funds allocated to them when, according to government officials, the departments urgently need considerable amounts of funding?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Before I turn the floor over to officials, who will provide you with more detailed answers, I'd like to thank you for your questions.

Over the past few years, the government has been under a great deal of pressure. Departments want to spend the money that's been allocated to them, but we've seen some challenges related to supply chains and legal issues, among other things. That may be part of the reason why all the information isn't available right now.

I will let Ms. Boudreau answer your questions and provide specific examples.

Ms. Annie Boudreau (Assistant Secretary, Expenditure Management Sector, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you very much for your questions, Mrs. Vignola.

The report you were referring to indicates that \$12 billion has not been spent in the federal health portfolio. As has been said, this is related to uncertainty arising from COVID-19.

Another \$4.3 billion is for settlements with indigenous peoples, but it's impossible to know when they will be ratified by the communities. So that's part of the reason for the lapsed funds.

A third example is the reprofiling of \$5.2 billion related to infrastructure projects. This may be due to delays in completing some projects, because the construction season in the north is so short that it's impossible to finish all projects planned.

Implementation delays are a fourth consideration. Indigenous Services Canada is a good example, because it has not spent all of its allocated funds due to its staff being unable to travel to communities.

The final consideration would be the Treasury Board's central votes, \$1.8 billion in total. When these funds go unused, they are lapsed. If they are still needed, then they must be requested from Parliament again.

To sum up, we have \$12.1 billion for COVID-19, \$4.3 billion for indigenous peoples, \$5.2 billion for delays and infrastructure, \$5.5 billion for implementation delays, and \$1.8 billion for central votes.

• (1125)

Mrs. Julie Vignola: In addition, an unprecedented \$5.7 billion is being spent on immigration, including \$112 million to fund the 2022-24 immigration levels plan.

How much of that money is earmarked for Roxham Road infrastructure?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Again, thank you for your question.

I feel that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada would provide a better answer than me. That said, we will send a detailed written response to the committee.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I would appreciate it.

The Governor General has been in the news for several months owing to the budgets she's been granted, including \$55 million to \$67 million for the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General. Money is being spent not only there, but also in several departments.

Is an additional amount provided in this budget for the Governor General's expenses?

Hon. Mona Fortier: The answer is no.

[English]

The Chair: I'm afraid that's your time. Perhaps you can get back to us or revisit it in your next round.

Next is Mr. Johns for six minutes, please.

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

Minister, last week Lana Payne, the president of Unifor, Canada's largest private sector union, said that the Governor of the Bank of Canada has basically declared a class war on working people in this country. The governor has advised employers to suppress wages, and is pushing for a rise in unemployment to slow inflation.

Collective bargaining with several bargaining units is continuing against this backdrop, while public service workers have delivered for Canadians throughout the pandemic. In the face of high inflation and uncertain economic times ahead, they're looking for wages that will allow them to make ends meet and for job security.

As a major employer, the federal government sets an example for employers right across the country. Now, at the bargaining table, the question for you is whether you will be taking the advice of Mr. Macklem and suppressing wages, or whether you will be offering workers a fair deal.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Our government is committed to reaching agreements with all bargaining agents that are fair to the employ-

ees, and we are mindful of today's economic and fiscal context. Of course you know that we bargain at the table, not in public, but, just to make sure that we're all on the same page, our offers take into account other collective agreements in the country, our ability to attract and retain highly qualified employees, the terms and conditions of employment in other workplaces and responsible fiscal management.

We will, of course, make sure that there is fairness for the employees and also for taxpayers.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Minister.

We want to make sure that those employees can pay their bills and that it meets the rate of inflation.

The supplementary estimates (B) propose a transfer of \$235,000 from the National Research Council of Canada to the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat "to support the implementation of a Buy Clean Secretariat for federal procurement." The development of a buy clean strategy appeared in the mandate letters of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, but not in the mandate of the Treasury Board president.

Despite the strategy being tasked by three ministers, there haven't been obvious signs of progress. The buy clean strategy has broad support from industry, labour and the environmental community as a way of reducing emissions and generating economic benefits at home.

Can you please explain what the Treasury Board's role in developing the strategy will be and how \$235,000 will move this forward in a timely way?

• (1130)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Johns, before I turn it to Sam to define the \$235,000, I have to tell you that I have the privilege in my mandate of working on greening government and making sure that we reduce our footprint across the country with our infrastructure and with our vehicles.

I would like to present to you the plan that we currently have with the centre for greening government and my team when you have a chance. We are reducing our footprint right now, and we will continue to do so.

I will ask Sam if she can give precision on the exact amount that you were sharing.

Ms. Samantha Tattersall (Assistant Comptroller General, Acquired Services and Assets Sector, Treasury Board Secretariat): Within Treasury Board Secretariat, there is a greening government secretariat that's about greening federal operations. The transfer from the NRC to Treasury Board is for two full-time persons who will support the development and implementation of green procurement standards and support guidance on low embodied carbon materials like carbon and steel that we use during the construction of our buildings, etc. It's about greening government—

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Minister, your colleague, the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, said in September that the government is moving towards a regulated safer supply of drugs in response to the toxic drug crisis. However, to date, the government has only supported small-scale pilot projects while thousands of Canadians die every year, including in your riding, because of the contaminated supply. Now the Conservative leader is spreading misinformation that safe supply is a failed experiment.

The substance use and addiction program is significantly over-subscribed. I just found out, on a question on the Order Paper, that the first call for proposals was able to provide funding only for 11.8% of what was sought, while the second call for proposals provided 17% of the funding sought. That funding goes to a range of programs related to not just safer supply, but also prevention, harm reduction and treatment.

In light of the funding shortfall, has the Minister of Health sought from you any additional funding to support safer supply programs?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Toxic drug and overdose crises continue to take a tragic toll on the families and loved ones in our communities, even, as you mentioned, in my riding of Ottawa—Vanier. Our government is using and will continue to use every tool at our disposal to work with our partners to that end.

For this national public health crisis, as you know, since 2017 our government has invested more than \$800 million to address the overdose crisis, and we're continuing to take concrete steps to divert people who use drugs away from the criminal justice system—

Mr. Gord Johns: That's not answering the question, Minister.

The Chair: I'm afraid that's time as well. Perhaps you can come back to it in the next round.

Mrs. Kusie, you have five minutes, please.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm not sure who defines misinformation, but I'll continue.

