



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

OGGO • NUMBER 010 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, May 3, 2016

—
Chair

Mr. Tom Lukiwski

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Tuesday, May 3, 2016

•(1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC)): Welcome to the 10th meeting of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

We have witnesses today from the Privy Council Office, the Transportation Safety Board of Canada, and the Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat. We will have opening comments from each of the three agencies and then go into our usual rounds of questions.

I would point out to members of the committee that I have reserved about 10 minutes at the end of the committee to go in camera and start to discuss committee business, primarily the report of the subcommittee on agenda for our future meetings. If we can proceed as quickly as possible, my understanding, ladies and gentlemen, is that each of the three agencies before us has a few brief comments to make.

It is my understanding, Mr. Lucas, that you will start. So please, sir, would you give us your comments and also introduce the officials who may be with you today.

Mr. Stephen Lucas (Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, Plans and Consultations and Intergovernmental Affairs, Privy Council Office): Thank you, and good afternoon, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting us to speak with you today.

[Translation]

With me is Karen Cahill, executive director of finance and corporate planning, and deputy chief financial officer, corporate services, of the Privy Council Office.

I am pleased to be here today and to have the opportunity to answer your questions regarding the 2016-17 main estimates and PCO's 2016-17 report on plans and priorities.

To begin, I would like to provide some information about each of these documents.

[English]

PCO is seeking \$120.7 million in the 2016-17 main estimates. This is an overall increase of \$1.9 million from the amount PCO sought in its 2015-16 main estimates, which totalled \$118.8 million. Here are a few examples of why there is an increase in PCO's main estimates for this year.

There are activities related to the continuation and advancement of the border implementation team in support of Canada/U.S. border-

related activities; activities related to the support for the Prime Minister's official web presence, including social media accounts; and activities related to the continued implementation of Canada's migrant smuggling prevention program.

These increases are partially offset by a decrease in funding for the implementation of various government-wide initiatives, including the continued consolidation of pay services, the implementation of the Canada School of Public Services' new business model, and the 2016 population census.

[Translation]

I will now provide a summary of PCO's report on plans and priorities for fiscal year 2016-17.

It should be noted first of all that PCO's strategic result is to support and implement the government's program and decisions, and to provide support for the operation of institutions. In this regard, PCO will continue to play a lead coordination and advisory role to ensure that the government meets the objectives set out in its mandate.

[English]

PCO plans to meet the strategic outcome by focusing on four key organizational priorities during the year.

PCO's first priority is to support the Prime Minister and portfolio ministers in exercising their responsibilities and implementing government policies by providing professional, non-partisan advice and support on the government's policy, legislative, and government administration priorities, including on the new Governor in Council and Senate appointment process.

PCO's second priority is to support the deliberations of cabinet and its committees on key policy initiatives, to coordinate policy planning, and to provide non-partisan advice to help the government implement its agenda as outlined in the ministerial mandate letters and the Speech from the Throne.

[Translation]

PCO's third priority is to facilitate the management of open, transparent and responsible government, which supports the Clerk of the Privy Council as the head of Canada's public service. PCO will contribute to sound public administration by supporting the delivery of enhanced services that better meet the needs of Canadians, and also improving public service productivity. The department will continue to support the commitment of the clerk and the deputy clerk to an efficient, modern, and highly effective public service.

Finally, PCO's fourth priority is to strengthen the organization's internal management practices. This priority fosters rigorous internal management practices, which enables PCO to fulfill its mandate with excellence.

[English]

PCO will achieve this through continued compliance with Government of Canada information priorities and its modernization efforts, including digital record keeping, continuing to adopt the email transformation initiative, and improving its IT security posture.

• (1535)

[Translation]

To ensure that the department has the necessary resources to effectively support the government's program, to strengthen security, and to make the investments needed to renew the life cycle of systems and buildings, new funding is provided to the Privy Council Office in budget 2016, specifically, up to \$49 million in 2016-17, and up to \$50 million in 2017-18.

The funding for the current year is obtained through the supplementary estimates process. That means that we will certainly come before the committee again to discuss in greater detail the changes that PCO will implement.

[English]

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to explain the initiatives related to PCO's 2016-17 main estimates and report on plans and priorities.

We'd be pleased to answer your questions.

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

Now we'll go to Ms. Fox, representing the Transportation Safety Board of Canada.

Ms. Fox, could you please introduce the officials who are with you and then give us your opening comments, please?

Mrs. Kathy Fox (Chair, Transportation Safety Board of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting the Transportation Safety Board of Canada to appear today.

I bring with me two colleagues who offer a wealth of experience. Mr. Jean Laporte is our chief operating officer. He's been with us since our inception in 1990 and possesses a deep understanding of our mandate and the processes we follow. Madam Chantal Lemyre is our director general of corporate services and chief financial officer. She is well placed to provide greater context and information about the financial and corporate details of our work.

I'd like to take just a moment to tell you about who we are and what we do. The Transportation Safety Board of Canada, or TSB, was created in 1990 by the Canadian Transportation Accident Investigation and Safety Board Act. Our mandate and our sole purpose is to advance transportation safety in the air, rail, marine, and pipeline modes of transportation that are under federal jurisdiction. We do this by conducting independent investigations, identifying safety deficiencies, analyzing causes and contributing factors, making recommendations, and publishing our reports. Put simply, when something goes wrong, we investigate to find out not

just what happened, but why. Then we make public what we've learned so that those best placed to take action—industry and regulators—can do so.

It's also important to clarify what the TSB does not do. We are neither regulator nor tribunal. We do not assign fault, nor do we determine civil or criminal liability. We do not conduct investigations or audits. Those functions are left to the regulators and other organizations. Instead, we're independent, operating at arm's length from other government departments and agencies. This lets us be impartial, free from any real or perceived external influence. As such, we do not report to Transport Canada or to the Minister of Transport, but rather directly to Parliament through the leader of the government in the House of Commons.

[Translation]

That is why the TSB falls under this committee's mandate as regards its main estimates and its report on plans and priorities.

[English]

This past March, we completed our 25th year of advancing safety across Canada. That's thousands of investigations and countless lessons learned. A lot has changed over that time.

[Translation]

The world has become increasingly connected, new technologies and new tools have emerged, and the demand for information is more pressing than ever.

[English]

Last year, for example, we received notification of approximately 3,700 transportation occurrences from coast to coast to coast. We opened 41 new investigations, and we received over 1,400 requests for information from the media—reporters, editors, TV producers—and as you can imagine, they all want to know everything right away.

To deal with all of this change and the evolving expectations of Canadians, we've developed a new five-year strategic plan. This plan places a priority on modernizing much of the way we work—our processes, our tools, our training and our products, even the way we communicate—while continuing to deliver on our day-to-day mandate. But there are challenges and risks ahead. Chief among them is the need to constantly balance our workload against available resources. That's because successive budgetary freezes and cuts, as well as the implementation of new government-wide systems and initiatives, have had a cumulative impact that has reduced our flexibility.

Put another way, we're a small organization whose management team works hard to ensure good planning and oversight on an ongoing basis so that we can deliver on our mandate as efficiently as possible with limited resources. That really is the ultimate bottom line, because there's not a single person in this country whose life is not impacted by transportation safety. No matter where things go wrong—on our waterways, along our pipelines, on our railways, or in the skies—Canadians need to have confidence that we will find the answers.

• (1540)

[Translation]

They have to know that, even if things are changing and we have to adapt to new realities, we can continue our work without compromise in order to make Canada's transportation network as safe as possible.

[English]

Again, in closing, thank you for inviting us to be here today.

We're happy to answer any questions you may have. *Merci*.

