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# Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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Chair: Mr. Robert Kitchen





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• (1905)

[*English*]

**The Chair (Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)):** Thank you, everybody, for being here today. I would like to call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number five of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

The committee is meeting today from 7:09 to 9:09 to hear from the President of the Treasury Board and officials on the main estimates 2020-21. I would like to thank the president and the officials, who have agreed to stay longer so we can get this in. I appreciate that.

Pursuant to the motion adopted by the House on Wednesday, September 23, the committee may continue to sit in a hybrid format. This means that members can participate either in person in the committee room or by video conference via Zoom.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. Interpretation in this video conference will work very much as it does in a regular committee meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of either floor, English or French. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. When you are not speaking, we ask that you keep your mike muted. To raise a point of order during the meeting, committee members should ensure that their microphone is unmuted and say “point of order” to get the chair’s attention.

In order to ensure social distancing in the committee room, if you need to speak privately with the clerk or the analysts during the meeting, please email him through the committee email address.

Yesterday, the clerk sent out the speaking notes for the President of the Treasury Board. I will now invite the President of the Treasury Board to make his opening statement and mind briefly introduce those who are with him as well. I’d appreciate that.

Mr. Minister.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to begin by thanking the committee members for having invited me to discuss the 2020-2021 main estimates, which were initially tabled last February.

I will also comment very briefly on the supplementary estimates (B), which were tabled recently.

[*English*]

As you invited me to do, I am going to introduce to members of the committee the staff who will be here to assist me today. With me are Glenn Purves, assistant secretary, expenditure management sector; Karen Cahill, assistant secretary and chief financial officer; and Sandra Hassan, assistant deputy minister, employment conditions and labour relations.

To begin I would like to bring your attention to the main estimates of 2020-21. These main estimates provide a detailed view of responsible government spending to support the creation of opportunities for Canadians from coast to coast to coast and, therefore, reinforce Canada’s status as a responsible citizen of the global community. Following the recent prorogation and the recent return of Parliament, these same main estimates were re-tabled on September 30 to allow their continued study.

They present a total of \$125.1 billion of budgetary voted expenditures, and \$87.2 million in non-budgetary voted expenditures.

These main estimates also include information on \$179.5 billion of statutory budgetary spending and \$3 billion of statutory non-budgetary spending.

As the members of the committee continue to review the main estimates and supporting documentation, it will become clear to everyone that the government’s spending plan is closely aligned with the priorities expressed by Canadians in the pandemic.

It also includes the understanding that Canada must continue to work towards reconciliation with indigenous peoples. The expenditure plan, therefore, describes significant amounts for indigenous health and social services, for greater access to early learning opportunities, and for new investments to advance the proven benefits of indigenous self-determination in education.

Mr. Chair, Canadians understand that we have an obligation to be a force for good here in Canada but also in the world. The spending plans in the main estimates, therefore, support measures to advance human rights, invest in our armed forces and diversify Canada’s trade and investment opportunities.

[Translation]

We know that the environment and the economy go hand in hand, and that is why the expenditure plan includes major investments for measures that favour both solid growth and climate change mitigation.

As for my own department, the Treasury Board Secretariat, expenditures identified include \$2.2 billion for us to discharge our obligations with respect to public service insurance plans, as well as a \$282,000 contribution to the Open Government Partnership.

The main estimates also include central funds, which are essential to help the government deal with urgent matters, and to speed up the implementation of programs and services responsibly.

I will now speak very briefly about the 2020-2021 supplementary estimates (B)

These supplementary estimates provide information about expenditures that were incomplete when the main estimates were being prepared, but that have since been clarified to factor in changes made to a number of programs and services.

The 2020-2021 supplementary estimates (B) continue to report expenditures authorized for COVID-19 under the Emergency Measures Act, which ensures transparency and accountability in the delivery of programs and services to Canadians.

• (1910)

[English]

These estimates present a total of \$79.2 billion in budgetary spending, including \$20.9 billion to be voted on by Parliament and \$58.3 billion in forecasted statutory expenditures. Of these amounts, roughly 74% of the voted requirements and 96% of the additional statutory forecasts are for the government's emergency and economic responses to COVID-19.

The voted spending in these estimates for emergency responses to COVID-19 includes \$5.4 billion for medical research and vaccine development and \$2.2 billion for purchases of personal protective equipment, medical equipment and supplies.

There are also economic responses to the pandemic. These include \$2.4 billion in support for small and medium-sized businesses, salary top-ups for essential workers, and funding for provinces and territories to safely restart their economies and bring students back to school.

In addition, my department, the Treasury Board Secretariat, will receive \$585 million for public service insurance plans and programs.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, our government has the responsibility to ensure that Canadians have the support they need during the COVID-19 pandemic and to promote economic recovery and prosperity going forward. We do this by investing in critical health care and supporting the safe restart of our economy. Our spending plans will ensure that Canada and Canadians thrive and succeed.