Minister, we're both working mothers, and we're both very proud to be. As we ease out of the pandemic, we are still seeing the implementation of the hybrid model within the federal public service, something that I'm not necessarily opposed to. I'm wondering about the effects of vacancy rates as a result of individuals working at home.

Would you have an idea as to what the current vacancy rates are for buildings in the national capital region at this time as a result of this, please?

Hon. Mona Fortier: As you can imagine, our public service is no longer working remotely out of necessity but in a hybrid-by-design approach. With the departments, we are monitoring how we will continue to deliver services to Canadians. To do so, we are, of course, looking at how public servants can better offer those services. Hybrid work is something that is here to stay.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Minister, I was asking specifically about the vacancy rates and if you're aware what they might be. Then I was going to ask a follow-up question as to the operating costs on a daily basis for the buildings in the national capital region so that perhaps we could ascertain—based upon vacancy rates and the operating costs—whether, perhaps, this amount of money could be better utilized by evaluating these working spaces.

I'll go back, then, to employees, since we were talking about the type of work currently being done in the federal public service. I'm sure you saw the story—as reported by Kevin Page, our previous Parliamentary Budget Officer, who is now at the University of Ottawa—indicating that 19,151 new jobs were added last year. This, of course, means that the public sector is growing faster than the private sector. However, the results that Canadians are getting really aren't indicating the benefit of having hired so many individuals.

For example, ESDC added 8,500 new positions but saw disastrous record highs for passport delays, delaying thousands of Canadian travellers this summer. Of course, everyone knows about Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. It hired 1,750 new people in July, yet it had more than two million applications in its backlog. This is prior to the new 500,000-individual target being set.

I'm wondering, Minister, how the Treasury Board will consider value for money going forward, given that there's been an incredible investment in the public service—greater than that of the private sector—yet we're still not seeing the results. What are you going to do about that?

● (1135)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Well, there are many questions in your statement right now, but I'll start by saying one thing. The federal public service is about 0.84% of the population, the same as it was in 2010 under the Harper government. At this time, if we look at it, it's about the same proportion.

Our government is really focusing on delivering support for Canadians who need it most while responsibly managing public funds. New, vital services like CERB and CEWS were clearly things that Canadians appreciated and that helped them go through COVID. For that, we needed public servants to quickly adapt those programs and offer them to Canadians.

Also, we have to say that our government is continuing to look at how we can better offer our services. We have reduced the backlog for the passport issue that we had this summer. Yes, we had to find innovative ways to offer the services that Canadians rely on. With regard to passports, for example, we opened new offices across the country, even one in the Yukon, in Whitehorse.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Minister, my time is brief, so I'm just going to move on, then, to some other questions of waste.

For example, according to an article by Laura Ryckewaert, "The federal government wracked up a total of \$227.1 million in lost revenue, public money, and public property due to fraud, accidents, or offences in 2021-22". What are you doing to address these lost revenues, public monies and public property losses due to fraud, accidents or offences in the last fiscal year, Minister, please?

The Chair: I'm afraid that I'm going to have to interrupt again. That seems to be my habit in this meeting.

We are out of time. Perhaps this is for our next time.

Mr. Bains, we'll go over to you for five minutes, please.

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

Thank you to the minister for joining us today and providing these answers, and thank you to the Treasury Board Secretariat.

In the region I come from, which is Richmond, British Columbia, our coastline is very important to my constituents. We have the largest commercial fishing harbour in Canada. We also have the Ocean Legacy program here, which is the only one of its kind: Plastics are removed from the ocean and turned into little plastic beads that go back into the circular economy.

My question is about the recent oceans protection plan announcement, which I participated in just the other day, for the next phase of oceans protection plan funding. Can you speak to the \$196.3 million allocated for the oceans protection program in the estimates and how it will protect our coastlines?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

I'm glad to see you online today, MP Bains. Thank you for participating.

As you know, and as I think you will confirm, Canada has the longest coastline in the world, and coastal areas are vital to our economy. We're expanding our oceans protection plan, of course, to strengthen protections for coasts and wildlife, improve marine traffic and incident management and, of course, advance partnerships with indigenous peoples.

The funding will be used to position Canada's marine safety system and ecosystem protections to better mitigate the threats to Canada's oceans, and it's also about users: the impacts of marine traffic, enabling supply chain resilience and supporting economic growth.

I hope that gives you an idea of how this investment will support our coastlines.

• (1140)

Mr. Parm Bains: I want to thank you for that.

As you know, a part of our government's efforts toward reconciliation is to ensure that 5% of the value of federal contracts is awarded to indigenous businesses. I come from the traditional territories of the Musqueam and the Coast Salish people. They are very actively involved in our economy here. Can you inform the committee of how the government plans to meet its targets?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

As you know, we've been putting in a lot of effort on truth and reconciliation, but also in giving opportunities for indigenous peoples to have better economic opportunities. We are committed, of course, to creating those opportunities for indigenous businesses to succeed and grow.

By 2024-25, a minimum of 5% of the total value of federal contracts must be awarded to indigenous businesses. Of course, the departments will report their performance through next year's departmental results reports.

I wanted to provide an example. As of March 24, 2022, PSPC had awarded 42 contracts, worth over \$197 million, to self-identified indigenous businesses in response to COVID-19. It shows that there is a good proportion of indigenous businesses able to deliver different services. That includes logistics and air charter services, accommodation and cleaning services, IT professional services, medical and laboratory supplies, masks, hand sanitizers and thermometers. That's just to give you an example of concrete awarded contracts for indigenous businesses.

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you.

Chair, do I have any more time?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, sir.

Mr. Parm Bains: Minister, thank you very much for providing all of those answers and being clear with them.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bains.

Mrs. Vignola, you have two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

This budget provides nearly \$4.8 billion in funding for measures related to COVID-19, bringing the total to \$16.1 billion for 2022-23.

Canada has 467 health care centres, each with one to five employees, and hospitals with over 500 employees. For \$237 million, it has purchased a total of 40,000 ventilators, over 12,000 of which are unused and unsold. A total of 40,000 ventilators for 467 health care centres means about 100 ventilators per centre, even for those with one to five employees. It seems to me that's a lot and Canada may have overestimated its needs.

Is reimbursement of the total amount for the unused and unsold ventilators included in the \$16.1 billion related to COVID-19? If not, how does the government plan to get reimbursed for the surplus ventilators purchased?

In addition, I'd like someone to explain why we paid so much for vaccines that ended up in the garbage because they had passed their expiry date.