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

Now, representing the Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat, we'll have comments from Monsieur McArdle.

Mr. André McArdle (Secretary, Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With me is Mr. Brian Berry, who is the assistant secretary and chief financial officer.

We welcome the opportunity to appear before this standing committee. Because of the rather unique nature of the Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat, with your permission, I would like to give the members of this committee a brief description of who we are and what we do.

[Translation]

The Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat was created pursuant to a first ministers' conference, in May 1973. It was then made a department for the purposes of the Financial Administration Act, by an order in council dated November 29, 1973.

[English]

We report to Parliament through the president of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada.

Although the secretariat is a federal department, in practice it is an intergovernmental agency whose operational budget is co-funded by the provinces. Our full-time employees consist of federal, provincial, and territorial public servants. The secretariat reports to all governments annually.

The secretariat is a single-program agency whose mandate is to serve federal, provincial, and territorial governments in the planning and conduct of senior level intergovernmental meetings. The organization's primary objective is to relieve federal, provincial, and territorial clients of the numerous administrative and technical tasks associated with the planning and conduct of such conferences.

This enables government departments to concentrate on the substantive issues.

These meetings are a key instrument for consultation and negotiation among governments, and are a critical component of the workings of the Canadian federation.

The agency serves conferences in virtually every sector of intergovernmental activity, and its services are available across Canada.

[Translation]

I would also add that the Secretariat is responsible for a unique collection of intergovernmental documents from all the meetings it has helped organize for over 40 years.

[English]

Its value as a unique archive has been recognized by Library and Archives Canada.

It is important to note that the secretariat does not convene conferences. We respond to decisions taken by governments to meet on national or specific issues, as we were asked to do with respect to the recent first ministers' meeting which was held in Vancouver in early March.

Decisions concerning the location of such meetings, their frequency in a given year, their timing, and their duration are all factors beyond our control. These factors, however, have a direct impact on our level of expenditures for every fiscal year.

The secretariat served 114 conferences in 2015-16, of which 40 were teleconferences and two were by video.

The Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat 2016-17 budget of just under \$6 million remains approximately the same as in the previous year.

This funding will allow the secretariat to address the following priorities: enhance and expand strategic partnerships; continue to ensure a client-focused, responsive service delivery model, in step with rapidly evolving technologies, for example; maintain the effective and efficient use of resources; and cultivate a continuous learning environment for our staff.

The agency is very much in line with the transformation agenda of Blueprint 2020. We are proactive in evaluating and implementing efficient and innovative conference solutions that help contain or reduce costs.

The Secretariat continues to transform its back office by consolidating human resources and financial systems to increase efficiencies.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Security is a priority for the Secretariat, both physical security and with regard to information technology. It is an integral part of the organization's strategic frameworks, its daily activities, and the conduct of its employees.

[English]

In closing, the agency, by skilfully executing the logistical planning and delivery of senior-level intergovernmental meetings across Canada, not only relieves governments of an administrative process burden, but more importantly, allows them to greatly benefit from significant cost efficiencies and economies of scale. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Monsieur McArdle.

Now we'll go to our regular line of questioning. We will begin with the Liberal Party of Canada, and Madam Ratansi, please.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Lucas, I understand from your presentation that the PCO is seeking a \$1.9 million appropriation for 2016-17. When we were reviewing the supplementary estimates, PCO had requested \$0.6 million to modernize the Prime Minister's digital presence. Could you give me an idea of what changes are being made to modernize the Prime Minister's digital presence, and how will this benefit Canadians?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: The Privy Council Office is investing in technology and people to support the ability of the Prime Minister through his official Government of Canada website and social media accounts such as Twitter or YouTube. Our purpose is to provide information to Canadians 365 days a year, on a 24-7 basis, using innovative tools such as interactive approaches, and up-to-date and more rich digital content videos, and other means of conveying important information on government programs, services, and major events.

In addition, the support enables us to have, behind the interface, a web content management system that allows the curating of, and access to, these materials for Canadians on an ongoing basis. In addition, because it's an official Government of Canada website, it needs to respect the policies of the Government of Canada, including with respect to official languages and accessibility. It's to that end that these investments are helping provide information on an around-the-clock, year-round basis to Canadians.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: In your presentation, you mentioned that this increase also relates to activities related to the continued implementation of Canada's migrant smuggling prevention strategy. You've asked for \$1.0 million in support of this strategy. What has been done so far to implement Canada's migrant smuggling prevention strategy?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: The strategy on human smuggling and illegal migration was established in 2010 and involves a number of departments, including Global Affairs Canada; the RCMP; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; and CSIS. PCO plays a coordination role. With the investment in 2016-17 of \$0.3 million, that coordination will support the activities of these other agencies to identify overseas points of embarkation, or issues pertaining to illegal migration or human smuggling, and interdict them overseas. Indeed, over the past number of years, there have not been any such landings in Canada. In the coming year, there will be an assessment of the overall program.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Is this strategy fully implemented, and are there any updates on recent positive outcomes?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: I think the performance metric for this is the number of potential embarkations outside Canada of smuggled or illegal migrants into the country by criminals that are blocked before

leaving those overseas destinations. To that end, it has been and continues to be successful.

• (1550)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: What were some of the countries that this smuggling comes from?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: I don't have that specific information. Canadian officials are working with their counterparts in a number of regions around the world, including Southeast Asia, West Africa, and Europe, to address these concerns.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: I looked at the main estimates between 2015-16 and 2016-17 and saw that there is a decrease in spending for the advice and support to the Prime Minister and portfolio ministers. Can you explain this decrease and what is the outcome of it?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: I'll turn to my colleague, Karen Cahill, for that one.

Ms. Karen Cahill (Deputy Chief Financial Officer, Corporate Services, Privy Council Office): You said there was a decrease in the advice and support?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Yes, for advice and support to the Prime Minister and portfolio ministers.

Ms. Karen Cahill: In our main estimates?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Yes, between the two years.

Mr. Stephen Lucas: We may have to get back to the member on that question.

Ms. Karen Cahill: We actually have additional funding that we are requesting. It's actually an increase that we asked for, but we can —

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: I did my math. It is a reduction from \$13.921 million to \$13.876 million.

Ms. Karen Cahill: We can get back to you on this.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay fine, that's not a problem.

The Chair: You have about a minute left.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: I have one very quick question then. According to the 2016-17 report on plans and priorities, PCO has the responsibility to implement new staffing framework. What are some of the main changes that have been made, or challenges you have faced? It's the appointment policy and the appointment delegation and accountability instrument.

Ms. Karen Cahill: Just like any other department, as of April 1, PCO has implemented the new policy on staffing or the new staffing framework. The main change since the older policy is that before, we had five policies. Now we have one policy. The prior directive, or the prior framework, was more on a rule-based system whereas this new framework is more tasked on a value-based system. There are clear expectations on managing the priority entitlement and implement equity requirements, as in the past the expectations were not as clear as they are now. The role of the human resources advisor is more strategic. In the past, the HR advisors were applying rules to staffing actions, and we are assessed on a cycle of five years. Every five years the department will be assessed on how they have implemented the framework and what action resulted from the framework. It allowed us to review our delegation instrument to provide our manager with more staffing flexibility.

Now, in terms of the challenges facing us, I must—

The Chair: Madam Cahill, if you could please wrap up, we are seriously over time. We might be able to get back to this for the continuation of your answer, but I would suggest that we move on to Mr. Blaney, just in essence of trying to keep our timetable. Thank you.

Mr. Blaney.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome the three witnesses representing federal agencies and thank them for appearing before us today.

First, I would note that some aspects of the request seem very worthwhile, especially improving the situation at the border with our American partners and the strategy to limit illegal immigration.