[Translation]

The senior officials and I would like to thank you once again for your invitation to the committee. We will be more than happy to answer any questions you may have.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister Duclos. We appreciate that.

Now we'll go to our first round, which is for six minutes. The first up will be Mr. Paul-Hus for the Conservatives.

Mr. Paul-Hus.

**Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

I don't want to intervene, but I'm hearing that the staff are having some issues calling in, so if somebody could look at that, it would be great.

**The Chair:** Certainly. If everyone could just hold on for a second, we'll straighten this out.

We believe it's been fixed now, so we will try continuing. If there's still an issue, we will address it, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Paul-Hus.

[Translation]

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

Thank you, Minister, for being with us this evening.

I would like to begin by informing you and your team that we are here to discuss the main estimates. You will be returning in a few weeks to speak to us about the supplementary estimates (B).

First of all, I would like to know if you have any idea of when the government will be tabling the budget.

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Thank you for your question, Mr. Paul-Hus.

I'm delighted to be here with you today, and look forward to hearing from you about coming again to speak at greater length about the supplementary estimates (B). These estimates are integrated, however, and it is important for the members of your committee to understand how the expenditures are complementary and integrated into both the main and supplementary estimates.

As for the coming economic statement, my colleague the Minister of Finance is working very hard on it, as you might well suspect, and I know that she is eager to announce the exact date as soon as possible.

• (1915)

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Thank you, Minister.

I will now move on to my next question.

I have read the Treasury Board's Contracting Policy. Can you explain why your former colleague Frank Baylis was awarded a contract not long after leaving his job?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Once again, I'm pleased to be able to answer this question promptly knowing that Ms. Anand, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, has already announced that she will be able to visit you soon. I know that she is keen to do so. That will give you an opportunity to put the question to her.

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** I am aware that contracting is Ms. Anand's responsibility. However, the Treasury Board prepares the guidelines.

For instance, can you tell me whether or not your policy allows a shell company like FTI Professional Grade to be awarded a \$237 million contract for ventilators made by Mr. Baylis's company?

Does the policy not state that it is important to “ensure that the fees paid do not exceed the appropriate market rate for the service provided”? How can the failure to comply with Treasury Board directives be explained?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** That's an excellent question.

As you mentioned, the Treasury Board is responsible for providing directives to all Canadian government departments, in particular, as you noted, in matters of procurement. The ministers concerned are there to apply these directives in accordance with their responsibilities and their assigned areas of authority. Ms. Anand is the person who can provide you with the details of this particular case.

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Okay.

Mr. Minister, I would like to return to my first question. You spoke about the economic statement, but what I am speaking about is the budget. We still don't have a budget.

We are, of course, aware that the pandemic arrived at the same time, but what has been happening since then? Are you expecting to table the budget?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Those are excellent questions.

Naturally, we would prefer not to be experiencing this COVID-19 crisis. If we had a magic wand that could get us out of it, we would wave it immediately. But we have to take the current context into account because it is making things very difficult for Canadians in terms of health and the economy. The Minister of Finance, Ms. Freeland, will be happy to give you further details about any future delays and key moments.

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Thank you.

The auditor general is overwhelmed right now because of all the investigations she has to conduct into instances of public fund mismanagement. Her audits are currently compromised because she lacks the funds to do her work.

Will the transfer of funds be approved soon?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** We have been having excellent discussions with the auditor general. You yourself heard her say that she was very pleased with the discussions, and with the Canadian government's attitude and receptiveness. She is, of course, very happy

about our 2018 funding, which enabled her to hire 38 more full-time people. She interacts highly effectively with the Minister of Finance because it is very important for discussions to be based on accurate information, as you are well aware, and as you manage to do so well yourself.

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** At the Treasury Board, there are also guidelines in its Guidance for Drafters of Treasury Board Submissions, which provides information for everyone on matters pertaining to financial policy and contracting.

I have a question about the WE organization. There is a problem in terms of French. When the contract was awarded, there was nothing in it about French, or even Quebec. And yet the Treasury Board directives clearly state that “In all circumstances, you must conduct an Official Languages Impact Analysis.”

Was such a study conducted for the WE organization?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** I'm glad you asked that question, Mr. Paul-Hus. You and I are both Quebecers and francophones, and we firmly believe in the importance of ensuring that the public service can work in French, wherever employees wish to do so, and that services in French are offered to Canadians wherever they may live in Canada, and certainly in Quebec. It's not just a directive, but a fundamentally important policy that—

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Minister, my question was whether such a study had been conducted? If so, could we have the document?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** The directives apply to all policies and programs in all departments and, accordingly—

Can you still hear me?