• (1145)

Hon. Mona Fortier: We all remember two years ago when COVID-19 hit, we had no idea what was going to happen in the next few years. It was crucial that we have the resources to ensure the health and safety of Canadians.

With the ministers' approval, the departments wanted to put the odds in Canadians' favour. We made major investments in vaccines, ventilators and equipment that would help us save Canadians. It really comes down to the fact that we put Canadians first in our efforts and priorities.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Clearly, you did, but how are we going to get reimbursed for what's unused and unsold? How do you justify vaccines ending up in the garbage?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: What was purchased but not used can't be in the estimates because the estimates show expenditures that have not yet been incurred and won't be incurred until they are approved by the House and Senate.

We can follow up when next year's public accounts are released. We'll know then what happened to the goods you mentioned

Hon. Mona Fortier: I think that—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm afraid that's our time.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: I urge you to ask the Minister of Health, who may have more details about that.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Gord Johns: Minister, you said that the government is now moving to a hybrid-by-design model.

Can you please advise if any bonuses are being paid to management based on the number of employees returning to in-person work?

Hon. Mona Fortier: First, I want to reiterate the fact that hybrid work is, of course, here to stay. We're working with different departments to make sure that we offer Canadians the best services that we can.

As for your question, I don't think there is any link into bonus pay depending on the number of.... It's not something that is considered.

Mr. Gord Johns: I just wanted to clarify that.

I had asked you a question: Has the Minister of Health sought any additional funding—new money—to support safer supply programs?

Hon. Mona Fortier: It's not in the supplementary estimates (B).

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay. That's disappointing, given the scale of this crisis, Minister. I'm going to continue to pressure your government to respond to it as the crisis that it is. The \$800 million is far from enough. It's inadequate.

In June 2017, this committee tabled a unanimous report recommending sweeping changes to the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, which have yet to be implemented. Subsequently, budget 2022 committed \$2.4 million over five years to the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat to launch a review of the act. Despite the lack of action on this file for years, the assistant deputy minister for people and culture recently put out a call for bargaining agent representatives to apply for two positions on the advisory committee for the review, with less than three business days' notice to respond.

This hasty request raises questions about the quality of the review that will be conducted. It has been apparent for years that Canada's whistle-blowing protection regime is broken and in desperate need of reform. However, the government is spending millions while existing recommendations sit on the shelf.

Can you please provide some details on this new review and how it will deliver value to Canadians?

The Chair: Give a short answer, please.

Hon. Mona Fortier: As I said earlier to another colleague, we are currently bringing forward the names for the panel that will be working with us to do the review. I have to say that the names of the union representatives have been discussed with unions, and we will have that representation at the table.

We will be starting that review very soon.

The Chair: Thanks, Minister.

We'll now go to Mrs. Block for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses, Minister Fortier and all of the departmental officials, for being here. We appreciate your taking the time to answer our questions.

Minister, Conservatives always understood that if Canadians were being asked to stay at home and businesses were being shuttered during the pandemic, financial assistance would be necessary. However, I'm hearing daily from constituents who are waking up only to find out that they are being told they didn't qualify for the CERB payments and they are now being asked to repay those payments.

My question is more toward the Canada wage benefit. The fall 2022 economic statement proposes to provide \$4 billion over six years, starting in 2022-23, to automatically issue advance payments of the Canada workers benefit to people who qualified for the benefit in the previous year, starting in July 2023 for the 2023 taxation year.

I have three questions. Did the Canada wage benefit go through the typical Treasury Board process? What has been the cost to Canadian taxpayers for recouping CERB payments that people were ineligible for? Why are you now creating the same conditions with the CWB? Are you fine with potentially writing off \$4 billion of taxpayers' money?

• (1150)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you for your questions.

I will start by saying that the CEWS, the Canada wage subsidy, was—I heard from many businesses—the greatest support to help them go through the pandemic, and it was a very good program that helped bridge them.

To answer your questions, I understand that this is a tax measure, so it doesn't go through Treasury Board authority.

Do you want to add to that?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Yes.

If you look at part one of the blue book, it is clearly indicated that the Canada child benefit is legislated through the Income Tax Act and is considered an expenditure for government financial reporting purposes. Parliament does not authorize annual spending for this item or for any other tax expenditures or refundable tax credits.

Thank you.

Hon. Mona Fortier: That was for your first question.

For your second question, with the CERB, as we know, we wanted Canadians to have access to support as soon as possible. When we sent those cheques, we also mentioned that we would be auditing and making sure that it was used appropriately by Canadians, and that is what we are doing now. We are making sure that those who were eligible continue to receive the CERB, and those who didn't have the requirements need to.... It's the Canada Revenue Agency that is doing that work right now to make sure that those who need to reimburse do that.

As for the CW benefit, I don't know if my officials have an answer at this time.

Ms. Annie Boudreau: It's the same thing. It's considered a tax measure. Accordingly, it's not part of the estimates that you are studying right now.

Mrs. Kelly Block: I'll follow up with a question with regard to the mandate of the Treasury Board to oversee the spending of government, and to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are being spent wisely and that they are getting the best value for the money that is being spent.

Do you know what the cost to Canadian taxpayers has been for recouping CERB payments that people were ineligible for?

The Chair: Please give a brief answer.

Hon. Mona Fortier: The Canada Revenue Agency has that number, and we could provide it to you as a follow-up.

The Chair: Great. Thanks, Mrs. Block.

We have Mr. Kusmierczyk, please, for five minutes.

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

Minister, welcome back to OGGO. We always love having you here and getting your testimony.

Your mandate letter includes accelerating the “Greening Government commitments to electrify the entire federal fleet of light duty vehicles by 2030.” You and I had an excellent conversation last week about the fact that in Windsor—Tecumseh we build the award-winning Chrysler Pacifica hybrid minivan. I'm very much interested in the greening government program for the fact that I would dearly love to see more Chrysler Pacificas on Parliament Hill and in our fleets.

I wanted to ask you if you can speak to the progress that we're making on the greening government program, and specifically on the greening of the federal fleets as well.

• (1155)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you for that.

Yes, of course we are moving forward and actually making sure that our fleets are zero-emission by 2050, but we also want to make sure that we have the appropriate infrastructure so that those vehicles can be electric. For most of them, of course, we're focusing on that, and the one you were sharing with me, the Pacifica, should be on our list of possibilities, of course, to invest in Canada. In my mandate, working with the centre for greening government, we will continue to show the work and the progress that we're doing for greening government.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: That's terrific, Minister. That really is heartening to hear.

