



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# **Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates**

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OGGO • NUMBER 152 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, November 8, 2018**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski**



## Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Thursday, November 8, 2018

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC)):** Colleagues, I call the meeting to order. Welcome.

Before us today we have representatives from the Canadian Transportation Accident Investigation and Safety Board and the Privy Council Office.

My understanding, Madam Fox, is that you do have an opening statement.

Colleagues, with your consent, Mr. Shea has said that rather than reading his opening statement into the record and taking up about 10 minutes of our time, we will, if you agree, just enter his opening statement into the minutes and that will allow more time for questioning from all colleagues around the table.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** They are deemed read.

**The Chair:** They are deemed read.

Do I have your consent for that?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[See appendix—Remarks by Mr. Matthew Shea]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you for your kind offer, Mr. Shea.

Madam Fox, it's good to see you again. Welcome back to our committee. You have certainly been here before, so you know the drill, and you'll understand that you have about 10 minutes for an opening statement, after which we will follow with questions from all the committee members.

Madam, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Kathleen Fox (Chair, Canadian Transportation Accident Investigation and Safety Board):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I can assure you I'll be definitely less than 10 minutes.

Mr. Chair and honourable members, again, thank you very much for inviting the Transportation Safety Board of Canada, or TSB, to appear today.

[Translation]

My two colleagues with me have a wealth of experience with our activities.

Let me introduce Jean Laporte, our chief operating officer, and Luc Casault, our director general of corporate services and chief financial officer.

Given that officials from the Transportation Safety Board, the TSB, have appeared before this committee twice in the past year, I believe that you are familiar with the TSB and its mandate. I will therefore proceed directly to the reason for our presence here today, the 2018-2019 Supplementary Estimates (A).

[English]

The 2018-19 main estimates show TSB appropriations of approximately \$27 million and statutory contributions to employee benefit plans of \$3 million, for a total of just over \$30 million. Add to that the \$2.9-million permanent increase that we're seeking in the supplementary estimates (A) and you get a total of \$33.5 million to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the TSB's program.

Allow me to briefly provide some context.

Over the past few years, the TSB has faced a number of growing funding pressures that made it increasingly difficult for the organization to deliver on its mandate and achieve its performance targets. The TSB has not received any new permanent funding since 2003.

Since then, public expectations and the complexity of the TSB's work have changed significantly. The TSB has also faced increasing costs that add up year after year. In 2017-18, the TSB reached the point where the integrity of its program was put at risk due to insufficient resources.

[Translation]

Last fall, the TSB put forward a request seeking approval of interim funding in the amount of \$1.8 million to address its immediate program integrity issues for 2017-2018, while a longer-term solution was identified.

[English]

The funds we seek today will provide financial stability to the organization for the next few years; however, this will not increase our capacity. These funds will help us sustain the current number of investigations that we conduct, the number of outreach activities and the timeliness of our investigations, meet performance targets and improve the availability of information to the public.

Put another way, that's the first substantive and permanent funding increase in 15 years, and it is less than 10% for an organization that has pushed tirelessly for transportation safety from coast to coast to coast.

On that note, and in closing, last week on October 29, the TSB published Watchlist 2018. This is our list of the key issues that need to be addressed to make Canada's transportation system even safer. A brochure featuring the Watchlist issues has since been emailed to all members of Parliament, and no doubt some of you have read it. If you have questions about the Watchlist today, we'd be very happy to answer them, as well as any questions you may have about the supplementary estimates.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Fox and Mr. Shea, and thanks to both of you for your economy of words.

We will go into direct questioning now, starting with a seven-minute round of interventions.

Go ahead,, Madam Ratansi.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Thank you, Chair.

Chair, could you tell me when I have two minutes left so that I know how to manage my time?

Welcome to all of you.

I have some questions regarding the Privy Council. The Privy Council is asking for \$47 million in funding for the missing and murdered indigenous women. Is this above and beyond what you asked for in your last budget, or is it a continuation? What work has been done, and how much are you proposing to do or carry out with this amount of money?

**Mr. Matthew Shea (Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services, Privy Council Office):** It's a mix of both of those things. It is additional funding.

You may recall that an extension was granted for six additional months for the important work this commission of inquiry is doing. They requested with that approximately \$38 million in new funding. The amount we have here includes an additional amount from previous years that was reprofiled. That was part of the initial \$53 million. That was not spent. It has been reprofiled. The total amount now is \$92 million between the original money and this new money that's been brought in.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Are you confident the inquiry will complete its report by April 2019?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** It's not for me to say. One of the things I've said to this committee before is that we operate at arm's length from the commission of inquiry. We provide them support. They're absolutely independent. I would suggest that you look to the press releases and the various discussions they've had. They recently granted some interviews in which they talked about the progress and the work they're doing.

I will say that we work very closely with them and I know they are continuing to work towards the deadline to ensure the work is completed in time. We enjoy an excellent relationship with them.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** I ask because I want to understand, from a governance perspective, the relationship between PCO and the board of inquiry. How does one follow progress or how does one follow the money to ensure that we are getting return on investment, that it's getting the results it is supposed to get?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** Our role is much more an administrative role. We are not there to decide if this is a good expenditure or a bad expenditure or the best return on investment. We're ensuring that they follow the Financial Administration Act and all applicable policies. If there's an expenditure that we have concerns doesn't potentially fit one of those criteria, we'll talk to them.

I will say that my experience has been that when we have raised concerns, they've worked very closely with us to address those concerns and ensure that this was done properly, but as far as their actual progress and the number of sessions they hold goes, whether it be for institutions or individuals, that's completely within their purview to decide.

We're very, very focused on ensuring they have independence. That's a tenet of the way it was set up—to ensure that independence.

● (1535)

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Under the supplementary estimates (A), 2018-19, some of the funds were requested under vote 1 for the Prime Minister's residence. Is this the one on Sussex Drive, and is it undergoing any construction? If so, what's the progress on it?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** It's the vote definition that includes the Prime Minister's residence. There is no money being sought here for the Prime Minister's residence. I think this is a common question we are asked almost every time we come for supplementary estimates or main estimates.

There is a very clear protocol as to how that work happens. PSPC and the National Capital Commission deal with the actual renovations to and work on the residence. Our role involves simply the staff that work there and the expenses directly tied to the Prime Minister.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Thank you.

Madam Fox, I was looking at the monies that your department is asking for. I was looking at the Transportation Safety Board accidents. In my estimation there have been about 25 close calls, loss of control, collisions in water, or collisions on terrain. How do you manage it? Is the amount of money you're asking for for personnel to help you determine the safety processes or to report the accidents? What is the money going to be used for?

**Ms. Kathleen Fox:** The funds we're requesting are primarily to top up on our salary budget, which over the years has grown. Even though the number of personnel hasn't grown, the salary costs have grown as a result of collective agreements, among other things. It's primarily to top up the salaries so that we can pay our personnel to the end of the fiscal year and ongoing, but it also allows us to normalize our expenditures in O and M for things like travel, training, and asset replacement. We've had to borrow from that budget to supplement our salary budget over the years. Then within that, we divide up those resources among our multiple programs, including aviation, marine, pipeline and rail.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** When you talk about \$2.5 million to maintain program integrity, what exactly do you mean by program integrity?

**Ms. Kathleen Fox:** Specifically, it's our ability to conduct investigations, to complete reports on a timely basis and to conduct our outreach activities, including things like issuing our Watchlists.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Do you need more resources, because you also have...? In 2018 the board highlighted a 50% increase in the numbers of investigations. Are you looking for more money to help you prepare this and analyze it or give us more information?

**Mr. Jean Laporte (Chief Operating Officer, Canadian Transportation Accident Investigation and Safety Board):** Essentially we're asking for \$3.3 million. That will allow us to maintain the current level of activity. The numbers you're referring to from 2017-18 are what we believe is a reasonable level of investment and effort in terms of fulfilling our mandate. We want to maintain that going forward this year and in future years.