On the other hand, I was surprised by the work that Treasury Board must do and the additional funding requested for the Prime Minister's media presence.

My first question is for Mr. Lucas.

Since you represent the Privy Council Office, could you tell us the size of the budget, within this funding envelope, that is earmarked for the Prime Minister's Office?

• (1555)

Mr. Stephen Lucas: The budget for the Prime Minister's Office is allocated from our funding for the current fiscal year. These expenditures will appear in the public accounts at the end of the year.

Ms. Karen Cahill: That's right.

Each year, the Privy Council Office gives the PMO a notional budget, as Mr. Lucas said. This budget has not changed for several years. It is part of the budgets allocated to the Privy Council Office. As is the case for ministers' offices, the expenses incurred by the PMO will be available to you once we have the public accounts in the fall.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Could you tell us right now what the PMO's budget is?

[*English*]

For this fiscal year, because I understand that this is within the ask today, and I would like to know how much it is.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karen Cahill: The PMO's budget is \$10.6 million. It has not changed for a number of years and we do not anticipate any change in the coming years.

Hon. Steven Blaney: It will change though since you have requested an additional \$0.6 million to hire two people. Is this additional amount part of the \$10.6 million?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: These resources are allocated to PCO for our working group on communications and consultations.

Hon. Steven Blaney: They will be dedicated to the Prime Minister, however.

Mr. Stephen Lucas: They will be dedicated to the Prime Minister of Canada's official website and other social media.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I imagine that keeps you very busy since they say our Prime Minister has among the highest level of media exposure in the world. Yesterday, we saw him doing push-ups. One day he is at a boxing club, the next day he makes some other appearance.

The Privy Council Office must provide important advice to the Prime Minister on various issues. There are people in Alberta who are losing their jobs. In my riding of Sainte-Claire, a company shut its doors last week. We have even seen a hostage-taking where Canadians were the victims of atrocities committed by terrorists.

My question pertains to these additional resources. You are requesting an additional \$0.6 million to increase your web presence. It seems the media are having a field day with all these appearances.

Can you describe the work of these two additional resources assigned to promoting the Prime Minister's activities on the Internet? It must be said that these activities are taxpayer-funded.

Mr. Stephen Lucas: As I said, these resources are assigned to the support, both daily and annual, of the Prime Minister of Canada's official website and other social media tools.

[*English*]

The investment enables not only utilization of these tools with an increasing volume—the volume has more than doubled over the past number of years in terms of the utilization of digital media—but it also allows for the development of a web content management system. Thus it allows Canadians to access material from previous times and access materials, as technology evolves, through interactive means.

•(1600)

Hon. Steven Blaney: On a personal note, that would certainly appreciate more investment and advice to the Prime Minister on the issue I've just touched on. There are Canadians who have been slaughtered by terrorists. There are jobs that are being lost, whether in Alberta or in my own riding, in regard to protectionist measures that have been put in place. We understand you are there to serve the Prime Minister and adjust to the priorities. I have no doubt about the professionalism of the work you are providing.

I would now like to turn to the Transportation Safety Board of Canada.

[Translation]

Ms. Fox, could we please have an update on the investigations you conducted at Lac-Mégantic? What kind of recommendations do you make? Do you anticipate any further action in relation to the Lac-Mégantic disaster?

Mrs. Kathy Fox: Yes.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Fox, if I may, this is a very serious topic and you want to give a very comprehensive answer but we do have a shortage of time, so if you could try to make your answer as succinct as possible, I would certainly appreciate that.

Mrs. Kathy Fox: Yes, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

We completed our investigation into the accident at Lac-Mégantic in August 2014. Further to our investigation, we made five recommendations, one of which the government has acted on. There are four more recommendations, one relating to the tank cars used to transport oil and petroleum, as well as the need for risk analysis when rail companies transport oil.

Two further recommendations pertain to Transport Canada's oversight and the need to prevent runaway trains. The TSB has evaluated Transport Canada's response. In fact, we re-evaluated it one year after the measures had been taken. These measures are ongoing and we will continue to verify the measures taken by the government until the recommendations are fully implemented.

There are other recommendations, including the training of regional rail company employees, about which we had expressed concerns. We will also continue to verify the measures taken by the government in this regard.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Weir, please, for seven minutes.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): We haven't had any questions for the Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat.

It seems that we've moved from having a federal government that was not particularly interested in meeting with the provinces to having a federal government that has a very ambitious agenda of intergovernmental meetings. I'm struck by the fact that the budget of

your organization seems to be about \$6 million every year. I'm wondering how you account for that stability.

Mr. André McArdle: Thank you for the question.

The reason for this is that before 2004 we used to go almost regularly to Treasury Board to obtain supplementary estimates, because we never had enough money to be able to serve all the conferences that were coming our way, so the decision was taken to finance us at a level that would permit us to do 100 face-to-face conferences.

If there is a surplus, that really goes to the consolidated revenue fund. It has actually saved us a lot of bureaucratic processes, because the money is there, and at the end of the year we lapse, and then it goes into the consolidated revenue fund.

Mr. Erin Weir: Not to put words in your mouth, but the idea might be that the organization is erring on the side of asking for more money than it might actually spend, knowing that the remainder can be put back into the fiscal framework.

Mr. André McArdle: Well, it gives us flexibility because, as I mentioned in my opening speech, we have no control over the number of conferences that we do in a given year or their location and frequency.

For instance, we just did a first ministers meeting, which cost the secretariat close to a quarter of a million dollars, and of course the Prime Minister has talked about another first ministers meeting in the fall.

This gives us the required flexibility to be able to finance these meetings.

•(1605)

Mr. Erin Weir: As I mentioned, the current government seems to have a fairly ambitious agenda for intergovernmental relations. Among other things, it has promised an enhancement of the Canada pension plan, which would of course involve the agreement of most provincial governments. Do you feel confident that this \$6 million will be sufficient to cover all of those meetings?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. André McArdle: That's an interesting question. If you've noticed, our statistics for last year show that we did 115 meetings, but of these 115 meetings, 40 were teleconferences, and two of them were virtual. In line with not only the orientation of federal government but also the provinces' orientation toward being more cost-effective with regard to intergovernmental machinery, of course the costs have gone down.

Mr. Erin Weir: If I may, I will shift over to the Transportation Safety Board.

With your estimates, I'm struck by the fact that they actually have gone down a bit in recent years. How would you account for that, given events such as Lac-Mégantic and the overall level of concern about rail safety and other matters in your portfolio?

Mrs. Kathy Fox: Like other government departments and agencies, we have been affected by budget cutbacks and reductions over the years. However, that has not impacted our ability to conduct investigations, the quality of our investigations, or the timeliness of our safety communications.

We also have a mechanism to go to, to provide a submission to the Treasury Board, and through the supplementary estimates to obtain additional funding, when we have a large investigation or a flurry of smaller investigations that go beyond our baseline of activities. In the case of Lac-Mégantic, we did in fact apply for additional funding in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 fiscal years. But, no doubt, we have had to make some internal efficiencies and take steps to deal with the reductions we've had.

Mr. Erin Weir: Could you maybe talk more about those efficiencies? You sound very confident that the budget cuts haven't had any impact on the organization's ability to do proper investigations. I guess I'm wondering what was cut.

Mrs. Kathy Fox: Well, to be clear, we've managed through the reductions. It has reduced our flexibility, as I indicated in our remarks.

Perhaps Monsieur Laporte can give you some more specifics about where the reductions have been effective.