I want to shift gears a little bit and ask you about how our federal government is advancing the inclusion of Canadians with disabilities as well.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

This is something that is actually very dear to my heart, because in my mandate letter, I have been asked to commit to hire at least 5,000 new public servants with disabilities by 2025. Every organization, of course, as we know, needs to embrace disability inclusion. We are the largest employer in Canada; therefore, we need to lead by example.

We're currently piloting a workplace accessibility passport that is across 20 different departments. This documents the employees' needs and tracks their workplace accommodations so these employees no longer have to relitigate every time they have either a change in managers or an advancement in the system. Our government also created the office of public service accessibility and the first-ever accessibility strategy for the public service of Canada. As you know, we really need to create a workplace where everyone feels included, can be themselves and realize their full potential.

We still have a long way to go, but we are making some progress. I even challenged my cabinet colleagues to show how we can make that progress and make sure we get to the 5,000 target. But we need to do much more. We have talent across Canada that we need to bring in.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I absolutely agree with you that we need to do more on that front and bring in the incredible talents that persons with disabilities have in Canada too. They can only benefit and improve our federal service.

I wanted to ask you whether you or maybe the officials have an update on how we are measuring up in terms of the target of hiring the 5,000. Do we have a timeline or an estimation of how we're doing on that?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Again, it's by 2025 that I have this mandate. We are slowly making progress. Maybe Carole would have more specific numbers, but I will tell you that the mandate I have is net new employees, so that 5,000 is not just for somebody who may be in the system already. It has to be new employees.

One difficulty we have is that many Canadians who live with a disability don't necessarily want to disclose that information. Therefore, we have to try different ways to demonstrate that we are focusing our efforts. That is one challenge we have.

Of course, I recognize that some people living with a disability don't want to check a box. Working together and making sure that we find those opportunities for people living with a disability to feel that they can belong to the work of the Government of Canada is my objective. I welcome parliamentarians of all parties—and also, of course, senators—to suggest to me how we can really move this objective.

● (1200)

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

The Chair: You have negative 55 seconds.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Okay. I will yield my negative time.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Minister, are you done, or will you be staying around for a bit more?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I am done.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you for joining us today.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you again, Chair. I'm surprised that you didn't ask me any questions, but I'm sure you will next time. Please feel free to continue to talk to me about your experience and, actually, your expertise. You've been around this table for a very long time, and I know we can work with you.

Thank you so much, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

If you noticed a twitch, that was me wanting to ask questions.

We will excuse the minister and continue with our next round, with Mrs. Kusie, please, for five minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much.

Wow, Chair. The minister said she can work with you. I'm shocked, knowing you so well.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: That's very high praise.

Thank you very much, Minister, for joining us here today.

I'm going to move on to my questions for the department officials.

I was having a conversation with the minister about inflationary spending and then, of course, wasteful spending.

My topic today, which I would like to focus on with you, is transparency. As always, I have a couple of articles in my hands. The first one is an article by Ken Rubin that was published in The Globe and Mail. It says, "Access to information in Canada is broken beyond repair." This might in fact be how our fantastic chair has gotten a lot of his information through the years.

The second article is by Tom Cardoso and is also in The Globe and Mail. The title is "Ottawa cites translation, accessibility costs as reason for keeping documents from public", which is something that we're unfortunately seeing with the ArriveCAN investigation as well here at OGGO.

My first question for you, then, is, what role does Treasury Board play in ensuring that ATIP divisions in every department and agency are well resourced and well financed, please?

Ms. Kelly Acton (Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy and Performance Sector, Treasury Board Secretariat): Good morning.

The Treasury Board Secretariat is the policy centre for access to information and privacy operations across government, providing everything from policy guidance and instituting legislative change, such as the recent changes to Bill C-58, and then on through to community development and support training and that kind of thing.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Why are departments having such great difficulty in maintaining adequate service delivery for ATIP requests? What is the Treasury Board doing to fix this cross-department issue, please?

Ms. Kelly Acton: There are just over 200 institutions that currently fall under the Access to Information Act. That does include Crown corporations and wholly owned subsidiaries. It's quite a variety of organizations.

I think the most recently published statistics had the proportion of requests that were closed within legislative timelines at about 70%, so there is work to do. The Treasury Board Secretariat has been working with institutions across government on everything from making available new and more modern processing tools to really transform what are quite analog and paper-based systems, to also, on the tech front, standing up a new ATIP online portal this summer, a modernized platform, and, as I said, moving to support the community through such things as a community development office launched earlier this year.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Do you feel you are adequately re-sourced in an effort to deliver those new technologies that you're talking about? What type of timeline would we be looking at for the delivery of these being available for use?

• (1205)

Ms. Kelly Acton: The modernized ATIP online platform launched in July, and the vast majority of institutions are onboarded to the portal. There are a number of departments, which are among the larger requesters, that still need to come on board, but plans are advancing to have that happen.

The procurement that made available these new tools was completed earlier this year, and they are available now to departments. Again, departments are making plans to avail themselves of those new tools.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Okay. It would be safe to say, then, that you anticipate there will be a day when you meet normal service delivery timelines for ATIP requests.

Ms. Kelly Acton: It is a legal obligation for institutions to—

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: It's legal, but it's not being met, unfortunately.

One recommendation to improve the efficiency of ATIP requests is to publish requests on the website. In your opinion, why doesn't the government currently do that?

Ms. Kelly Acton: Currently there are summaries, posted in both official languages, of all completed ATIP requests. We have been working for a period of time to see what more could be done in terms of making available completed requests more broadly. As you will be aware, in the publication of all of our government information online....

[*Translation*]

It has to be in both official languages.

[*English*]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you so much.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jowhari, you are next, please.

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

Welcome to the officials. I'm not sure who is going to respond, but I will table the question.

The supplementary estimates (B), 2022-23 are requesting \$25.8 billion in both of the authorities, compared to \$2.8 billion in supplementary estimates (B) for 2021-22 and about \$1.3 billion for 2021. Why is there such a huge difference between this year, last year and the year before?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Thank you very much for the question.

As the minister was explaining at the beginning, this is a cycle. As you know, we table main estimates on March 1 of every year. After that, we have supplementary estimates (A), (B) and (C).

This year, supplementary estimates (A) was smaller than normal. That's why we have in supplementary estimates (B) this year a big amount. It is \$20.8 billion in both of the authorities. I know that the PBO referred to \$25 billion, but that includes statutory authorities.