We can always use more money and do more, but there are diminishing returns after a certain level. What we've asked for is to sustain what we achieved last year and meet our performance targets—not to increase the number of investigations, but to improve the timeliness, because we haven't met our timeliness standards for the last number of years.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Thank you.

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

Mr. McCauley, you have seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC):** Welcome back. It's appropriate that you're almost here on Halloween, Ms. Fox, because I find your reports quite scary and alarming, especially your comments on addressing your recommendations.

Mr. Laporte, you just mentioned that the \$3.3 million or \$33 million would be enough money. I'm looking at your departmental plan, and it's showing percentage of investigations completed within published target time: Aviation not met, marine not met, rail not met. I don't mean this as a criticism, because I know we haven't funded you properly, but is that enough money if you're clearly not being able to meet these investigation deadlines that you've set out in your targets?

• (1540)

**Mr. Jean Laporte:** With the additional funds, we believe that we will be able to meet most, if not all, of those targets and to sustain the level of effort that we've undertaken. I think part of the challenge of the past years has been balancing the resources available with the workload.

We've also undertaken a number of steps to improve the efficiency of our process. We've implemented a new occurrence classification policy. We now have short-form reports to expedite on non-complex investigations, for example, to get them quickly out of the way and focus more on the bigger ones, the more complex ones. Essentially we believe it's a reasonable amount of money.

We initially asked for \$3.3 million. What's included in here is \$2.9 million, as you can see in the supplementary estimates. We did not

quite get the full amount that we asked for. We are still discussing that shortfall with the Treasury Board Secretariat.

The money was supported by the minister, but when we got to the Treasury Board submission stage, there's an old Treasury Board policy that requires 13% to be set aside for accommodation, so that's where that \$300,000 plus change has gone. It's gone into the PSPC reserve fund for accommodation, which we don't need because we're not increasing staff.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I just want to pull up on that. We discussed the last two times a lack of urgency from the transportation department to address your outstanding items. I'm looking again at your plan. Rail deaths last year were up 35% over the previous year and rail safety goals were not met, and yet we have the minister regally standing in the House and saying that transportation safety is his number one priority.

Obviously it's not, because we have a lot of problems here. Are we running into a problem with funding because the attitude from the government side is that everything is fine, look somewhere else, no need to worry, safety is number one? Clearly, it's not.

**Mr. Jean Laporte:** As I've said, we're looking for another \$320,000 roughly, more than what's in here, and it's more of an administrative issue with the Treasury Board submission process. That would allow us what we believe is the proper level of investment. In terms of Transport Canada resources to do what their mandate entails, we can't speak on their behalf. We have concerns about their oversight. We've cited them. It is on our Watchlist, so perhaps the committee should ask Transport Canada or the Minister of Transport about their resource levels.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** It's quite concerning. Again, we see deaths are up, and we haven't achieved rail safety. It has become worse for the last three years, and yet the person responsible for it stands to say it's our number one priority when it's not. Unfortunately that message gets out.

I'm looking at your outstanding recommendations. We have a bunch: 20 years older, 15 years older, 10 years older. What is it going to take, a commitment from the Minister of Transport to get these issues cleared up, or again, is it more a lack of funding for TSB?

**Ms. Kathleen Fox:** I'll take that question.

We first noted the slow progress in addressing our recommendations on the TSB Watchlist two years ago, in 2016. At that time we had 52 recommendations that were more than 10 years old, of which 39 were more than 20 years old.

In the ensuing two years, working with Transport Canada and largely due to research we did and looking at what industry has done, we were able to reduce 52 down to 34. However, there were quite a few recommendations, older recommendations, when Transport Canada had promised to give us updated information, and they did not meet the deadlines they set for themselves. As a result, we weren't able to close more.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Are those details specifically the ones they haven't provided information for?

**Ms. Kathleen Fox:** In our background information, which is available and which we can make available to the committee if you wish, we have provided the specifics on which of the specific recommendations we were referencing.

We also had a number of dormant recommendations. Dormant recommendations are ones that we are not asking the Department of Transport to update periodically, because they've already told us they've done as much as they're going to do. We've thrown those into the mix.

Now we have 62 in all that are more than 10 years old, but this isn't just a Transport Canada issue. This is a Government of Canada issue, because as you may be aware, to get regulations through the system, the Department of Justice is involved, Treasury Board assesses it from the point of view of the regulatory impact and the economic side, and then Privy Council Office is involved as well.

In this edition of the Watchlist we're asking for a number of things, specifically for Transport Canada to work to bring Canada back into line with international standards where we aren't in line—in other words, to address those recommendations—and to reduce the total number of outstanding recommendations, as well as to expedite the inter-ministerial processes that can sometimes cause delays in implementing safety-related regulations.

• (1545)

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Over the last couple of years, the percentage of investigations completed within the published time target has been getting better. Right now you're at 15% on aviation, marine 43%, rail 29%. If you get this extra money, will you get to where you need to be, or how much do you need to receive to get to where you have to be?

**Mr. Jean Laporte:** Again, with the funds that are included in these supplementary estimates, we think we can get to those targets.

The shortfall is focused on two areas. One area is dealing with putting out more information to the public on the web, so we're asking for more money to invest in that, in translating and publishing material for public disclosure. The second area has to do with occupational health and safety and with meeting Canada Labour Code requirements. That's the money we didn't get that's stuck in this admin process right now.

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

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Thanks very much.

**The Chair:** Mr. Blaikie, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Thank you very much.

Mr. Shea, this goes back to the spring and the main estimates under the Treasury Board vote 40, the central budget implementation vote. There \$745,000 was set aside for a process to develop and implement a new commission for federal election leaders' debates.

Treasury Board had said they were going to be updating the list of allocations every month. To date none of that money has been allocated, but of course a new debates commissioner has been announced. I'm wondering how we got to the point where we announced the debates commissioner without releasing any of the funds meant to develop the process. That would be my first question, and my second question is how do you anticipate using those other funds that have been set aside, and specifically, have you submitted a proposal to Treasury Board?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** We've submitted a draft Treasury Board submission to Treasury Board Secretariat. We hope to get approval in the next month, as soon as we possibly can.

I believe a nominee for the position of debates commissioner has been named; it's not formally concluded, and we will do our best to time the Treasury Board approval to coincide with the formal start of that work.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** How do we come to have a nominee if we haven't spent a dime on developing the process?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** We spent none of the actual money set aside for the commission. On the process itself, the work to set up the debates commission, PCO is funding that internally as far as any workload that happens behind the scenes is concerned. All of the money that's in the federal budget is related to the work that the debates commissioner will do, and it's reserved specifically for them, but not for PCO.

Once again, independence—

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Then the language in the budget is mistaken when it says that the money is to develop and implement; it's actually just to implement the process.

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** It's to implement the process. It's to implement the actual debates commission itself, with a debates commissioner, and so we are working behind the scenes to make sure that can get up and running as quickly as possible. Similar to the commission of inquiry, similar to NSICOP, PCO will provide arm's-length support from a corporate perspective. My team is already working with the potential debates commissioner to make sure that everything is set up, that we can make this work.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** If we now only have a nominee, and you're anticipating, if I understood you correctly, that the nominee won't actually be officially in the job until the proposal goes through Treasury Board, is it not prejudicial to have the nominee working with PCO before we know that they're officially the debates commissioner, providing input on the Treasury Board submission for how the money's going to get spent?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** Just to be very clear, the nominee has no role whatsoever in the Treasury Board submission. It's no different from other independent areas. We're simply seeking the funding.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Then the funding proposal would be complete before we have a debates commissioner.

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** The funding proposal is an “up to” amount that would be available for the debates commissioner to use. We have a general idea of what that dollar value is. You saw the amount in the budget this year. I can say that the intent would be for around \$5 million next year. That coincides a bit with part of your first question, which was around how we are going to spend the money. The money that's set aside is for a very small fraction of the year. When you can extrapolate that out, it makes sense that it's a smaller amount this year and a larger amount next year, as we go into an election season.