Mr. Jean Laporte (Chief Operating Officer, Transportation Safety Board of Canada): A large part of our reductions have been done on the administrative side. We've reduced eight administrative positions, two management positions, and three investigator positions. We've shifted to electronic communications and distribution instead of printed material. We've reduced our travel by using video conferencing. We've reviewed the management of our standby and overtime costs, with more robust oversight and prioritizing projects and initiatives, essentially.

As Madam Fox indicated, we've taken all the steps possible to avoid reducing the number of investigations that we undertake in a given year for fiscal reasons.

Mr. Erin Weir: I just want to make sure I understood correctly that you have eliminated three investigators. I have a hard time understanding how that would not reduce the capacity to conduct investigations.

Mr. Jean Laporte: If we look historically, we've always had a number of vacant investigator positions just because of ongoing attrition. The positions we eliminated were positions that had been vacant for a few years. So there has been no net impact in terms of the delivery of the mandate.

Mr. Erin Weir: But if the positions had been vacant, then there were no savings from eliminating them. Is that fair to say?

Mr. Jean Laporte: The budgets still include those salary dollars. Those salary dollars were lapsed at year-end, because the positions were vacant. When the time came for the cuts, we basically eliminated those positions and reduced the budgets.

Mr. Erin Weir: Okay. Great.

One specific aspect of your main estimates that really jumped out at me was the reduction in funding for pipeline investigations. It's reduced by more than half between last year and this year. I just wonder if you could shed some light on that decision.

Mr. Jean Laporte: Currently we have no pipeline investigations ongoing. Last year we completed two pipeline investigations.

The way we proceed for pipelines is that because there are very few occurrences that we investigate, we allocate a notional amount that covers the salaries of two investigators who are dedicated to

pipelines so that we have the capacity, the readiness. Then, in the year when we launch an investigation, we reallocate money between programs—i.e., from aviation or from marine to pipelines—to cover the cost of the investigations as the costs are incurred.

So that we don't have money that's sitting there unused, we reallocate and move money around, as required.

•(1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our final seven-minute intervention will come from Mr. Whalen.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Ms. Cahill, I just wanted to get back to the question you were responding to from Ms. Ratansi earlier. I'm wondering if there was anything else you wanted to add on the staffing policy framework, the benefits, and the implementation plan for the staffing policy framework.

Ms. Karen Cahill: Mr. Chair, the new framework was established on April 1 of this year and at this point we're just a month into it. So we have not been able to assess the real challenges or the benefits, but I'm sure that as we proceed with more staffing action, we'll definitely be able to have a better assessment.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Further to that policy, at what stage in the policy development process was the gender-based analysis plus examination undertaken? Is there some way you can provide the committee with a copy of the analysis of the gender-based analysis plus that was meant to have been done in connection with that policy?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: Mr. Chair, the policy was developed by the Public Service Commission. The Privy Council Office, amongst other departments, provided input into that via the Human Resources Council across government, so they would be best placed to respond to that specific question. But, indeed, as was noted, employment equity and other considerations are part of the staffing policy.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Perhaps you could provide the committee with that. I'm trying to get a sense from all the different policies that are made throughout government—and certainly over the past number of years, the last five years perhaps—to see exactly where in the policy stage the gender-based analysis was undertaken and how it affected the overall decision-making and the policies. It would be helpful to see that.

Mr. Stephen Lucas: Certainly. If it's the will of the committee, we can follow up with the Public Service Commission and provide the information to you.

Mr. Nick Whalen: In respect of the Transportation Safety Board, I will just follow up a little further on Mr. Weir's questions. I'm from Newfoundland and Labrador. Safety in the fishery is very much a concern. It's considered one of the dangerous professions in the country. I noticed there were recommendations made by your organization just a couple of years ago that already got implemented by the Ministry of Transportation.

How many investigations are you doing per year on the marine occurrence side, and what percentage of overall marine accidents in the fishery are investigated by your department, say, as a percentage?

Mrs. Kathy Fox: Mr. Chair, in the marine mode last year, in 2015-16, we conducted 15 investigations. They average between about 12 and 15 per year. A lot of those are fishing vessel accidents, as opposed to involving other types of marine vessels. Fishing vessel safety is on the TSB watch list of those issues posing the greatest risk to Canada's transportation system. There are a number of recommendations that have been made over the years with respect to fishing vessel safety, some of which are still not implemented. As I mentioned in answer to another question, each year we reassess Transport Canada's response to our outstanding recommendations to see what progress has been made. We were concerned about the lack of progress on some of those recommendations. We made some of them unsatisfactory. We're just finalizing our reassessment for this year, and we will be making those reassessments public in the next few weeks.

Mr. Nick Whalen: The second part of my question was, what percentage of overall marine incidents would be investigated if you're doing 12 to 15 per year? Is that really a representative sample? What's the sample size that these would be pulling from?

Mrs. Kathy Fox: I can't give you the exact number, but we can certainly make available to the committee the information on the breakdown by mode, Mr. Chair. I just don't have that number off the top of my head, and I don't want to guess.

• (1615)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay, fair enough. I'm just concerned that maybe, as an overall measure, we want to make sure that enough assessments are being done, particularly in respect of the modifications to fishing vessels that seem to be happening as fishers attempt to allow their boats to be used in particular classes and vessel sizes for fisheries, which really appears outwardly to render those vessels unsafe, and yet regulations on the fisheries side encourage those modifications. On the transport side, the regulations appear to be somewhat lax.

Do you have any insight on how fishing vessel modification is affecting overall fishing vessel safety as determined by your department?

Mrs. Kathy Fox: When we investigate a fishing vessel occurrence, we always look at all of the factors that may have been at play, and fishing vessel stability. The work that's been done to modify fishing vessels, for whatever reason, is always part of our investigation, and has been identified as a contributing factor in many investigations. It's one of the areas that we are asking the Department of Transport to do more in order to reduce the risk.

I would just add one comment, Mr. Chair. In all of the marine occurrences that are reported to us, whether or not we conduct a full investigation with a public report, we always assess and document and then determine which ones we can learn more from and advance transportation safety more by doing a full investigation with a public report. All of them are assessed, but then we do investigations where we can make the most difference, learn the most.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Lucas, I'll go back to you back to you.

The committee is very interested in trying to have an improved process to harmonize the budgeting and estimates process. When we look at the reports on plans and priorities, I think we have something like an extra \$5 million over what the main estimates asked for. If you look at the budget speech, it looks like you guys were given another \$49 million. What do we expect to see when we get to supplementary estimates (A) in terms of increases and what projects might be increased? Would you feel that a process that harmonizes the estimates and the budget process would help your organization in informing our committee and also your own planning and spending purposes?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: Certainly. Perhaps starting with your first question, I think you met with Minister Brison, who spoke to his mandate commitment and approach to having greater clarity of reporting to Parliament and looking for opportunities to work with Parliament to harmonize the budget and estimates process. That is an area of commitment of the government that he will be proceeding with and I'm sure he would be pleased, along with his officials, to speak further to the committee about.

In regard to your question pertaining to the additional funds proposed by the budget for PCO, it addresses a number of areas that required investment. One is to upgrade IT systems, both hardware and software, and ensure that they meet security compliance standards at different security levels, given the nature of our work.

There's also support for the buildings to ensure there is a safe and effective workplace and security, and then support for some of the new functions of the government, including in regard to the Prime Minister's role as Minister of Youth, strengthened intergovernmental focus, and the focus on results and delivery for *[Inaudible—Editor]* Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lucas.

We'll go to a five-minute round now and we'll start with Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): First of all, I'd like to thank you, Mr. Laporte, for your comments on pipelines being the safest, most reliable, and environmentally friendly way to transport oil.