If you look at the sum of supplementary estimates (A) and (B) compared to last year, we are at the same point in time—the same level of authorities.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you. That was a great explanation.

These supplementary estimates also include 25 horizontal items, totalling nearly \$2 billion, of which 14 are budget 2022 initiatives. What would explain the high number of budget 2022 initiatives structured as horizontal items?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: As I was explaining, a lot of budget 2022 items are included in supplementary estimates (B). It's a question of timing, when the federal budget was released in April and when it was time for organizations to be able to define their implementation strategies and come to the Treasury Board in order to have access to the authorities.

You are right. We have 25 items, and there was a schedule that was published the same day as the tabling of the supplementary estimates (B). As referred to in the PBO report, 90% of budget 2022, if we add supplementary estimates (A) and (B), is included in the estimates that you have in front of you.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: That was a great answer.

You talked about the PBO. There was a note made by the PBO that there's a discrepancy between the fall economic statement and the supplementary estimates (B). That discrepancy is a large amount. I believe it's into \$20 billion-plus.

Can you shed some light on why there's such a discrepancy and how it could be explained in a very simple way to the Canadians who are interested?

• (1210)

Ms. Annie Boudreau: In the book that I keep referring to, there is, in section 1, a section called "Comparison of the Fall Economic Statement 2022 and Estimates".

I will explain the difference. Basically, the big amount will be the employment insurance benefits. They are included in the fall economic statement, but they are not included here because we don't need the approval of Parliament for that. We also have the Canada child benefit, which I was referring to earlier on another question, which is also not included in these estimates.

We also have what we call accrual accounting, so some of the expenditures or authorities have been included in another document. For example, in the fall economic statement of 2021, there was an amount of about \$20 billion put aside for Indigenous Services Canada for funding services for the CHRT ruling. This amount was included in last year's forecast, but was only included in this year's main estimates.

For all those adjustments, it is basically a timing difference, and it is well explained in part 1 of that document.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you.

I have about 30 seconds, and I'll be remiss if I don't ask about digital credentials. I believe that's going to Mr. Wagner.

Can you give us your plans for digital credentials, sir?

Mr. Paul Wagner (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategy and Transformation, Treasury Board Secretariat): We continue to evolve the digital credential program within the federal government. There have been some important pieces since the last time I addressed this committee. We're moving quite rapidly with our provincial partners at establishing a national framework for leveraging digital credentials, and many of the provinces are already using those digital credentials.

The Chair: Mr. Wagner, I'm sorry; we're out of time.

Mrs. Vignola, you have two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much.

Ms. Boudreau, if I am wrong to ask you the following questions, I urge the appropriate individual to answer them.

In terms of horizontal items, \$675.1 million is earmarked for resettling Afghan refugees. That's great news. However, many communities have a lot of needs right now.

I have four short questions.

What measures will be introduced to resettle Afghan refugees and how will the \$675.1 million be used?

How much is earmarked to resettle Ukrainian refugees?

How much is earmarked to combat the illegal smugglers who make life hell for immigrants crossing over at Roxham Road?

How much is earmarked to ensure that immigrants crossing over at Roxham Road get a better welcome, and by that I mean we refer them to legal services that suit their circumstances, rather than handcuffing them upon arrival and putting them at a high risk of homelessness?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Thank you very much for your questions.

First, I'd like to say that immigration isn't solely funded by horizontal items. Obviously, other line items fall under the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship as well. There's a section that deals with Ukraine and the Afghan refugees, foreign aid to developing countries and broader immigration measures.

I will now go back to your question about Ukraine. We have \$184.4 million going to immigration and settlement measures, temporary accommodations and income support for Ukrainians. In addition, \$151.7 million was provided to advance Ukraine's resilience and early recovery, including humanitarian assistance and de-mining support.

With respect to Afghan refugees, \$658.5 million is provided for resettlement, including processing of new permanent resident admissions, settlement services, security and law enforcement activities, and health screening and assessment.

With respect to foreign aid for developing countries, \$732 million is provided to support access by those countries to vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics to fight COVID-19.

In addition, \$250 million is provided to respond to the global food and nutrition crisis—

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you, I saw those figures as well.

With respect to the Roxham Road situation, is anything being done to ensure that migrants are no longer victimized by smugglers, that they are properly received, that they are no longer handcuffed when they arrive, and that they are less likely to be at a high risk of homelessness?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: My last point may answer your question.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm afraid, Ms. Boudreau, that we're out of time. Perhaps you can provide that to us in writing.

Mr. Johns, you have two and a half minutes, please.

• (1215)

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Under vote 1b, there is over \$5 million in funding proposed for the office of the chief information officer to support the governance and oversight of digital initiatives.

Last week, we heard from the chief information officer during our study of the ArriveCAN app. She spoke about Canada's digital ambition, which is intended to provide “modernized and accessible tools to support service delivery” in the digital age. This document contains an appendix of related policies and directives, but notably absent is the policy on title to intellectual property arising under Crown procurement contracts. Under that policy, IP developed through work on a Crown contract by default must be owned by the contractor, unless an exemption applies or Treasury Board approval is granted. The rationale provided for this policy is to enable the commercialization of IP by the private sector.

In a brief that the committee received from Professor Amanda Clarke, it reads, “This policy represents a clear recipe for ongoing lock-in to the vendors producing custom software for the government, reducing the departments' ability to share and reuse resulting software.” She recommended making Crown IP ownership the default.

If the government is going to be embarking on a mission to develop new digital tools, ownership of the IP needs to be an important consideration. An analogy of the current policy would be the government paying someone to build a house and then giving the builder the deed so that they can rent the house back to the government, and rent the basement too.

Will any of the funding proposed by the office of the chief information officer or in budget 2022 for the “comprehensive strategic policy review” be looking at this policy and the potential benefits of increasing Crown ownership of IP?

Ms. Samantha Tattersall: I'll start, and then I'll pass it to Paul.

For clarity, that policy is a policy of ISED. It is not a Treasury Board policy. That's important context.

Paul, I'll turn to you to speak about the efforts of OCIO.

Mr. Paul Wagner: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

One of the tenets and one of the digital standards that we have is developing the open.... There are opportunities when we can use open source, and we can work across departments and across industries, in fact, to develop software where the IP is out in the open and can be shared freely. That's one of our digital standards.

There are cases, though, where commercial software is what is required to deliver robust services to Canadians and Canadian businesses. It's finding that balance based on the type of solution that needs to be built. That's how we make those decisions.