We are setting that up behind the scenes. There is no input whatsoever from any nominee on how we actually set it up. However, once that money is made available, they will have complete independence to spend that money as they see fit.

However, I think the nominee spoke at a parliamentary committee this week and explained generally that it's going to be salaries and contracting and communications and those engagement types of roles if he is the debates commissioner.

• (1550)

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I won't press the point any further, but I do find it somewhat odd that we would have the funding proposal in place without having a commissioner who could provide input, and there was the possibility of using some of that money to develop a process that might lead to legitimately having a commissioner and then developing a proposal for the balance of those funds.

I do have a question for our witnesses from the Transportation Accident Investigation and Safety Board. This comes back to some of the issues around rail safety.

I'm from Transcona. Transcona's a rail town. I know a lot of people who drive trains for a living and who express a lot of frustration at the process for dealing with complaints, especially around fatigue management. Sometimes those incidents then lead to a case involving a TSB investigation.

If I'm somebody who works at CN and lives in Transcona, what can I expect as a result from the additional funds that you're requesting today? I'm concerned about people who are being called up without enough time between shifts or being forced to stay on the road longer than they should be. They've been complaining to Transport Canada. They're not seeing results. What can they hope to see changed as a result of this additional funding?

**Ms. Kathleen Fox:** I don't think you can take \$3 million of additional funding and say, “This will do this in this specific rail mode.” What we're saying is if we don't get this money, we don't have enough money to cover our salaries till the end of the year. We would have to reduce our workforce by up to 10%, more now because we're already well into the year.

What this is going to allow us to do is maintain our mandate, to continue to do what we do every day, which is to investigate incidents and accidents, prepare reports, identify safety deficiencies, and make recommendations to ministers and to stakeholders to reduce those safety deficiencies.

Our Watchlist specifically mentions fatigue in the rail industry. We added that in 2016. We've expanded it to include air and marine this year. We have some very specific suggestions to the department and to the industry as to what they need to do in rail. For example, railways are required, by regulation, to have fatigue management plans. Those often rely on schedules that are negotiated between the railway companies and the unions, so it's very important that they work collaboratively to negotiate the best schedules, not from a monetary perspective or an efficiency perspective, but from a safety perspective as well.

Certainly, if we've received a number of confidential safety reports from employees at different operators who are concerned about working while fatigued and we pass those on to Transport Canada, to the operator, we expect to receive a response on what they're doing. We're just going to be able to continue to do that and advocate for the changes that need to happen so that safety's not put at risk because people work when they're fatigued.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Thank you.

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

Majid Jowhari, you have seven minutes, please.

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

My question is for Madam Fox.

Prior to asking the question, I'm going to read a couple of quotes from the report. The first one is from the message from your office. The last paragraph begins:

Yes, that's a tall order, and achieving everything on our list is bound to be challenging with limited resources.

Now I'm going to go to page 13, where the report is addressing the number of resources—full-time equivalents—under “Planning highlights”:

The TSB faces important resource pressures that put the integrity of its programs at-risk. In 2018-19, the main priority for the TSB internal services will be to work with the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Department of Finance to find solutions that will ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the TSB and the integrity of its programs.

Now, with regard to those two quotes—to the fact that you have resource shortages and to the table that highlights that in 2018-19 you are estimating 50 full-time equivalents and the same in 2019-20 and 2020-21—my question is this: Why aren't you asking for more funding for resources if resources are a major issue?

• (1555)

**Ms. Kathleen Fox:** There's a lot in that question, and I'll try to break it down as best I can.

Our first priority is to seek and receive the funding that we need to sustain our current workforce and our current level of activity. One of the issues that we had in the past was that... First of all, we don't control our workload. We don't decide or control when accidents and incidents occur, and we certainly don't not investigate because of a lack of resources. However, when we have a flurry of smaller accidents, or a large accident, it does put a lot of pressure on the organization to investigate and to provide timely information to the public.

That said, I think the first thing that we have to do is look internally. What efficiencies can we do? What we have done is change our current classification policy. We're actually going to be putting out more investigations because we're going to putting out more shorter ones for more routine occurrences, allowing us to focus our resources on the more complex ones, which take longer.

We've also amended our targets, so it will no longer be 450 days for all investigations. We've tailored our targets to adapt to the different types of investigations that we can conduct.

At this point, we believe that the resources that we have in place, especially if we can get the extra two that we would like, are sufficient to conduct business. That's not to say that this won't change in three or four years, but for now it's a reasonable number that will allow us to conduct our activities. However, we have been playing catch-up for the last few years.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Great.

In your report, you speak of a 50% increase in the number of investigations that were concluded. Has the number of incidents under all categories increased, and if so, by how much?

**Ms. Kathleen Fox:** I'd have to look at our statistics to give you specifics on that. We vary every year between about 3,500 and 3,700 reported occurrences. That's in all four modes.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Okay.

**Ms. Kathleen Fox:** We have been able to conduct more investigations in this fiscal year because we cleaned up a lot of the backlog of old investigations in the previous fiscal year. We've also introduced a short-form report for more routine investigations, which allows us to get the information out more quickly. That's what has increased our capacity.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** What was the reason for the backlog?

**Ms. Kathleen Fox:** There were a number of reasons for the backlog. We had to look at our internal processes. For example, we have an earlier scoping of our investigations. Investigators are curious people. They like to go down a lot of different avenues of inquiry, so we want to scope them early on and make sure that we're focused on the key safety issues. Our processes weren't as efficient as they could be, so we've been working on—

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Can you give me an example of a process efficiency that you've implemented that has helped you to use the same resources to solve more cases?

**Ms. Kathleen Fox:** Sure.

**Mr. Jean Laporte:** One example is simply rigorous project management methodology. For each investigation, we identify a team leader, an investigator in charge, who manages a team. However, those team members are involved in multiple investiga-

tions simultaneously, so there's the challenge of managing the workload of the team members and getting them to focus on the right priorities. As a result, we've changed our approach to get managers and the directors of investigations more engaged at different steps of the process, rather than just delegating to the team lead to resolve issues early and to resolve the priority conflicts.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** It's not as much about project management as about resource management. That's what I'm hearing.

**Mr. Jean Laporte:** It's about both of them.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Okay.

I understand that the \$2.5 million or \$2.6 million you're asking for is basically to make sure that you sustain current resourcing. What is the long-term plan? What should we expect? I know it's outside the scope of the estimates, but I'm trying to get a sense of where we're going after this.

**Mr. Jean Laporte:** In terms of the longer plan, we established a strategic plan in 2015-16, a five-year plan to modernize the organization and its business processes. We're halfway through that plan.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** By modernizing, what do you mean?

**Mr. Jean Laporte:** We're looking at everything. We've looked at our resource base. We figure that we need an extra \$3 million to bring it to the right level for the next number of years. We've made that request, which we're discussing today. We've looked at the business process, the project management. We're modernizing that. We are looking at our investigator training and modernizing all our internal training programs. We're looking at the technology and making better use of technology to expedite the process to, again, get more efficiencies.

Everything we do, we're looking at.

• (1600)

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Sorry, I have a 10-second question.

You're hoping that with all of that modernization, the length of time it's going to take for you to do an assessment of an incident is going to be reduced by how much?

**Mr. Jean Laporte:** We're looking at fully achieving the targets outlined in our plan, but we're going beyond that. Instead of saying that everything is 450 days on average, we're saying that there are five types of investigation, from simple to very complex.

We've now established—and you will see that in our next plan submitted to Parliament—targets for each level. We want to go faster on the simple ones and take the proper time to do the bigger and more complex ones.

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

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Deltell is next.

[Translation]

Mr. Deltell, you have seven minutes.

[English]

**Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair.

[Translation]

Thank you for coming, my friends. It is always great to see you.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to your parliamentary committee.

I would first like to talk to Mr. Shea, the assistant deputy minister in the Privy Council Office. Let us recall that the Privy Council Office is the Prime Minister's department. So it has to respond to specific mandates. The issue that interests us here is the leaders' debate, more specifically its new structure that the government is proposing. First of all, Mr. Shea, you said just now that the Rt. Hon. David Johnston had been suggested for the position, but that he has not yet started work.