• (1920)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, it's my mike that's doing that.

I just want to let Mr. Paul-Hus know that he has 30 seconds.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Okay.

Mr. Minister, was a study of the impact on official languages conducted for the WE organization? If so, could you provide the document to us?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** As I was saying, you and I fully understand that this is an extremely important matter. It's about whether the Canadian government is capable of offering services in French to francophones across Canada. There is a Treasury Board policy and requirement that applies to all programs and services in all departments. The same policy applies everywhere, and it is up to each minister to ensure that the policy is followed.

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** We agree then that it is ultimately your responsibility as the Treasury Board president. If the document is available, we would like to see it.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

We will now go to Mr. MacKinnon, for the Liberals.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good evening to my committee colleagues.

I would like to welcome the minister as well as Ms. Cahill, Ms. Hassan and Mr. Purves.

I am delighted to see you all again.

I would like to begin, as the member of Parliament for Gatineau, by saying how grateful I am to the public servants who work day and night, as eloquently evidenced by the presence of those who are here this evening, often under extremely difficult conditions, to get us through this pandemic. Mr. Duclos, could you please, on behalf of us all, I believe, express the gratitude of each and every elected member to all public service employees.

That, precisely, is what I want to talk about. You perform a key role as the president of the Treasury Board because the Treasury Board Secretariat is the employer of the entire public service.

Needless to say, as a Quebec member for Gatineau, I was troubled by recent comments from the official languages commissioner, Mr. Théberge, according to whom official language and language of work provisions are not being followed in the workplace, virtually or otherwise, during the pandemic.

Mr. Duclos, what action have you taken, or are you going to take, in response to Mr. Théberge's comments, or since the start of the pandemic, to ensure that official language and language of work provisions are followed during the pandemic?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Thank you, Mr. MacKinnon.

I very much enjoy hearing what you have to say because you are a member from the national capital region and are fortunate to have in your riding a large number of public servants who are always hard-working, and especially so under the strenuous conditions of the pandemic. Both personally and professionally, things have often been getting more complex since the month of March. I appreciate hearing you express this gratitude.

Unlike you, I do not have quite so many federal public servants in my riding, but I live in another national capital area in which there are also many public servants. In both Quebec City and Gatineau, I can assure you that we are extremely grateful for their work during the pandemic.

But in Ottawa, more so than in Quebec City, we are also responsible for affirming the right of public servants to work in the official language of their choice, particularly in French. That's why, as soon as I heard Mr. Théberge and others report some concerns and even complaints about the ability to work in French, I wrote to all my ministerial colleagues asking them to ensure that this right is exercised in designated bilingual areas, including the national capital, within their respective departments.

It's more than a right; it's also a matter of work quality. If we want information to be conveyed properly, and if we want everyone to be able to develop and work to their full potential, then peo-

ple need to be able to work in their preferred official language. In many instances, in Gatineau and elsewhere, this means working in French.

• (1925)

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** Thank you, Minister, for attending to this matter so quickly.

Of course, in a pandemic which has forced us to work virtually, it may be difficult for employers to maintain the corporate culture, whether generally or in terms of official languages. It might be harder to motivate people, encourage teamwork and mutual support among colleagues, and to obtain interdepartmental collaboration.

Can you give some examples of things that would enable the Government of Canada to preserve corporate or workplace culture during the crisis?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Mr. MacKinnon, you have once again put your finger on something important. There is no doubt that we have been undergoing a major upheaval for several months now. Health and the economy come to mind immediately, but there is also technology. Over the past few months, the federal public service has made huge changes that would have been unthinkable in normal times. For example, the number of times people have securely accessed systems while working from home has increased by 72%. Out of 287,000 public service workers, 200,000 connect remotely to public service systems. The number of minutes public service employees spend teleconferencing with one another has tripled.

There have thus been many technological changes. Unfortunately, because of how rapidly everything has happened, some things were not handled as well as others and we need to fix them quickly. One such area is the ability to work in the preferred official language. We have to make adjustments there.

That is in fact what happened with the House of Commons. We initially had trouble finding the right button to press for interpretation. Even more substantial adjustments are required elsewhere in the public service.

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** Thank you, Minister. It's—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. MacKinnon. Unfortunately, your time is up.

Ms. Vignola, you are next for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ):** Thank you for being with us this evening, Mr. Duclos.

The Treasury Board Secretariat contributes \$282,000 to the Open Government Partnership, and sits on its board of directors.

How is it possible for the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, an independent organization, to have said in its report today on the 2020-2021 supplementary estimates (B) that “the amount of information that is publicly available to track this spending is lacking, thus making it more challenging for parliamentarians to perform their critical role in overseeing Government spending and holding it to account”?