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

We'll go to Mrs. Block for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to ask a question that I think any one of you could answer.

Does the Treasury Board provide guidelines for government contracts on, for example, sole-sourcing?

Ms. Samantha Tattersall: I'll take that question.

In terms of sole-sourcing, it's very clearly defined in the government contracts regulations, section 6, the circumstances under which you can sole-source. They would be low value, an emergency, national security and then if there's only one provider.

There is broader guidance that we provide on our directive to the community.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

During the pandemic, the government had a number of sole-sourced contracts. I understand, for the very reasons you just outlined, that those criteria were met for that sole-sourcing, but it drew a lot of public scrutiny.

For example, we've recently been looking at the ArriveCAN app and we learned that several sole-sourced contracts were provided to a small, two-person IT firm, which then subcontracted out the work. We have also learned that there is no way that parliamentarians have access to any of that information about those subcontractors. What this really means is that the government cannot be held accountable for how taxpayers' dollars are being spent.

The other thing we've learned is that by using a staffing firm, a large part, potentially one-third, of the cost of that contract is being paid to the firms. They've contracted other companies that do the work, and they're taking between 15% and 30% right off the top.

My question for the Treasury Board is this: What has the Treasury Board done in reviewing what's happened during the pandemic to address this issue? Why are you insisting on a process that covers up how taxpayers' money is being spent?

• (1220)

Ms. Samantha Tattersall: Just generally, going back maybe to your specific example, departments, deputy heads, are ultimately accountable for how they undertake their resources and how they decide to procure. If it's of a certain level, it will come into Treasury Board for oversight in the specific case.

The department had the authority, and they worked with PSPC and leveraged an existing procurement vehicle that PSPC had in order to act quickly at the time of the pandemic.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Who's responsible for that specific vehicle that they managed to leverage?

Ms. Samantha Tattersall: PSPC would have had a supply arrangement. As I understand, PSPC are here later this week, so you may want to put the question to them at that time. My understanding is that that was a supply arrangement they had in place, and that CBSA leveraged that supply arrangement.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: There's just over a minute left.

Mrs. Kelly Block: I want to go now to departmental results. We know they are an important part of informing parliamentarians as to whether or not they should approve spending plan requests without any sort of amendment. We've not seen departmental results. They haven't been published yet, so we don't know what the results are for this past year.

It is my understanding that Treasury Board has these reports and they have not been published. Why haven't these departmental results been published yet?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Thank you for the question.

Indeed, we have received some of the reports you are referring to. Once we receive those reports, we need to do a thorough quality assurance on them. What we have noticed this year is that there are some discrepancies sometimes between the French version and the English version.

Another element that is very important to us is the format being used in order to produce those reports. I say it is important because it's coming from a recommendation from the 15th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, whereby we were told that departments should be using the same templates to make sure it is easier for parliamentarians to be able to do their reviews.

We are still doing quality assurance on those reports, and we hope to be able to table them as soon as possible.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks, Mrs. Block.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, you're up again, please.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you.

The PBO report identified that one of the largest items in the supplementary estimates is contingent liability. The report states that from 2016 up until now we've seen an increase in contingent liabilities of 224%. I just wanted to ask if you can explain what contingent liabilities are about. I also wanted to ask how that might relate to our government's commitment to walk the path of truth and reconciliation with indigenous communities in Canada.

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Thank you very much for the question.

I may tag with my colleagues here.

"Contingent liability" is an accounting term. As stated in the PBO report, if there is certainty that the Government of Canada will have to pay, and if the number that is used is greater than 70% and

we are able to estimate the amount, then we should recognize a liability. That liability is recognized in the public accounts.

Once the liability is recognized, now it's a question of when and how that amount will be paid. When we have certainty on this, the department will come to Treasury Board, which will do their due diligence in terms of the money, in terms of making sure the implementation plans are accurate. Afterwards, that amount will be included in the estimates—either the main estimates or the supplementary estimates.

Thank you.

• (1225)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: The second part of my question is this: How does that relate to, again, our government's commitment to working with indigenous communities and walking the path of truth and reconciliation?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: It is 100% a direct link. Every time we have an indigenous claim, the objective is to make sure that we are giving them the money we owe them. It could be for a specific claim. It could be an out-of-court settlement. It could be a land claim.

[*Translation*]

The goal is to make up for the mistakes of the past and ensure that these Indigenous communities receive the funding to which they are entitled.

[*English*]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: In a lot of situations, these were long-standing land or legal claims brought against the Canadian government, and this government is working hard to resolve them with the indigenous communities. Is that a fair interpretation of where these funds are being directed?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: It is a fair interpretation. As you said, they come from the past. They are complex, and they're not always easy to estimate, hence my comment earlier about the lapsing money. We see in the public accounts 2021-22 that a lot of money has lapsed because a settlement has not been reached yet, but the money is protected there, and, when there is an agreement, we'll be able to pay for it.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: We see an increase in contingent liabilities, an increase of 224% since 2016, since this government took office in 2015. We're seeing many more of those claims being resolved by this government. Is that fair?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Yes, it is a correct statement.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Going back to my question to the minister regarding the greening government fund, can you speak to how much funding has been released through this fund, for example, to promote experimentation, initiatives or programs in greening government?

I noticed that there was a line item for \$50,000 that was included, a transfer by the Privy Council and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service to TB for this fund. Could you speak to that as well?

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

I'll start with your question with respect to PCO's contribution towards the greening government fund. This is a contribution that departments that generate over 1,000 tonnes of GHGs are required to provide to the fund. The contribution from PCO is their normal contribution towards any projects related to greening government.

With respect to how much has been spent, I'll have to come back to you with a written answer.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. Chair, am I in the red again?

The Chair: No, you've paid back 11 seconds. Thank you very much.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We're going to go over to Mrs. Kusie.

Keep in mind that it looks like we will be interrupted by the bells in about two or three minutes, but we'll continue on with your time.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Chair.

I've heard that before, that bells ring when I talk. I'm just kidding.

I'm going to go back to a question I asked the minister.

Does the Treasury Board know how much it cost to maintain and operate every government building in the national capital region, please?

Ms. Samantha Tattersall: PSPC is responsible for the management of office space, so I know that they're actively working with each of the departments to understand what their hybrid plans will be so they can have a portfolio approach to what they will keep and what they may dispose of.