[English]

My question will be quite simple. What is his power as a nominee, compared to when he will be the official director of this new mandate?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** I'm not a machinery of government expert, but right now, he's not been appointed and therefore has no formal authority. If he were to say, "I want to spend money on X, Y, Z", he would have no ability to sign for that money.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Who is calling the shots now?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** I'm saying the opposite, sir. It's not established yet.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Okay, who is calling the shots for this?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** There is no debates commission officially launched as of today. Until we formally establish the entity and create it, there is no entity. Right now, it's a nominee.

As I said, we're working on all the final authorities. I think it will coincide very well with the timing of the appointment, but as of today, no money has been expended, and that's really what I look at as the authorities, such as signing authority and financial authority.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Exactly when do you expect the Rt. Hon. David Johnston to officially start work?

[English]

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** I don't have that answer, but I would say that in the coming weeks, someone will be confirmed in that position.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Is that a vote in the cabinet or something like that?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** I don't know the formal process for confirmation.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Okay.

Even if the new commission does not yet have the power to act, it does have a budget. By looking at the document from the department, we can see that \$1 million has been allocated to this commission for the current financial year and that \$5 million are allocated for the next financial year. So that is a total of \$6 million

for an activity that, technically, will be over in 10 months, when the leaders' debate has taken place, one month before the election.

[English]

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** That's correct.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** That's correct. Okay.

[Translation]

So we are talking about \$6 million for the next 10 months. How many public servants will the commission employ?

[English]

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** Once a debates commissioner is established, they'll have flexibility as to how they want to use that funding. It could be through professional services, and there's a mechanism to do that. It could be through hiring outside of the public service. It could be from secondments from inside the public service. There is complete flexibility as to how that is staffed, and that's not something that I would be able to speak to.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** So the commissioner will decide on how his team will be made up?

[English]

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** Absolutely.

One of the hallmarks of this has been the independence, and part of that independence is the ability to decide how best to use the resources to that end.

• (1605)

[Translation]

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Okay. What will the \$6 million cover: travel expenses, hospitality, trips?

[English]

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** I believe the nominee spoke to this at committee recently. As I think I mentioned earlier, it can be a combination of professional services, salary, travel, communications or engagement-type activities. It really is up to the debates commissioner to decide.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Thank you very much, Mr. Shea. I will use the 30 seconds I have left to make a comment, which does not reflect on you in any way.

It is completely unacceptable to spend \$6 million of taxpayers' money on this. Televised debates have been held for 50 years and more than a hundred of them have been held without a cent of taxpayers' money being spent. Now we are creating an entity that is going to cost, not \$5 million, as the government announced, but \$6 million. Not a cent has yet been spent and here we are, 10 months from the event. Right now, we have no idea about the number of people who will be working on it, we do not know who will be travelling where, and we do not know what the money will be used for.

Mr. Chair, we are not about to sign a blank cheque. Thank you.

[English]

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

Next up, we have Madam Yip for five minutes.

**Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.):** Welcome.

In TSB's 2017-18 departmental plan, the board identified recruiting and retaining personnel as an elevated risk, due to specialized qualifications and the nature of the work. What does that mean?

**Mr. Jean Laporte:** We've had some particular challenges in recruiting for certain types of expertise, and this varies from year to year, based on demand in the industry. For example, for specialists who work in our lab, it's very specialized, and there is not a large talent pool across Canada to draw from.

We also have, in the various modes, the modal investigators. As you've likely heard, there is a shortage of pilots in Canada across the industry. We are hiring pilots as investigators. We're competing for those limited or scarce resources out there with all the other employers in the industry and within government.

We're trying to do our best to recruit. We have been able to fill a large majority of our positions, but sometimes there are longer delays before we can fill the positions because of the challenge of competing with the salaries of other employers for specialized skill sets that are in high demand and of limited supply.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** Are there any plans for increasing the participation of women, increasing diversity in your recruitment process?

**Mr. Jean Laporte:** Yes, definitely. We have, just in the past year, updated our employment equity plan. We are taking target measures to review our selection criteria to remove any systemic barriers for all the employment equity groups. We've implemented those changes, and we are working with other organizations, such as Transport Canada, to do some outreach.

For example, we recently participated in a conference that was organized by the Professional Engineers Ontario, which focused on attracting women to the engineering profession. We are partnering with other organizations to try to promote careers for women, visible minorities, aboriginal... and first nations, to attract those to apply to the jobs that we have, but there is a challenge with the specialized talent that we require in ensuring that these people meet the requirements of the job.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** Once you have these employees, what are you doing to retain them? It must be difficult, given the specialized nature.

**Mr. Jean Laporte:** It is difficult. For example, in the past year we've lost a few of our marine senior investigators who have gone back to industry because they can earn more money over there.

We're trying to invest in their professional development, in their learning, to maintain their currencies. We're also trying to provide flexibilities in work arrangements. We've updated our telework policy, for example, allowing people to work from home as opposed to having them come in to the office every day.

We're trying, within the public service framework and the rules we're governed by, to allow some flexibilities to accommodate those

needs. We've allowed some younger employees to take parental leave, for example, to stay home with their kids for a number of months. Of course, that creates an issue of temporarily backfilling, but we're trying to find that balance.

• (1610)

**Ms. Jean Yip:** Do I have more time?

**The Chair:** You have one minute left, Madam Yip.

**Ms. Jean Yip:** This is a question for the Privy Council officers.

PCO is requesting \$6.2 million to support ministers. Can you describe the type of support that amount is expected to provide to ministers?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** Absolutely. One of the things that is unique about PCO is that its exact mandate changes as time goes on. At this point, it has four different ministers who are supported, and the Prime Minister is also the minister of youth. This funding is really to recognize that fact. We recently added an additional minister.

The way it works is that departments are not funded for ministers. Typically for a large department, absorbing one minister's office is not a large problem for us. Absorbing four ministers becomes a bit of a challenge from a program integrity perspective, so a portion of that is for the actual ministers' offices themselves in recognition of the costs, and then a portion is for the support that coincides with that in light of those broad mandates.

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

Mr. McCauley, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Thank you.

Mr. Shea, I want to go to your departmental plan. The departmental plan that was released shows a decrease in funding for the next year because of sunseting of the missing and murdered women and also a decrease in funding for a GIC appointment process. Of course, now we see in the supplementary estimates that the money is back in.

Walk me through what changed in those estimates. Why wasn't it in the main estimates, but it's showing up in the supplementary estimates?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** It wasn't in the main estimates because we didn't have funding approval at that point. We put a funding proposal in place for a number of items, including for the ministers' offices.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** When did it come out? When the departmental plan came out, it came out at the same time as the main estimates and the budget. At that time you were predicting a decrease in funding for 2018-19.

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** The departmental plan is based on approved levels from Treasury Board.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Was this before the extension was planned or announced for the missing and murdered women?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** Are you speaking specifically of the commission or for all of the different pieces?

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I mean the funding for the missing and murdered women that's in—

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** The funding for that was, again, originally \$53 million over three fiscal years. At the time at which the departmental plan and the main estimates were tabled, a decision had not yet been made as to an extension. In addition to that reality, we had not quantified what that dollar amount would be, so it was impossible to put anything in.

Following that, we received a request for the extension, and the extension was granted.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Therefore when the plan came out, you were expecting the money just to sunset and the plan to be done at the time?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** That was the plan as of that moment.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Okay.

For the GIC appointment process, it was the same thing. You were expecting to wind down, because you were saying that year over year there would be a decrease for this year, but now there's almost \$4 million in the supplementary estimates for the GIC appointment process.