Mr. McArdle, I have a couple of things to ask regarding the conference secretariat. It works out, I understand, that the provinces pay about \$2 million into the \$6 million, ballpark. Based on 65 meetings for the feds that we pay for, it works out to about a ballpark of \$50,000 of support per meeting. Is that about correct?

Mr. André McArdle: I'll pass on the question to my colleague Brian.

Mr. Brian Berry (Assistant Secretary, Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat): I'd say that that's probably close.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Perfect. I'll go to my second question then. You want to benefit greatly from significant cost efficiencies and economies of scale within your department. For the 50 grand, have you gone out to the private sector to see how much value you can receive for that?

The reason I ask is that I spent my life in convention centres, hotels, etc., and I'll be blunt: \$50,000 to provide services for a meeting does not seem like great value for our taxpayers. I apologize as I don't want to sound critical, but \$50,000 for each and every meeting for support services....

• (1620)

Mr. Brian Berry: Mr. Chair, if I may, if you look at the cost breakdowns, that's an average overall, but it depends again on the number of meetings that we hold.

In the previous year we held 115 meetings. That reduced the cost to closer to \$40,000. I know it's maybe not....

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Have you considered going out to bids, so to speak, or looking at how efficient the department is overall as opposed to having professional meeting planners provide the service?

Mr. Brian Berry: I think—and again I can only answer part of that question—from the finance side of things, it's a little bit more.

With respect to audiovisual services and items like that, we do actually use the private sector for that, but when it comes down to the discussions in the room, the impartiality and the neutrality of our staff versus using somebody from the private sector, I think these are the issues that need to be offset.

Also, there are the translation and interpretation services that we use. We are using shared services through the Translation Bureau for those, and we don't set those rates. That amounts to a significant part of the costs of what we do.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Great. Thanks.

Mr. Lucas, I am not sure if you has a look at the Auditor General's report that came out today. In regard to GIC appointments, it states:

We concluded that issues remained in the timely appointment of qualified individuals being made to selected administrative tribunals, which affected continuity of service to Canadians. Many key positions have sat vacant for long periods.

I realize it came out at 7:30, plunk. Is it accurate? If so, what is getting done to look after it and address these issues?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: Mr. Chair, let me address that question.

In February, the government announced a new approach to filling Governor in Council appointments to reflect the diversity of Canada and ensure that the positions were open to Canadians and staffed on the basis of merit.

To that end—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Which they were before.... They were open to Canadians, and it was based on merit.

Mr. Stephen Lucas: It is a more open and transparent process that will be available through a website, where all the appointments are advertised and there are opportunities for people to participate in that regard.

As the new Governor in Council appointment process takes hold, the government is looking at interim appointments of a one-year duration to address some of the vacancies you noted, and it is attending to that as it moves forward with the new process.

The Chair: Mr. McCauley, we are out of time, unfortunately.

Before we go to Mr. Grewal, I have one quick extemporaneous comment to Mr. Berry, to underscore what Mr. McCauley said. In one of my former lives, I was a partner in an event management company that had done work with the federal government. I would be very interested to see any kind of analysis you may have as to the secretariat's cost for arranging meetings, major conventions, and conferences, as opposed to private sector firms that may be out there. That is just a personal curiosity item.

I believe we have Mr. Grewal, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Raj Grewal (Brampton East, Lib.): My question is going to build on my colleague's questions about the digital strategy for the Prime Minister's Office. This is just to confirm that the investment that is being put into the digital strategy for the Prime Minister isn't just for our government. It will continue for future governments as well.

• (1625)

Mr. Stephen Lucas: As I think we are all very well aware, the way in which people receive news and information and interact with it has dramatically transformed over the past couple of decades. Increasingly, Canadians are turning to online sources. In fact, we are one of the most connected countries in the world, with the highest number of users of the Internet and other sources of information. To that end, there is a broader transformation under way in the support for governments in terms of communications towards a digital-by-default approach.

In that regard, there are investments that have been made and that are proposed here in terms of the estimates, as discussed, to enable that transformation from perhaps an older, paper-based system of news releases to a more interactive, digital system that delivers information to Canadians where they are, and in ways in which they would like to receive it, and that respects the policies of the government in terms of official languages and accessibility.

Mr. Raj Grewal: I think the Prime Minister needs to get Snapchat.

According to the 2016-17 reports on plans and priorities, PCO supports "the Government of Canada's efforts to modernize information technology (IT) through enhancements to the department's IT networks, systems and processes."

Now, I am sure there is a huge program to upgrade the Government of Canada's IT departments, specifically for members of Parliament and our offices, and anybody looking to save money.

To build upon the earlier point made about meetings, video conferencing is something that is not utilized enough. We have such a vast country, and we also deal internationally with a lot of different stakeholders. What are we doing to ensure that video conferencing is more accessible for everybody in government, and to ensure we can save money for our taxpayers by doing more video conferencing and less travel and face-to-face meetings? Not to say those will all be extinct, but there should be a more efficient way of running our government.

Mr. Stephen Lucas: Mr. Chair, to respond to the member's question, indeed one of the initiatives of the government and one of the initiatives promoted through the public service's Blueprint 2020 initiative has been to promote and enable desktop video conferencing. This has been undertaken by Shared Services Canada, and I would note that 43 organizations across government are accessing this service and are using an average of about 2.5 million minutes of video conferencing each month.

It is a tool that is being used increasingly, not just as an offset to travel costs but more fundamentally to harness technology to enable better engagement with other government employees, with colleagues in provinces and territories, and with stakeholders or Canadians to provide that input to our work in policy and program development.

Mr. Raj Grewal: Excellent.

Trade, especially with the United States, is extremely important to our country's economy. What is the PCO doing to reduce the barriers and increase trade and commerce specifically with the United States?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: The government is continuing to do work on advancing trade through co-operating on such initiatives as Beyond the Border and others with the United States.

At the March 10 meeting between the Prime Minister and President Obama, they looked at the importance of border modernization and work to advance key trade policy and trade commerce issues including border trade facilitation, strengthening supply chain benefits, applying innovation and innovative technologies, and addressing cybersecurity implications.

A couple of key outcomes of that were the commitments to move ahead on pre-clearance for air, land, marine, and rail and to support entry-exit information. The Privy Council Office provides a supporting role working with other government agencies in terms of the border implementation initiative.

As was noted in the Speech from the Throne, the government is committed to this area, given its recognition of the strong and critical relation with the U.S. as our friend, ally, and largest trading partner.

The Chair: We'll go now to Mr. McCauley.

• (1630)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: On page 1 of the 2016-17 report on plans and priorities, the government communicates clearly to Canadians that this will be the last report using the existing framework, and states that reports to Parliament will be more transparent and easier to read and will focus on how the government is using resources, etc. I'm just curious as to how you're going to go about making things more transparent in these reports.

We've seen the PBO and the finance department criticizing the current budget as the least transparent in the last 15 years, and yet at this time the direction is to be more transparent, but we seem to be going backwards in other departments. How are we going to measure how transparent the new RPP is going forward?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: This is—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You have about 13 seconds to answer.

Mr. Stephen Lucas: This is an area being led by the President of the Treasury Board, Minister Brison.

I think the commitment is twofold. One, as you noted, is to increase transparency, not just in the report on plans and priorities, but as well in the information—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Will this transparency then be directed upon you the way the transparency has been directed upon the budget or will this come directly from the deputy ministers, the PCO, and so on?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: I think the commitment, as I said, is twofold.

First, the government has committed to an open-by-default approach thereby improving the transparency of information that it provides to parliamentarians and Canadians.