That would be a question that PSPC would need to answer, as they're the general manager for office space.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

I always struggle with that. As the former consul for Canada to Dallas, Texas, I had the fortune or misfortune of Minister Baird's coming to visit me at the time, and I lost my residence shortly thereafter. Anyway, such can the case be.

Does Treasury Board track vacancy levels for office space in the national capital region? I think you kind of addressed that in your last question there. I was going to ask further questions about the cost to maintain and operate the space.

I'm going to go to some of the expenses as reported in both the public accounts and the supplementary estimates to see if anyone can offer any insight as to the specific expenditures.

There's \$6,929 at Global Affairs Canada that resulted from the "[l]oss, theft or misappropriation of cash receipt and petty cash fund". Again, having come from that department for close to 15 years, I can well imagine any comments on that.

The second one I want to mention is \$8,500 to Rebel News for not allowing them to participate in the leaders debate. As a Conservative, I have to admit that I'm not the biggest fan of Rebel News, but we always talk about a fair and democratic system, so it's very interesting to me that they sort of received hush money from the government, so to speak.

There's \$149,712 on behalf of the Department of National Defence to Enterprise for damage to rental vehicles. Do you have any insight as to this expenditure, please?

• (1230)

Ms. Monia Lahaie (Assistant Comptroller General, Financial Management Sector, Treasury Board Secretariat): In the public accounts, volume III, you can see all the amounts that were paid out. Every year, there are situations where vehicles and property get damaged. We are committed to full transparency on this, with good internal controls, so you can all be aware of exactly what's happening.

For more details on this specific request, you would have to go to DND.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Ms. Lahaie.

I hope my counterpart, Michael Barrett, is listening to this: \$191,414 in funding for legal services out of the Privy Council Office. Is there any commentary on that at all? Okay.

There is \$1,439,398 for the recovery of payment for parking tickets out of CSIS—out of the intelligence service. My goodness, intelligence is expensive parking work.

Is there any commentary on that?

Ms. Monia Lahaie: Again, the internal control framework in the department ensures the proper controls are in place. For specifics on the "why" for this parking ticket reimbursement, you would have to go to the department.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

Finally, as my time is coming to a close, there's \$21,675 from the Canada Revenue Agency, an amount not to be recovered, due to employees fraudulently claiming travel, relocation or overtime. That's worrisome, as well. Who knows, perhaps with the whistleblower legislation we'll see more of this, or perhaps we'll see less of this.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the time.

The Chair: Thanks, Mrs. Kusie.

Go ahead, Ms. Thompson.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

I'm going to reference the supplementary estimates (B), 2022-23. That estimate includes five measures from budget 2022.

What percentage of budget 2022 measures have been presented in supplementary estimates, so far?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Thank you.

I'm going to give you a number that differs from the number you saw in the PBO report, because my number is based on voted authorities, while the PBO report is based on all of them, including legislated amounts.

As of today, if we include the main estimates and the supplementary estimates (A) and (B), about 71% of budget 2022 items or measures have been included in the document, for you to approve the authorities.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you. I appreciate the clarification.

Do you expect other budget 2022 measures to be presented in subsequent supplementary estimates this year?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Absolutely. The last one we're going to present is supplementary estimates (C). It's going to be tabled in March of next year. We are probably going to see some items coming from budget 2022.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

I'm going to switch topics.

The last time you presented to committee, you spoke about indigenous entrepreneurship. Are you able to give us an update on what's happening on the file and in the work?

Ms. Samantha Tattersall: The indigenous 5%, as the minister indicated, is being implemented over a three-year time frame. We're in the first year of implementation, so we'll have the results after the end of this fiscal year.

We have been working with PSPC and ISC to do a number of things to support our procurement officers in undertaking those procurements, including new mandatory training and outreach. PSPC is updating its supply arrangements and standing offers, so we can have more existing vehicles going out and procuring with indigenous businesses. Our colleagues at ISC are taking steps to work with indigenous communities in building their capacity, so they can also participate in our procurements.

• (1235)

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

If I can move to a slightly different topic, could you explain why public accounts take longer to produce than provincial accounts?

Ms. Monia Lahaie: One of the main reasons is the size of the public accounts. We have over 2,500 pages, compared to the smaller reports from provinces. There is also bigger work for audit purposes. It's the biggest audit in the country. It also takes a bit longer for us to complete. We have a requirement to publish in multiple formats, and we have to ensure accessibility, which is not necessarily required across all provinces, for example. That's my understanding. These are the main reasons it takes longer to prepare.

There is also when they can table. Some provinces can table earlier, because they don't have to do it when the government is sitting. That's another difference.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

Are you able to give an update on where we are with the Phoenix pay system?

Ms. Carole Bidal (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Employee Relations and Total Compensation, Treasury Board Secretariat): With respect to the Phoenix pay system, we are continuing to work toward ensuring that every public servant is paid accurately and on time. The government has implemented a series of measures and made consistent progress to address existing pay issues and minimize—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Bidal. I have to interrupt for a couple of seconds.

The bells are ringing now. I want to make sure that we are in agreement to continue along until 10 to one.

Do we have everyone's agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Thanks, Ms. Bidal.

Ms. Carole Bidal: Absolutely.

The government is working to fix existing pay issues and minimize the emergence of new ones.

In parallel, the government is also working with stakeholders, such as bargaining agents, employees and HR and pay practitioners, to develop a flexible, modern and integrated HR pay solution to meet the government's needs now and into the future.

Progress is being made, and we continue to work to address it.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: How am I doing for time?

The Chair: You have about 20 seconds.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: I'll pass on it, because the next question will take much longer.

Thank you.

The Chair: We have Mrs. Vignola for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

Ms. Boudreau, I really want to compliment you on your ability to respond in both official languages with such great ease. I can tell you, that is quite rare. When someone asks a question in English, you have no trouble answering in English, and when I speak to you in French, you respond in French, whereas that's usually more difficult. I'm very grateful for that

If you can't answer my question, I urge you to turn over the floor to someone else. For some time now, I've been receiving emails about the Governor General's expenses. Quebecers and Canadians across the country are asking that these expenses be reduced and capped. I know that some expenses are being charged to the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General, while others are being covered by various departments.

For the benefit of Quebecers and Canadians, is there any way to reduce and cap the Governor General's budgets, either through a committee or consideration in future budgets?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Thank you for your question.

Part of the Governor General's budget is mandated by statute. So, as public servants, we have very little control over these statutory expenditures. Another part of her budget is appropriated, as you can see in the estimates tabled at the beginning of the fiscal year in March. As I mentioned earlier, that portion has not been increased in this budget.