I'm trying to wrap my head around what's changed from when the plan came out. Were you expecting to be further along in the GIC process, or—?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** No. I would say for the ministers' offices and for the GICs, the story is very similar in that it was identified that we had a funding pressure, that it was costing more than what our budget was for those areas. Then the process for the GIC funding was changed several years ago, and a best estimate was made as to what that would cost. In the end, the workload has been greater than what was anticipated. It is a vast set of positions that we're doing in an open and transparent way—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** For the \$4 million in the supplementary estimates, are you able to give a ballpark breakdown of how much is for judges, how much is for Senate, how much is for this or that, or is it just too wide a range?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** What it's for is salaries, to pay our employees who do this work.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Right.

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** It's for that combination of the different pieces. It's for all of the positions done under the open and transparent process that we now have for GIC appointments.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** What I'm getting at is that the government has been very heavily criticized for the slow appointment process for judges. We're actually debating Bill C-75 in the House right now. Murderers are being set free, etc., because we don't have enough judges. The plan that came out just six months ago said there would be a decrease in funding, which is obviously because there was going to be less of a need for the GIC process. Now we see an uptick. Is that—

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** It wasn't about less need. Again, I'll take you back to—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Was it about just not having the planning ready at the time?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** I will just explain. Generally, from a budgeting perspective, what's in the departmental plan is approved funding. We can't say that we think we need more money and then go ahead and put that in the departmental plan. That's just not the process. We knew—

• (1615)

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I realize that, but you've identified in the plan that you knew there was going to be a decrease.

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** Yes, because that's what was approved, and so we worked on a funding request to identify the fact that we needed more funding to do these 1,300 positions that fall under this open and transparent—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I think that gets back to my question about —

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** —so we needed more funding for that, and if I could just finish on one point, I'd point out the fact that we've completed 950 appointments under this. I do want to make it clear that a lot of progress has been made on this file.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** That's great. We want to see progress, but again, when the plan came out, it showed that there was going to be a decrease in funding, year over year, in the GIC process. Then all of a sudden the money is back in. Were we just not ready to have this money continue, to have the money and planning process approved? Can I have my answer?

I want to go back very quickly. I know it's not you, but we asked this before. With respect to the mandate tracking website, who is responsible for reciting exactly what's there? I'm going to bring up two exact examples.

One is balancing the budget by 2019-20: “Underway—with challenges”. It's not under way with challenges, and it's not your fault. It's not going to get done.

The other one is paying public servants on time: “Underway—with challenges”. It's not under way with challenges. It's not halfway, period, and it will not happen within the mandate time.

Is it a political person who says, “Let's mislead Canadians”? Who's deciding that?

**The Chair:** You might have an opportunity to answer that question in the next round, but we're going to Monsieur Drouin for five minutes now.

[Translation]

**Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate my colleague's comments. But I have to say that a number of public servants are paid on time. I do not feel that it is fair to say that most public servants are not paid on time. So I believe that the website is correct.

I have one other comment. I also believe that it is necessary to mention that the commissioner of leaders' debates plays an important role. I am aware of the comments of some of my colleagues. However, as a francophone living in a minority situation, I want to remind the committee that, in 2015, there was a whole social media campaign with the hashtag #Nouscomptons, because Radio-Canada asked not one single question about francophone communities outside Quebec. I feel that it is important for the new commissioner to ensure that questions will be asked on francophone communities in minority situations.

Let me now move to the issue of public appointments. I see that, under the Privy Council Office in vote 1a of the supplementary estimates, that you are asking for \$3,882,746 to manage and oversee Governor in Council appointments. The last time I looked at this issue, the website was not yet up and running, but it is now. I see that it is a lot more transparent: positions are now posted on the website and Canadians can get information on them. Currently, are all the positions posted on the website?

[English]

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** I apologize. I'll have to confirm to the committee whether all positions are there. I do know that every effort is made to post positions in an open and transparent way. That is the whole goal of the process.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** What will the close to \$4 million be used for?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** That's used for salaries, largely.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Okay.

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** Going back to the previous question, when the work was originally resourced in budget 2016, an estimate was made as to what it would cost. The reality is there has been a much higher cost simply because the work is expansive. There's a lot of work that goes into all of these processes that PCO supports, and the progress being made has that cost. We've tried to cash-manage that amount, along with some other pressures; and the reality is that similar to some other departments, we're at a point that we can't cash-manage that by reallocation.

I think some of the recent collective agreement amounts that we have to absorb.... There are a number of different factors that I'm sure many of my colleagues from other departments understand.

As a result, we put in a funding request. That goes back to the timing question that Mr. McCauley asked about. We did not have that in time for the main estimates. We put that funding request in over the summer, got approval and did the Treasury Board submissions, and that's why it's only now coming through supplementary estimates (A). There is an ongoing portion of this that will be included in the main estimates for next year for not just that, but for the ministers' offices and other pieces as well.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Again with regard to the Governor in Council appointments, since the website has been up, with positions on the website, have we been tracking whether more people are applying? Do we know what the numbers are compared with those of 2015 and 2016?

• (1620)

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** I don't have the historical comparison, but I can tell you that since we launched this, since February 2016, we've had 27,000 applications come through. I think that's indicative of the fact that we're having greater reach by doing it in this open and transparent manner.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Those would exclude the Senate appointments.

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** Correct.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** That's just for positions on boards and whatnot.

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** Yes, it's for leadership positions.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** With regard to the physical security of systems and buildings, you have an amount of close to \$500,000. Essentially, what's that for? Is that for PCO buildings?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** It's for PCO buildings.

In budget 2016 we were approved a large amount of money to deal with some physical and IT issues. As you can appreciate, with events over the past few years, not just in Canada but elsewhere, physical security is of great importance to our department. Part of this was upgrading various aspects of our security.

As with any project, there are delays at times. This has been the only reprofile we've sought. This is simply money that we couldn't spend last year, that we're spending this year to finish some of the work we're doing around access control to our building.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Great. Thank you.

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

Mr. Blaikie, if you're within earshot, you have our final intervention of three minutes, please.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I thought we had another round of Conservative questions.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Oh, I do.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Kelly was on such a roll, I didn't want to preempt anything.

I know I have only three minutes, but I want to come back briefly to the question of the Treasury Board submission for the debates commission.

I've become a bit of a student of the Treasury Board submission process. I'm curious to know something. If we don't know—because it's up to the future commissioner, who hasn't yet been appointed, and the nominee doesn't have any role in determining the content of the submission—how many staff there are going to be, if we don't know where they're located, if we don't know whether there will be internal hires or secondments or whether the work is going to be contracted out, if we don't know how much travel is going to be represented within that budget, then without revealing any of the specific content of the submission—because I realize you can't—what could possibly be in the Treasury Board submission?

My understanding of a Treasury Board submission is that it's a spending plan. How are you costing things if you have no idea what the money is for? Isn't that the point of the Treasury Board submission? That's the moment when you say, "This is actually our detailed spending plan for the money." How do you have a Treasury Board submission, prepared and submitted to Treasury Board, without having any concept of any of those things that I just mentioned?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** I think there is a concept of generally....

Again, there are clear deliverables. It's important to keep in mind that while we don't necessarily know the exact configuration of it, there is a set of clear deliverables that Minister Gould committed to.

Really, it's about ensuring that there are two debates, one in each official language, with a view to reaching the largest number of Canadians possible.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Aren't the high-level objectives more what you would expect to see in a cabinet submission? The Treasury Board submission would present our costing—the FTEs we think it's going to take, our cost for equipment and office space, our cost for travel.

If you don't have those details, why would you be submitting to Treasury Board at this point, and what would you be submitting to Treasury Board?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** It would be a high-level spending plan with a best estimate of the breakdown.

Again, we know the total amount. We know the amount by fiscal year. There is only so much money, and it's all—

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** If you had something such as that for the budget process, presumably somehow we got to the \$745,000 number for vote 40, so how is this any more detailed than what was prepared for the budget?

We were told that what goes into the budget is this high-level costing, and the nitty-gritty comes when you file a Treasury Board submission, because that's when you have a sense of how many staff you're going to hire, how you're going to support those staff, and the other things you're going to do.

Therefore, what would be in the Treasury Board submission that you've submitted—without a commissioner weighing in, because you don't have one yet—that wasn't in the high-level spending estimate for the budget?