Then with regard to the report on plans and priorities, I think the commitment is to have clearer articulation of the outcomes the government is seeking through the investment of public resources; to state which indicators are associated with those outcomes or targets to determine whether progress is being made against those; and to report frankly and faithfully on what has been achieved through those investments.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Lucas, it has been mentioned that in 2013 you launched objectives for Destination 2020. Can you give us an update on where you are in the implementation of this initiative and whether you are reaching its goals?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: What I would say, perhaps starting with the final point you made, Mr. Chair, is that fundamentally Destination 2020 is about continuous improvement in the public service of Canada to support the government and Canadians, to be more innovative and agile, to harness technology, to have a modern and effective workplace.

To that end, a number of key actions have been undertaken. One of them at the Privy Council Office, as a support across government, was launching the central innovation hub to enable public servants to learn more about new tools and approaches, such as the use of behavioural economics or data analytics to develop program and policy solutions to better serve Canadians.

We're working with the provinces and territories with regard to innovative approaches to policy challenges. We're using online tools; for example, through the Public Service Commission for language training. We have broader, government-wide ways of sharing information now through tools such as GCpedia, basically a Wikipedia to enable people to collaborate across government, breaking down silos between departments.

Through a number of these initiatives, we believe we're making progress on the aspirational goal of being more effective, enabling young recruits to contribute and to break down barriers to enabling the timely provision of advice to ministers in the government.

Hon. Steven Blaney: It's rather reassuring to see that hard-working civil servants are taking care of things while some others are doing pushups and photo-ops—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Steven Blaney: —and more—

The Chair: I'm not sure how relevant that is.

Now you're down to 30 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you.

I would like to go back to the Lac-Mégantic situation.

Ms. Fox, during your investigation, did you form an opinion as to the possibility of creating a rail line around Lac-Mégantic?

• (1635)

Mrs. Kathy Fox: Mr. Chair, we did not formulate an opinion on that. In our view, regardless of the route taken to transport dangerous goods, transportation safety is absolutely essential.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's your time

Our final five-minute intervention is for Monsieur Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): I have to say that I agree with the need to update the Prime Minister's digital presence. Some prime ministers get earned media and some others choose a 24-7 reality show.

More seriously, based on your three priorities but mainly on the second one, in which you stated, Mr. Lucas, that the role of PCO is to support the deliberations of cabinet and its committee on key policy initiatives, and the third priority, to enable the management of open, transparent, and accountable government, how does it work when mandate letters have gone off to each minister and have been posted online for the first time in Canadian history? How do you translate the mandate letter into management practices? How do you measure quantifiable metrics based on the results of each department's ability to enact those mandate letters? How does it work with the new assistant secretary to the cabinet on results and delivery?

Can you explain the process for me, so that I can get a better understanding?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: I think in the first instance that the public mandate letters, as part of the commitment to openness and

transparency, define the objectives of the government in a summative form as articulated in the Speech from the Throne.

A number of aspects associated with them will require decisions by cabinet to enable a policy decision. If there are funding requirements, they are proposed through a budgetary process and spending authorities are approved by the Treasury Board before they're presented to Parliament.

What we're trying to do in focusing on results and delivery through the role of my colleague, Matthew Mendelsohn, the deputy secretary for results and delivery, is fundamentally to ensure that at the front end of the policy development process, we are focusing on what outcomes the government is trying to achieve; the plan to get there; and then how we know whether we're going to get there, which are the indicators or the targets.

For example, in the case of an initiative of government over the past number of months, it set the goal of bringing 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada, so there was a clear target. Benchmarks were set up of how many refugees per week, as well as ongoing monitoring of that, including through an ad hoc committee of cabinet, to be able to track that progress and report to Canadians.

In this the government is sharpening the focus that governments have had on results, to move that up in the policy process to have it defined at the front end, and then to be able to communicate with Canadians what its trying to achieve and the progress en route to achieving that.

Mr. Francis Drouin: The 25,000 refugees is the perfect example. We're not so much focused on the funding, but rather the hard number.

Is this a move across government? Past governments of all stripes were focused on making funding announcements and the amount of money involved rather than saying how many citizens we have served. That's the number I want to see. Is this what's happening within government right now, a move toward harder numbers as opposed to just a funding number?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: It's about focusing on outcomes as opposed to activities—which is often how we describe what we do in those outcomes—in a way that is meaningful to Canadians in what it means to the economy, diversity in society, or the well-being of Canadians.

Consequently, by focusing the development of policies and programs with the end point in mind, and then having a means to measure progress toward it and the discipline in the system, we're sharpening the focus to ensure that we're checking on implementation. The goal is to be able to make progress toward those targets.

Other ones are closing the gap in socio-economic outcomes for indigenous Canadians, or our climate change targets, for example.

• (1640)

Mr. Francis Drouin: That's great. Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go to a three-minute round and we'll have only one questioner, Mr. Weir.

Mr. Erin Weir: I have a question for the Privy Council Office.

A few months ago the federal government announced an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. I note, however, that in your main estimates there's a forecast that there will be no spending on a commission of inquiry. I wonder why.

Mr. Stephen Lucas: The government has made the commitment. Ministers Bennett, Wilson-Raybould, and Hajdu have engaged indigenous Canadians, the families of victims, and others in the parameters and approach toward a potential inquiry. The government will deliberate and determine an approach and announce it in the weeks ahead.

Should there be a decision to have a commission of inquiry supported by the Privy Council Office, funds would subsequently be proposed in the supplementary estimates, but that has not yet been determined.

Mr. Erin Weir: The presumption at this point is that there won't be an inquiry within the 2016-17 fiscal year?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: In budget 2016, the government did propose an investment of \$40 million in the inquiry. However, as the decision on the specific approach has not yet been taken, the parameters of the nature of that inquiry and the responsible organizations have yet to be determined.

Mr. Erin Weir: Might we expect to see that through the supplementary estimates?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: Indeed, that would be the course, in the estimates pertaining to the relevant ministers and organizations supporting the process.

Mr. Erin Weir: I have a quick question on the advisory board for Senate appointments. How much is going to be spent supporting that through the Privy Council Office this fiscal year?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: I believe in supplementary estimates (C) there was an investment of—

Ms. Karen Cahill: —\$700,000. We came to this committee.

For Senate appointments, it's a perfect example of the misalignment between the mains and our supplementary estimates. Our mains were prior to the submission being approved for Senate appointments. Therefore, we could not include this amount for fiscal year 2016-17 in our main estimates. We will be coming back to this committee with a request for additional funding of \$1.4 million for the advisory board regarding Senate appointments.

The Chair: We turn to the seven-minute rounds.

Mr. Ayoub.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Hello, everyone. I would like to thank all the witnesses for being here today.

My question is specifically for the representatives of the Transportation Safety Board.

There was some question of a reduced budget for investigations into pipelines. In your report on plans and priorities, you mentioned communications a number of times. First of all, what is the link

between investigations and communications when the goal is to improve oversight of safety and prevention?

Moreover, aren't investigations and prevention part of the same administrative unit? If so, can you elaborate on this? If not, I'd like to know what the link is.

Finally, did the communication process mentioned in your report already exist or is it something new?

• (1645)

Mr. Jean Laporte: First of all, our mandate is to investigate incidents. Other agencies are responsible for the oversight of the pipeline network and other modes of transportation. In the case of the pipeline network, the National Energy Board is responsible for oversight and protection.

Our contribution to prevention is after the fact. When an accident occurs, we investigate to determine what happened and why, and how we can prevent the same thing from happening again. We make recommendations or issue safety advisories.

We use different formats and methods, including safety advisory letters, safety bulletins, and recommendations in order to communicate with the industry and with regulatory bodies in a timely manner. So we don't necessarily wait for an investigation report to be presented.