Unfortunately, I can't answer your question at this time, but I will be happy to get back to you with more details.

● (1240)

[English]

The Chair: You have 12 seconds.

Mr. Johns, it's over to you, please.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

We know the pandemic has created financial difficulties for many individuals and families through no fault of their own. For some, their credit rating has taken a hit. We also know that some groups, such as young people, women and racialized Canadians, have disproportionately felt the economic impacts of the pandemic.

The Treasury Board has a policy that requires credit checks as part of background checks for employment. Has the Treasury Board conducted a recent evaluation of this policy to see if it may be exacerbating inequalities that have arisen during the pandemic? Might it be creating barriers to employment for equity-deserving groups and hindering recruitment to the public service?

Ms. Kelly Acton: What I could tell you, Mr. Chair, is that the standards that are in place around security screening in government live within the policy suite under the policy on government security. We are actively looking at that standard, which dates back to 2014. It is under review and it will be renewed in the months ahead.

Mr. Gord Johns: Great. We just want to make sure our concerns are related to you while you're doing that review.

Last week, the Auditor General released a report with concerning findings about the government's ability to prevent, detect and respond to cyber-attacks. The report found that departments are confused about cybersecurity roles and that four years after the Treasury Board directed departments to consider moving to the cloud, it had not provided the long-term funding for cloud adaptation.

Can you please advise if any of the funding in the supplementary estimates (B) will support improvements to cybersecurity and assist departments with moving to the cloud in a way that ensures the security of Canadians' personal information?

Mr. Paul Wagner: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

We accept the findings in their entirety, and I think much of the work is actually already under way. We've clarified some of the roles that departments have. You will remember that I have spoken to this committee before about cyber as a team sport. There are roles that departments have, that central agencies have.

The money that you're talking about in terms of the supplementary estimates speaks to supporting the oversight of programs and projects. What's happening from the response to the OAG report is to first clarify the roles and responsibilities of departments and, second, to establish a funding model that takes into consideration the very different funding model when we move to the cloud. When we use software as a service, when we use cloud services, it's very different from the way we have funded programs and projects in the past. That work is under way.

Thank you.

The Chair: That's your time, Mr. Johns.

We go over to you, Mr. Bains, for five minutes.

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is around the digital credentials. I know it was alluded to a little bit earlier as well, but can you inform the committee on your plans for digital credentials?

Mr. Paul Wagner: As mentioned before, this is a national initiative that we're working on with provinces and some private sectors.

One of the key tenets around digital credentials is that they're voluntary. This will be for Canadians who want to use digital credentials—and they'll be able to. I've given examples in the past where B.C. and Alberta have already instituted digital credentials, which are essentially digital versions of physical credentials that we have today. The vision is that you'd be able to use these digital credentials to authorize and access Government of Canada services. We're here today with one service, where you can use your B.C. services card, which is online, to access Government of Canada services.

We want to be able to establish that as a program, establish the standards across the country, so that we don't have to do it program by program and province by province. There is a standards-based approach that can be validated, and once you've established and actually validated that standard, you can then access the ecosystem to start to access government services.

We're working right now at consulting. Many of the provinces have already consulted with constituents, but we're also consulting with indigenous communities, persons with disabilities, persons less fortunate, to ensure that as we roll these services out, the needs of all Canadians are met.

• (1245)

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you.

This was discussed a little bit, but it was more in my last question when I was asking about the indigenous businesses. Our committee is currently studying diversity in procurement. Earlier this year, I met with Supplier Diversity Alliance Canada, which promotes inclusive procurement.

How are diversity and inclusion being advanced in the public service? I might have a follow-up, if I have time.

Ms. Carole Bidal: For your question, is it in procurement or in the public service?

Mr. Parm Bains: It's inclusion being advanced in the public service.

Ms. Carole Bidal: Okay. Thank you.

As you know, part of the minister's mandate letter is to advance diversity and inclusion in the public service, and a number of different initiatives will be undertaken. The minister did speak to a few of them in her responses. In addition to that, several initiatives, like the mosaic leadership development program, have been implemented. This supports equity-seeking employees at the EX minus one level, to equip them with a skill set to enter the EX group.

The speakers' forum has also been implemented. The federal speakers' forum on diversity and inclusion is a dedicated speakers' forum on diversity and inclusion that has been co-developed with members of equity-seeking groups. It's giving voices to public servants who are interested in sharing their expertise, their lived experiences and their perspectives. The forum was launched in April 2021, and has since posted profiles of 53 speakers online.

Mr. Parm Bains: I'm going to jump in again.

My follow-up on that is this. We've had sports organizations in recent news. You gave answers on the public service, but how much of it touches upon diversity in our sports organizations? Is there any impact we can make there?

Ms. Carole Bidal: With respect to sports organizations, the Minister of Heritage is responsible for sports. I think they would probably be in a better position to answer that question.

Mr. Parm Bains: Okay. Thank you.

Do I have any more time, Chair?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Parm Bains: I'll cede my time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Wonderful.

Colleagues, thank you for agreeing to work through the bells.

Seeing as we have about three minutes, I'm going to exercise the chair's prerogative and ask a couple of questions myself.

Ms. Boudreau, I want to get to the DRRs. You sent out a letter in May, advising a November 1 submission. In May, the template was provided in advance for departments to use. The tabling date was November 21. I'm curious why a letter you sent out in May apparently has not been followed. A template was sent out, and yet you seem to indicate that departments have not used the proper template.

Could you provide us with that, but also provide us—I realize we won't have the time today—in writing which departments still have not submitted their DRRs?

Our primary role, as parliamentarians, is to vote on spending. Frankly, I'm aghast at the fact that we're being asked to vote on issues when we still have not received last year's results. This is an ongoing problem.

Why is this happening?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the questions.

You are correct. In the email you referred to, those were tentative dates. I obviously cannot confirm a tabling date, so—

The Chair: That's right, but you provided the template in advance and you're saying some departments did not use the template. You're using that as an excuse. You've also stated that some departments have not submitted their information to you yet.

Would you please provide us in writing which departments, at this date, three weeks past the cut-off date, haven't provided it to TBS?

You said you've provided a template for the departments. Would you provide in writing to the committee which departments are not using that template or why we're still having template issues seven months after your note from May?

I think that is our time, colleagues.

Again, witnesses, thank you very much for appearing with us.

Colleagues, again, thank you for agreeing to work through the bells.

We are adjourned.

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