**Mr. Matthew Shea:** We have our best guess as to how it would be spent. We have a breakdown—

• (1625)

**The Chair:** We're going to have to leave it at that, Mr. Shea, only because we're completely out of time.

However, what I will say to all of our witnesses, particularly since in a couple of instances we've had incomplete answers because of a time shortage, is that should you have more comprehensive responses to some of the questions that our committee members have posed, I would encourage you to submit those written responses directly to our clerk. It would be to the benefit of our committee for you to do so as expeditiously as possible.

With that, ladies and gentlemen, I will suspend for just about five minutes while we have our next panel of witnesses approach the table.

Thank you all for being here.

We are suspended.

• (1625)

(Pause)

• (1625)

**The Chair:** I'd like to reconvene, if I may.

We have two sets of witnesses. One is from the Canada School of Public Service and the other is from the Public Service Commission.

I would like to welcome all witnesses here before us.

I believe, Mr. Sarantakis, you will be going first, and I believe you have an opening statement. If it could be 10 minutes or less, I would appreciate it greatly.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis (President, Canada School of Public Service):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm pleased to return to the committee in my new capacity as the president of the of the Canada School of Public Service, and I'm very pleased also to be bringing my experience at the Treasury Board Secretariat to the school.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

I am here today with my colleague Marc Bélisle, who is vice-president of the corporate services branch of the School of Public Service, to discuss the Supplementary Estimates (A) and the activities the funds will support.

[*English*]

The school is the common learning organization of the Government of Canada. We equip public servants with the knowledge, skills and competencies they need to fulfill their responsibilities to Canadians.

The school is preparing for a fast-paced digital future with ongoing refinements to its business model and its curriculum. Our mission is to keep learning as relevant, responsive and accessible as possible for Canadian civil servants.

We deliver learning, both in person at 13 locations across the country and online. Through the school, more than 270,000 public servants have access to about 100 instructor-led courses and about 300 online training schools. The school remains committed to a path of continuous improvement to serve Canada and Canadians. We want public servants to have learning at their fingertips wherever they are, whatever their learning preference, so they can do their jobs today and to be ready for their jobs tomorrow.

[*Translation*]

The school is getting ready for the road ahead by adding a host of innovative services to federal departments and agencies.

[English]

As a concrete example, Minister Brison, the President of the Treasury Board, recently announced the Digital Academy, which the Canada School of Public Service will build in partnership with the Office of the Chief Information Officer and the Canadian Digital Service to modernize training for federal civil servants in terms of their digital capacity and their digital ethos.

[Translation]

Other new projects of the school include leadership in the Free Agent initiative, temporary policy "surge capacity" for departments' own initiatives, and a new focus on disseminating trends in public policy and public administration throughout the federal government.

[English]

We're also refocusing the school along five new business lines to better position us to meet the demands of the future. In addition to the Digital Academy, which I mentioned Minister Brison launched less than a month ago, the other four business lines are as follows: indigenous learning, respectful and inclusive workplace, Government of Canada and public sector skills, and transferable skills. Going forward, every learning product at the school will fit into one of these five areas.

[Translation]

In delivering these changes, the school's most important resource is its people. Supporting employees means ensuring compensation and quickly resolving any pay issues. That brings us to the almost \$100,000 allocated through the supplementary estimates.

[English]

I'll briefly outline the work under way at the school in this respect.

In June, the school was selected to be part of the rollout of the new client service delivery model for pay stabilization. This is commonly called the pod system. Our collaboration with our pod system run by PSPC has been very good for improving quality in respect of our Phoenix issues. We established a series of escalation processes whereby we worked to deal with Phoenix issues as rapidly as possible. We've actually started reducing the backlog in our open cases significantly, in the order of 25%.

The pod overall has been very helpful to the school. In addition to the school's responsibility for its own employees, we have offered training to other federal government employees, whereby we've hosted material that has been put to us by PSPC.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, the school continues to work hard to modernize itself and to serve the Canadian public service, and through them serve Canadians, in the best way possible for the future.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, and belated congratulations on your recent appointment.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** Thank you, sir.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Borbey, it's good to see you once again. You have an opening statement, sir.

[Translation]

**Mr. Patrick Borbey (President, Public Service Commission):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Hello, and good afternoon.

I am happy to appear before you today, accompanied by Eva Jacobs, our general director for finances and administration, to discuss the Supplementary Estimates (A) of the Public Service Commission of Canada.

• (1635)

[English]

The Public Service Commission of Canada promotes and safeguards merit-based appointments. In addition to this, it protects the non-partisan nature of the public service in collaboration with our stakeholders throughout the public service.

The PSC reports to Parliament directly on its mandate. An Order in Council was recently passed, designating the president of the Queen's Privy Council as the minister who will table our annual reports and other reports to Parliament on our behalf. We expect that our 2017-18 annual report will be tabled in early December.

I'm expecting it's going to be a very good read.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** It should be a page-turner.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

[Translation]

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** Our Supplementary Estimates (A) identify \$99,196, which was provided for in Budget 2018. These funds were allocated to us for only one year in order to help us address the backlog related to the Phoenix pay system, as well as to strengthen our internal capacity to resolve the human resources and pay administration issues. The formula used by Treasury Board Secretariat to allocate funds to organizations takes into account the size of the organization itself.

[English]

This one year of funding was provided to all organizations supported by the Miramichi pay centre. The PSC is working hard to regularize the pay situation of its employees and is taking action on as many fronts as possible to minimize the impact of Phoenix issues. Generally speaking, we seem to be following the same trends as other departments and agencies served by the pay centre.

The PSC's planned FTE count for 2018-19 is 813. With respect to errors in pay, at this time we have 327 employees who have been overpaid and 124 who have been underpaid. The average overpayment is about \$6,200. I should note that in the case of about 35% of these individuals, the overpayment is less than \$1,000. Since 2016, we have issued a total of 244 emergency salary advances to 146 employees.

[Translation]

We took measures to ensure that commission employees receive accurate pay as quickly as possible. We hired a senior level employee to oversee and address pay issues. We established a working group made up of both human resources and finance officials. The group works closely together to obtain a comprehensive and integrated view of pay issues within the Public Service Commission, and we implement strategies to support our employees.

Our managers and employees took mandatory training to ensure they understand their roles and responsibilities in the HR-to-pay stabilization process. Measures were taken in regard to timely data capture, as well as the accuracy and integrity of data related to pay. We actively participate in the HR-to-pay coordination committee meetings led by Public Services and Procurement Canada.

[English]

Additional efforts have been dedicated to maintaining a high level of accuracy in our salary management system, which is critical to providing accurate data that allows us to monitor pay transactions, identify anomalies and take appropriate action before we approve pay transactions.

Our efforts include reconciling actual salary expenditures to salary system-generated forecasts for every pay file; investigating variances and bringing these to the attention of the pay centre, as appropriate; intercepting pay in which amounts are unusual, in order to address these early on in the process and prevent underpayments and overpayments; and developing and implementing a departmental emergency salary advance process.

Mr. Chair, earlier this week, on November 6 and 7, senior Public Service Commission officials visited the pay centre to further develop partnerships and to collaborate with them regarding a new approach to processing pay transactions as we move to the new pay pod model that was mentioned by Taki. This new approach will result in more efficient and comprehensive resolutions of pay issues and a reduction of backlogged cases. We expect to move to the pay pod model in May 2019.

• (1640)

[Translation]

We thank you for your interest in our supplementary estimates and, more generally, for the interest you have shown in the Government of Canada staffing process, including, since we are celebrating Veterans' Week, the hiring of veterans.

We would be pleased to answer any questions you may have about our supplementary estimates. We would also be happy to answer any questions in regard to hiring within Canada's public service.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, all of you.

We will start with Mr. Peterson for seven minutes.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here with us today and for informing us as we go over these estimates.

I'm going to start with you, Mr. Sarantakis. Welcome to the role. Congratulations on the new role.