In the case of less detailed investigations, we can issue safety bulletins. We observe the situation in the field, do a summary analysis and communicate our findings so that corrective measures can be taken.

So there is a combination of methods.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Do you see a link between these communications, the investigations conducted and the preventive measures taken, for instance, by the National Energy Board? Is there a link between the number of incidents and prevention measures?

I also note that your budget is fairly stable, even though it is reduced in some cases.

Mr. Jean Laporte: As I said, over the course of the year, we share the resources among our various programs depending on the number of investigations required. If fewer investigations are conducted in aviation, more resources will be allocated to the pipelines or rail sectors. We redistribute the funds.

The figures in our annual departmental performance report always differ from those in the report on plans and priorities. We cannot accurately predict the number of accidents and investigations that will take place. So we redistribute our funds if necessary to make sure we have sufficient resources to do the work as the need arises. We also have a mechanism in place to obtain additional funding, as was the case with the Lac-Mégantic disaster or other major incidents.

We have not analyzed the link between communications and the number of accidents. We can say, however, that we follow up on all of our recommendations and all our safety bulletins. We report our findings in our departmental performance report. We also produce a separate report, our annual report to Parliament, as is required under the act, in which we indicate the results achieved. We try to close the loop and report on results.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you.

The report shows upcoming retirements at your agency, specifically in the aeronautics sector.

Are the investigators multidisciplinary? Can you assign them investigations in more than one sector or is the work assigned by the type of investigation?

Mr. Jean Laporte: We have two groups. Some people are specialists in their field, be it aviation, rail, marine or pipeline transportation. We also have a group of engineers and experts on human factors. These people are assigned where they are needed to provide the appropriate technical and scientific expertise. They go where they are needed, depending on the investigation.

As to retirements, the average age in our agency is rather high compared to the rest of the public service because we hire people with many years of experience in industry. Extensive knowledge of the field is needed to conduct investigations. For instance, we can't send a university graduate to conduct an investigation in the field. Because people join the agency at the end of their career, turnover is always high. Attrition is fairly high and fairly consistent. Through succession planning, we try to manage the turnover and make sure adequate resources are in place.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: In other words, you don't train people to become investigators because the people you hire are at the end of their career.

• (1650)

Mr. Jean Laporte: We do offer training for investigators, but the people who join the agency are experts in their field. They might for instance have spent 25 years of their career in aviation and then become experts in that field. When we hire them, we spend about two years training them as investigators and then they spend about ten years with us before retiring.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

[English]

The Chair: A question and answer.

[Translation]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Are you concerned about that 50%? How will you manage that in the coming years?

Mr. Jean Laporte: We are concerned about it, but, as I said, we are working on succession planning. We conduct recruitment campaigns to create pools of pre-qualified candidates. We can then use the pools to quickly replace departing employees. We also have a knowledge transfer program that allows us to hire people in order to double up employees in certain key positions. This allows for knowledge transfer from departing employees to new hires.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Blaney, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Fox, you said earlier that you had made five recommendations in August 2014 following the Lac-Mégantic tragedy. You said that Transport Canada had implemented one of those recommendations and that the department it is working on the remaining four. Could you elaborate on this?

We have a bit more time now.

Mrs. Kathy Fox: Yes.

Transport Canada responded very quickly to the recommendation that rail companies have assistance plans in the event of leaks or loss of dangerous goods, especially oil and gas. There was no such plan before the Lac-Mégantic accident. The minister at the time responded to this recommendation immediately, and we determined that the response was fully satisfactory.

We are however still waiting for action on the four other recommendations. The first pertains to class 111 tank cars. For years, the TSB has said that these tank cars are not strong enough to contain their cargo in the event of an accident. Last year, Canada and the United States introduced stricter standards, but it will take some time for all these tank cars to be replaced. We determined that this response was satisfactory. These people have a good plan, but we are still concerned about the time it will take to implement these new regulations.

The second recommendation pertains to the risk analyses that rail companies must produce when they carry large quantities of dangerous goods, including flammable liquids. Here again, Transport Canada has required companies to produce risk analyses.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Is it also true that they must share these analyses with the cities whose rail lines they use?

Mrs. Kathy Fox: No. The rail companies said they will produce these plans or risk analyses for Transport Canada, but they will not share them with the cities. The cities want to know how much and what kind of dangerous goods are being transported through them.

• (1655)

Hon. Steven Blaney: I see.

Mrs. Kathy Fox: Transport Canada's response to this recommendation was also deemed to be well-intentioned, but we will once again wait to see how things develop.

We are concerned about the standards. For companies with at least 10,000 cars per year travelling on a rail line, Transport Canada wants to know their contents. This standard would not have helped the situation in Lac-Mégantic because MMA had fewer than 10,000 cars using that rail line per year. So we were asked to review these numbers.

As to the two remaining recommendations, one pertains to prevention for cars that are not sufficiently secured and can run away on a hill. Our first evaluation of the response to this recommendation was that it was only partially satisfactory because we had questions about the application of the new regulations. We actually just repeated this evaluation and our determination was the same.

The fifth recommendation pertains to oversight by Transport Canada of the safety management systems. We determined that Transport Canada's plan was satisfactory but we want to see the actual results.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Do you mean you want to see how the private rail companies will respond to Transport Canada's safety management requirements?

Mrs. Kathy Fox: Yes, in part, but we also want to ensure that oversight by Transport Canada is effective. It must be able to conduct detailed audits to verify that safety management systems are in place and that those systems effectively manage the risks posed by these companies. This can take some time.

Hon. Steven Blaney: You said that Transport Canada must verify that the rail companies implement safety mechanisms. Do you see a greater risk with the small rail companies as regards implementing safety management plans?

Mrs. Kathy Fox: In the case of Lac-Mégantic, we found this to be the case with the company in question, but I do not want to generalize. Each company that is subject to the rules requiring it to have a safety management system must ensure that the system actually works. That will help it manage risks.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Did you look into Transport Canada's ability to ensure that rail companies implement their safety management system?

Mrs. Kathy Fox: I'm sorry, I did not understand your question.

Hon. Steven Blaney: In other words, in your opinion, does Transport Canada have sufficient resources to ensure that rail companies appropriately monitor their safety management systems?

Mrs. Kathy Fox: In the case of Lac-Mégantic, the issue was not having sufficient resources, but rather determining how Transport Canada's resources were used to inspect and oversee companies to ensure that they comply with regulations and effectively manage risks.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I would like to talk about a more recent tragedy.

Have you begun your investigation into the recent airplane accident on the Magdalen Islands?

Mrs. Kathy Fox: Yes, the investigation is ongoing.

Hon. Steven Blaney: When approximately do you expect to get the results of this investigation?

Mrs. Kathy Fox: I can't say for sure, but I can tell you that a team is now analyzing the data we have on the accident. We have to take the time needed to find the real causes of the accident. We are, however, trying to complete it as quickly as possible.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Perfect, thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Weir, please, for seven minutes.

Mr. Erin Weir: I'd like to pick up where I left off in regard to the \$1.4 million in support of the Independent Advisory Board for Senate Appointments. I'm just wondering what that money will be used for. How many people will be employed in supporting that advisory board?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: The money proposed in supplementary estimates for the support through the Privy Council Office for the independent advisory board is to support the function of the board itself, which has three federal members and then two for each province, in terms of their meetings and deliberations. In addition, the funds will support a small secretariat within the Privy Council Office to enable the process, including the website for people to apply and show interest in the Senate. It includes costs such as translation, printing and professional services, and a small salary allotment of I think \$0.5 million.

Ms. Karen Cahill: It also includes travel costs for the board members.