I don't think we've had you before at committee.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** No, it's my first time.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Could you take a minute or two to talk about some of your vision for the school, what your mandate is, and how you're going to make sure that our public service continues to have all the learning resources that it needs?

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** The mandate of the school has always been to train civil servants in what's called the "common learning" of the Government of Canada, meaning things that are applicable to people as civil servants.

Upon my appointment, I was given a very strong mandate from Minister Brison to make the school a value-added organization, to make it an organization that civil servants want to use frequently to not only improve what they do now, but to further their functions and skills in the future.

As part of that, we're doing a little bit of a reorganization. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we're flipping the school inside out and saying, "Here are our five business lines." They are business lines that align very well with what Canadians expect from us, I think.

The first is indigenous learning. We're going to set up a unit to help the indigenous population within the Government of Canada, and also to kind of teach the indigenous fact, because that's very important to Canadians.

The second is an inclusive and respectful workplace. As a large organization, we have a lot of issues in the Government of Canada that are not uncommon to other large employers, things like harassment and inclusion. You have survey data in front of you that shows these things. We want to teach our civil servants how to better cope with things like difficult conversations, how to promote harassment-free environments, etc.

The third new business line is what we're calling "Government of Canada skills". These are skills that are specific to you as a civil servant. If you become a manager, a director or an assistant deputy minister, they might include your financial delegations and the like. It's kind of the nuts and bolts of being a civil servant.

The fourth is the flip side of that, which we're calling "transferable skills". These are skills that you learn and use everywhere, whether you're at Amazon, IBM, a small organization or the Government of Canada. These are things like project management, risk management and communication.

Our final one, which is actually the first one I mentioned, is our Digital Academy. We want to make sure that Canadian civil servants are among the most digitally literate in the world. If you go on our website, you'll see a couple of things that we've started. The first is Minister Brison's vision for digital, which is on our website. The second is that we've already started doing some work on artificial intelligence, and you can see a couple of very interesting videos on how the future of artificial intelligence will impact the civil service.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Excellent. Thank you for that response.

Mr. Borbey, this kind of segues into your role. I know you've been before this committee a number of times. Most recently, I think we were talking about some of the delays in hiring and how we can help address that issue and how we can prioritize some of it.

Working with the school, do you see this as a bit of a change in the vision of the learning model? Do you see this as dovetailing with your ability to hire and retain quality talent?

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** Yes. Once we hire and select individuals, when it comes to orienting them into the public service and then accompanying them throughout their careers at various stages, I think the school plays an extremely important role with what their learning requirements may be.

We have always worked closely with the school, and we will continue to do so. There are three specific areas where we work closely.

First are courses related to staffing. Before managers are even delegated authority for staffing, they have to go through a curriculum and demonstrate that they understand the requirements of the staffing system. That's an area where we collaborate. In fact, one of our employees is on secondment with the school and helps deliver some of that training.

The second area that is extremely important, as we continue to want to expand our student employment, is the orientation when students come in to help them make the transition into the government. We provide learning events tailored to their specific needs. For example, last year we worked very closely with the school on a learning program tailored to our indigenous summer employment opportunity, which is delivered across the country. Again, the school has the capacity to do that across the country, so there is a good partnership there.

The last one I would mention is leadership development. As we continue to see the need for renewal in the public service, we need to make sure that our top leaders are well equipped to deal with the issues Taki talked about, creating the right kind of workplace and environment, one that is respectful and harassment free. Through our Personnel Psychology Centre, we help the school in assessing candidates for leadership programs and developing the right kind of coaching and support based on the tools we can use, including psychometric assessments, in some cases.

Those are three ways we work closely with the school.

• (1645)

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Excellent. Thank you for sharing that with us. I see that your requests are not only identical in amount but identical

in purpose. Is there a reason the numbers are exactly the same? Is there some cap on this number?

First of all, congratulations on targeting it as a priority to get resources to make sure that employees are paid on time. I'm glad that you guys noticed that it's a priority and an important role, and the amounts are exactly the same.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** The amount actually wasn't determined by us. It was determined by Treasury Board Secretariat on a formula basis. The formula spat out that this is what you get, this is what you get, and so on.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Okay.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** We're similarly sized organizations.

**Mr. Kyle Peterson:** Yes, I imagine the number of employees or something would be a big factor in that formula.

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Mr. McCauley, you have seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Welcome back, Mr. Sarantakis. Congratulations. I understand that it's the highlight of everyone's year to be in front of OGGO for estimates, so I'm glad you're able to be part of it. It's an early Christmas.

You both touched on the Phoenix issue. You both have \$99,000 in your departments. Twenty different departments got that exact amount. Obviously, you do not have the exact plan for it. What exactly will that be used for?

Why don't you go first, Mr. Sarantakis?

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** We have hired two people full time for a shortened period, from now until the end of the fiscal period, with the \$99,000. Previously—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** To do what?

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** It is to basically help employees navigate the system. We've hired an AS and a CR.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** We've obviously all dealt with Phoenix a lot. The Auditor General's report came out recently, and it is still very critical about the training. We've gone out in the field. I know Mr. Blaikie has, and I met with Correctional Services recently. It's not your fault, but they were very dismissive of the quality of the training.

What do you see as your role in getting better training for the public servants on Phoenix? I can't help but note the irony that the people who do training for the government have to bring in people to help their own people because they haven't been trained properly on Phoenix.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** You're not going to hear those words from me because I didn't say that, but I'll come to that in a moment.

In terms of the training we offer, it comes in two forms, neither of which were developed by the school. We've been platform hosts for these. The first, the core training that the Treasury Board Secretariat has requested that everybody in the system go through, was developed by PSPC, which is also the provider of Phoenix.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Do we need to review that? Should a third party, either your department Mr. Borbey's, review the actual quality of that training?

• (1650)

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** I wouldn't disagree with that suggestion. We were actually going to look into that.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Fantastic. Thank you.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** We've run about 127,000 people through that training, and we've also run 23,000 delegated managers through that training. The Treasury Board Secretariat thought it was really important to make that mandatory. That's kind of the government-wide system.

Because so many people have been affected, as Mr. Borbey mentioned, it's a significant percentage of both our departments. In our department, it's in the order of three out of every four employees

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** It sounds like a challenge.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** —who have been affected. Prior to receiving the \$99,000, we had six employees working on this to kind of go through and correct the issues. Now we have eight. That doesn't sound like a lot, but it's a 33% increase, so we've been able to take an almost 33% cut on the stock of our problems.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Great.

Mr. Borbey, is it the same kind of—

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** I'll ask Ms. Jacobs to answer on our behalf.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I don't want to deprive you of the OGGO experience.

**Ms. Eva Jacobs (Director General, Finance and Administration, Public Service Commission):** Exactly. The \$99,000 is really a small amount, right?

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'm not criticizing. I'm just wondering what it's for.

**Ms. Eva Jacobs:** What we're spending right now to try to resolve the Phoenix issues is really about \$840,000. We have a team of finance people dedicated to this, as well as HR. We did hire one person to bridge the gap between the two, because sometimes the two don't necessarily connect. We do have dedicated people doing this, on top of the other people who were already there. Their workloads have just increased.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Great.

**Ms. Eva Jacobs:** It is a drop in the bucket for what we're doing, but it definitely—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** It's more to know exactly what it's for, because we're trying to get a handle on what each department is doing. When we're chatting, it does sound like every department has a different need and a different plan for that.

I have one last question, Mr. Borbey. We're just trying to trace some of the funding as it goes between departments in terms of the way the estimates and the budget are done. I'm just wondering if you could walk us through B-base and C-base funding for employees.

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** You said B-base and C-base. I'm not sure I follow. We have our main estimates—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** This is just for general funding. It's not out of the estimates, but just for general people working for the public service.

I may have to follow up through a different department. It's just that information has come back to us about certain employees who should be at a certain base getting funded through a different—

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** Okay.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** It's not regarding the estimates. It's regarding general public service.