Mr. Erin Weir: The small secretariat would be about how many people?

Mr. Stephen Lucas: I think it's two people.

Mr. Erin Weir: Okay. No problem.

If there is any further information, you can always get back to us.

Mr. Stephen Lucas: We will verify that and provide the information to the committee to validate the specific number.

Mr. Erin Weir: That's much appreciated.

To continue with PCO, there was a question earlier about how much is being spent on the Prime Minister's Office. I think the answer was that it was going to stay at \$10.6 million. Within the Langevin Block, how is the distinction made and maintained between work through PCO and the civil service versus the more political work of the PMO, with particular reference to these new employees at PCO who will be working on the Prime Minister's digital presence?

• (1700)

Mr. Stephen Lucas: Fundamentally, the relationship is similar to what you would find between ministers and their office staff on the political side and the professional non-partisan public service on the departmental side.

The Privy Council Office employees are part of the Public Service of Canada. We provide advice, based on evidence, to the Prime Minister and support the official duties of the Government of Canada. Official Government of Canada activities receive communications support through the Prime Minister's official website.

These distinctions between the role of public servants on the Privy Council side and political staff on the side of the Prime Minister's Office or in ministers' offices are defined and delineated in *Open and Accountable Government*, a guide provided to ministers and posted on the web.

Mr. Erin Weir: You don't see any concern that the work done on the Prime Minister's digital presence might blur the lines between political work and civil service work. You think it's quite easy to compartmentalize that.

Mr. Stephen Lucas: The work to support the Prime Minister and the official Government of Canada website and digital presence is done on the basis of non-partisan support. We assess content to ensure that it meets that criterion. The government has underlined this commitment in *Open and Accountable Government*, which details the use of social media by ministers and the importance of using it in a non-partisan way that respects the policies of the Government of Canada.

Mr. Erin Weir: I have a question for the Transportation Safety Board. My colleague, Mr. Blaney, asked about your assessment of Transport Canada's capacity to enforce regulations. I believe your answer was that in Lac-Mégantic the issue wasn't a lack of resources—it was how those resources were deployed. I'd challenge that a little bit. In any inspection regime, you'll never have enough resources to inspect every train, but even so, the probability of getting caught depends on the number of inspectors out there. At some point, doesn't it depend on the number of inspectors out in the field?

Mrs. Kathy Fox: The whole purpose of safety management systems was to enable companies to manage their safety risks, which they must do because you could never have an inspector watching everything that's going on. When we conduct our investigations, we always look at whether there were practices in effect that were non-compliant with regulations or unsafe. In cases of non-compliance, we look at why they weren't picked up by the regulator.

To date, what we've identified is more about the way Transport Canada was conducting oversight than it was about the number of inspectors that were available. In other words, there were situations—in rail, air, and marine—in which Transport simply didn't pick up on unsafe practices, even though they were doing inspections.

Mr. Erin Weir: So the idea was that the railway in question had been inspected and the inspectors missed it?

Mrs. Kathy Fox: Well, again, if I speak to Lac-Mégantic, Transport Canada was aware of weaknesses in MMA's ability to manage risk, but they were unable to change how that company was operating, and so those unsafe operating practices persisted.

We've seen in other modes cases in which the regulator has not identified instances of non-compliance or unsafe operating practices. That's one of the reasons we put this on our watch list in 2014, the notion that companies should be responsible to manage their safety risks and that the regulator has to make sure that their SMSs are effective and find ways to ensure that companies are able to effectively manage risk so that unsafe operating practices don't continue.

We haven't identified, in our investigations, specific instances in which that didn't happen because of a lack of resources.

● (1705)

The Chair: We'll go to our last seven-minute intervener. Then we'll excuse our witnesses and wait for the room to disperse, then go in camera for committee business.

We have a new member of the committee, Madame Shanahan.

Welcome to our committee. You have seven minutes, please.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you for what has been a very informative testimony from all the witnesses here gathered. Let me just say that I am very impressed by the professionalism of the work you are doing. You are each three very different organizations, but the professionalism and indeed the non-partisan nature of your work does you credit.

I have the privilege of sitting on the public accounts committee, so it could be that we'll be seeing each other in a different venue and a different way when we're looking at outcomes, when we're looking at past projects and the Auditor General's report.

In that vein, in this morning's Auditor General's report Mr Ferguson spoke to an overall theme. I think this theme would apply here today. It is the quality of data collection within organizations, agencies, departments in the public service and the difficulty the agencies would then have in using that data, either because of the quality of the data, because of its accuracy, or because of legacy systems that just weren't providing accurate data to allow organizations to then make solid, evidence-based recommendations and policy decisions, which would, I would think, affect you in your work in developing your estimates. That's really what we're talking about here today, so that you can continue your good work.

Maybe a little bit of time for each one of the organizations would be appropriate.

The Chair: Mr. Lucas.

Mr. Stephen Lucas: Indeed, that is an important area of focus and part of the focus of the government, as I said in response to a previous member's question, on outcomes for Canadians and really focusing on the implementation of initiatives. Critical to knowing whether you are actually on the path towards achieving the results or outcomes you've committed to for Canadians is having the data to tell you whether you are on track, whether in a case pertaining to greenhouse gas emissions, the number of refugees, or the number of innovative companies in the economy.

Indeed it is a priority of the government and a focus to identify data sources for those key indicators that can be reflected in reports on plans and priorities, with the results then reflected in reporting to Parliament. This will take effort from across government, working with provinces and territories and other partners as well, working with Statistics Canada in terms of its data collection and indeed in some areas with international partners.

Mr. Chair, if I may, as an aside I want to correct the record concerning the support through the Privy Council Office of the process for the independent advisory board on Senate appointments. The secretariat will have five people in it.

The Chair: Ms. Fox.

Mrs. Kathy Fox: Clearly, the data that the Transportation Safety Board collects for all of our occurrences, whether or not we conduct a full investigation with a public report, is very important. We've taken steps over the previous years to modernize our databases. Recently, about a year and a half or two years ago, we updated our regulations to make sure that we modernize the type of data we are collecting and harmonize with government departments where required. We've also recognized, as a vulnerable point, that we carefully have to guard how that information is retained, and we have steps in our strategic plan, which is looking at that, to make sure that, for example when employees leave, we are able to preserve any TSB data that is crucial from a business and continuity perspective going forward.

• (1710)

Mr. Jean Laporte: I'll just add that in each one of our individual investigations, we ensure that we're very thorough in collecting data, analyzing it, and being fact-based in our reporting and findings. That is essential to our credibility and the work that we do.

Our challenge is more at the big picture level once we collect all this information. There is more and more information available from all kinds of sources with technology nowadays. How do we manage this mass of information? How do we dig through it to look for trends to identify proactively some items that would require closer study and analysis? That's where our challenge lies primarily.

The Chair: The final comment will be from Mr. McArdle.

Mr. André McArdle: Being a one program process-oriented agency, obviously with regard to data it's maybe a lot simpler than what my colleagues have been saying. We are serving 14 jurisdictions and the aspect of client satisfaction is very important. We regularly survey our clients and have a satisfaction rate of over 90%.

We are very oriented toward analyzing conference costs in order to see where we could have savings that we can pass on to our clients. We are also in the process of digitizing a lot of the data we have, so that we're more able to extrapolate the information that is required.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I thank all the witnesses for being here today and providing valuable information to our committee members. I would remind some of our witnesses that in response to a question or two, I believe you suggested that you would be providing updated information to the committee. You can, of course, get that directly to our clerk.

Thank you once again. I appreciate your attendance, and you are dismissed.

We will suspend for a few minutes and come back in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

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

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

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

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

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

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

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

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

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

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>