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** A-base is generally recognized as the budget that normally, on a year-to-year basis, doesn't change. This is subject to parliamentary approval, of course, as main estimates always are. B-base budgets are recognized as those items that are approved for a very specific purpose. It could be a strategy or a new program, but it's a one-time item that's going to last two years, and I think that's when—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** The indeterminate employees should not be considered for B-base or C-base, should they?

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** That's up to the manager to decide. If you want to take a risk, if you have money that's only available for one or two years.... The best way to get the resources you need is to offer indeterminate employment, but you know that you'll be able to redeploy those people to other positions elsewhere. There's a lot of mobility in the public service, right? You can have—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Should we have general rules about what's A-base, B-base, or C-base, so that we don't have indeterminate positions that should be A-base getting funded through B or C?

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** I don't think that's necessary. I think managers should have the flexibility. In cases where there may be a reduction in budget, then of course the priority system is also there to backstop the government and departments. We manage the priority system, so on behalf of the government, we would then look at employees who are displaced and find ways to redeploy them to other positions through the priority system.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** If I may, I could supplement that. What you're asking really is—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Is it supplementary estimates (A)?

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** No. What you're asking is the nature of the employment versus the funding that the department receives. Typically, as Patrick said in a different way, most organizations in the Government of Canada have an attrition level of anywhere from 10% to 20%, so you know every year that x many people are going to move, and that allows you to move your employees around between priorities.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** You're both confident that it's a perfectly valid, above board way to operate.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** Well, we've never blown our vote, so to speak. No organization has.

•(1655)

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

Mr. Blaikie, you're up for seven minutes.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Thank you very much.

I just want to come back to where you said that at the Canada School of Public Service you had hired two staff, or that it cost \$99,196 to hire two staff, for the balance of the year.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** Yes.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** It's the same number for the Public Service Commission.

Did you guys hire essentially the exact same staff here? Is it just coincidence that the figure is same?

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** Yes.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** How is it that you guys ended up with the same figure?

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** It's a formula base.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** It's just the standard.

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** It's based on the amount of money that was available to distribute to departments.

We got \$99,000. We're spending more than that on pay-related issues.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Okay.

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** We did hire one senior person. That's roughly the salary for a senior person.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Okay. It's not a function of what it costs for a particular type of FTE to do that type of work, but a function of the total amount and then how it was divided.

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** Yes.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Okay. Thank you. That's what I was wondering.

I apologize if there's some repetition, but could you each just tell us how many employees you guys serve in terms of administering pay?

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** For the Public Service Commission, I believe I had 813 in my notes.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** We're in the order of 600.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Okay.

Based on your experience with the pay pod system, how easy do you think it would be to roll out to other departments? Was this a pretty smooth process? Is it a process that's very specific to each department?

Do you think your success bodes well and you would say that this is the model and it's just a matter of other departments having the funds to be able to implement this system; or would you say this worked great for us, but for larger departments it might not be the model?

What are some of the lessons learned?

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** In terms of us, as I said, we started in July on the pay pod. The big benefit of the pay pod has been that you have the same people working on your files all the time, and they open a ticket. If you're not in a pod, it's almost a first-come, first-served type of thing and the ticket opens and closes. The pay pod deals with the issues in a consistent manner. People develop an expertise on what the Coast Guard does or what the Canada School of Public Service does. In effect, the pay pod lets the pay advisers at PSPC start learning the particularities of the departments, and therefore they get more efficient.

My understanding of the pay pods in general has been that they've been a dramatic success. Our experience at the Canada school in particular has been in the order of a one-third reduction in the backlog. I think that's why the government is announcing that it's going to continue with the pay pod acceleration.

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** At this point, we're not on that system, but we're getting ready. Again, we have two people who were in Miramichi earlier this week as part of the preliminary work to get ready to be on a pay pod arrangement.

We're hoping to be on it by next May. In the meantime, we continue to try to resolve the issues as best we can with the resources that are available to us.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Okay.

For the Canada School of Public Service, I understand that the queue of open cases went down by about 25%. The backlog went down by 35%.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** Yes. That's pretty significant in just a few months.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I suppose that the decrease in the backlog is offset somewhat by new cases.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Despite some progress, which is good and means that we're getting better at dealing with problems once they arise, what about progress in terms of not having problems in the first place?

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** Yes, that's the key, because you can't break the back of the curve until you stop adding to the problems.

I'll just walk you through a typical month. Right now, we're still experiencing in the order of about 400 questions on pay every month.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Wow.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** We look at all of them. They're not problems.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** That's on about 600 employees.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** Right, but I'll walk you through, because there's more.

We get about 400 questions every month on pay, because people now are not very trusting of their pay. We investigate all of them, but about 60 of them on average are more than "No, that's just because the year changed and your pay dropped by \$30, so there's no issue."

Out of the 400 questions, in about 60 of them we call on these eight people, two of whom have come from the \$99,000, and we say, "That's a problem." We fix about two-thirds of those problems ourselves. The last third, about 20, we have to refer to the pod to actually get done.

• (1700)

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Okay.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** Every month we add, on average, another 20 problems. At some point, if they're fixing more than 20 problems a month, we're going to end up in a good place, but we're not there yet.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Right. It's better to take two steps forward and one back than one forward and two back.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** Exactly.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** All right. Thank you very much for sharing that experience with us.

**The Chair:** We're going now to our final seven-minute intervention.

Go ahead, Mr. Drouin.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Mr. Chair, I doubt it will be seven minutes. I think we have had plenty of information on \$100,000.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** I do want to ask this: Is the reason the amount is so low for supplementary estimates (A) a result of having the main estimates reflect the budget? Just being a small amount.... I mean, this is less than 0.0015% of the budget of your main estimates. Is that a result of the main estimates now reflecting the budget? Do you understand...?

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** Well, I think it was based on a formula that was driven by the number of FTEs that you have in your organization.

We're both organizations that have fewer than 1,000, so I suspect the formula drove the answer of \$99,000. If a few other organizations about our size were to appear here as well, they probably would have the same amount. Now, for the RCMP or Parks Canada, those amounts are much bigger because they have thousands more employees compared to us.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** In terms of why it's in the supplementary estimates (A), it's simply because it didn't make it in time for the main estimates. As such, in order for us to actually spend the money this year, we have to come before you today, as part of your process, to get that on our reference levels.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Well, I'm glad we've spent more than 25 minutes talking about \$100,000.

I appreciate your coming to committee.

Mr. Borbey, unlike in previous committee meetings, I'm not going to ask you about how you're doing on hiring millennials, so you're off the hook this time.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** My annual report—

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** He's prepared.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** My annual report will address that, and I'd be happy to come back.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** I have a quick question for you.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** You were saying that you received many queries to the pod from employees saying that they don't trust the system. How many have you had on the CRA?

The CRA has been a major problem for some of my employees, who complain to me that because they have been overpaid or there's been a pay problem, the CRA has come after them. How have you coordinated with the CRA to ensure that employees don't face that harassment from the CRA?

**Mr. Patrick Borbey:** This has been an issue over the last two years. We've worked collectively and closely with the CRA to better coordinate, to make sure that at the end of the day there are fewer problems. I know, for example, that the T4 issue has been resolved this year. People were getting surprises through their T4s at the last minute. I think that's been largely resolved. We're hoping that it's going to be much smoother this year.

**Mr. Taki Sarantakis:** There are two things. The first is general. With respect to Phoenix and the CRA, you're much better off being underpaid than overpaid. If you're underpaid, we can fix that, as organizations, quickly. If you're overpaid, it's far, far more complicated.

What we did when I was at the Treasury Board Secretariat and what we're going to do this year at the school is that if any of our employees are caught in the situation of being in an overpayment, which is a very difficult situation, we're actually going to have on-site tax assistance to help them navigate the system. We did that last year at TBS. It helped about 22 people, and they were inordinately grateful.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Thank you.

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

Gentlemen and lady, I know this is a bit of a truncated meeting, but I don't think that's a bad thing. Thank you all for being here. We appreciate your attendance.

To all of my colleagues, I hope you have a good Remembrance Week full of events.

The meeting is adjourned.



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