For members of Parliament, everything is perfectly transparent. Why is this not the case for the government? This is one of the three aspects mentioned. How can the government fail to be transparent when it contributes to the Open Government Partnership, and sits on its board of directors?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Thank you for having asked that question Mrs. Vignola. It allows me to link these two aspects.

For many years now, Canada has been an important, and even a key, player in the Open Government Partnership, and we take great pride in this. Not only do we learn from best practices abroad, but we also give insights to other governments through our openness and transparency.

As for accountability, openness and transparency during this COVID-19 pandemic, you are absolutely right about the fact that things have been moving very quickly. And programs have been adjusting as quickly as the situation evolves. Just today, as you mentioned, measures have been identified. We will be called upon to vote tomorrow on a bill that would yet again change some key aspects of the government's economic response.

Information is nonetheless transmitted effectively and transparently. On the Open Government Portal, there are 316 postings exclusively about COVID-19 that can be consulted at any time. If you go to the GC InfoBase—

• (1930)

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Excuse me for interrupting, Mr. Duclos. We have indeed received all kinds of information on COVID-19. But I'm talking about budgetary transparency. As members, if we spend \$50 on gifts at a Dollarama store, it shows up in our budgets. Now when ordinary mortals—and I include myself in that group—look at budgets, they wonder what that's all about.

I'm not talking about the COVID-19 budget here. We know now what PPE means because we hear about it all the time from the media. What I am talking about is the everyday grind of Parliament. We wonder what such and such a line item means. It's all so fuzzy. And yet the data are there. The problem is simply that the disaggregation process creates a lack of transparency somewhere.

How can there be so little routine transparency, except for the COVID-19 situation, when you are in the Open Government Partnership?

You have to walk the talk. In other words, you have to be consistent.

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** I'm going to add two things to what I said earlier.

First of all, in addition to the Open Government Partnership portal, there is the GC InfoBase, which contains all the detailed financial information about COVID-19.

Secondly, we acknowledge just how difficult it is for committee members and members of Parliament to monitor it all. It is incredibly complicated. A lot is happening. Accounting methods are not the same at the Department of Finance as they are at the Treasury Board. Today, we are discussing the main estimates. These are estimates, not the actual amounts that will have been spent by the end of the fiscal year. The estimates and the actual expenditures have to be reconciled. There is the cash method of accounting and accrual accounting. It's very complicated for everyone, but we are doing our utmost with respect to transparency.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much, Mr. Duclos. As you put it, we can always do better.

I also noticed that the funds for the Public Service Health Care Plan were cut. Why were they eliminated and why were they not entered in the department's base expenditures? As these amounts can be forecast, I do not understand why only parts of them are in the main estimates, requiring the calculation of other parts for inclusion in the supplementary estimates (A), (B), (C), and so on right up to (Z) if you want.

Expenditures for the Public Service Health Care Plan can be estimated, can't they?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** On the contrary, the budgets were increased. They may have been arranged in a way that made them more difficult to understand. I was lucky to have advice from experts, including Ms. Hassan.

Ms. Hassan, could you give us some brief details about the health care plans and access to insurance benefits? Could you explain where they fit into the main estimates?

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I would like to point out that it comes under vote 20.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Vignola, you have 10 seconds.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** This vote was reduced by \$485.7 million, which is certainly a substantial cut.

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** To avoid any confusion, I would like the assistance of the senior officials we are fortunate to have with us.

**Ms. Karen Cahill (Assistant Secretary and Chief Financial Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat):** Mr. Minister, I could answer that question.

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Please go ahead.

[English]

**The Chair:** Certainly. If you could do it in 30 seconds, I'd appreciate that.

[Translation]

**Ms. Karen Cahill:** Thank you Mr. Chair.

There has been no real decrease for the Public Service Health Care Plan. The plan had been funded for a period of three years.

However, I would like to point out that in 2018-2019, we allocated \$3.1 billion to the plan, and it is now stable. That's why there are no additional funds. Over the course of the year, there will be an increase in the benefit plans in the supplementary estimates (B).

That, more or less, is why you could see a decrease.

As for planning, I totally agree with you. We make forecasts every year for the health care and benefit plans, and then adjust requests for funding accordingly.

• (1935)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you for that response. I appreciate your comments. If you feel there's more you need to provide for that answer, kindly submit it in writing afterwards. That would be appreciated.

Mr. Green, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome back the honourable member Yves Duclos. I always enjoy your presence and certainly your leadership. Welcome to all of your staff here, as well.

I want to follow up on the Parliamentary Budget Officer's bombshell of a report on the financial and fiscal analysis of federal pay equity. You may recall—and I've shared this story before—that my mother used to work for Industry Canada. I can remember being a teenager and her explaining to me why she received an equalization payment as a federal member of government because, as a woman, she wasn't getting paid the equivalent to her male counterparts. Fast forward 20 years. Here we are today.

We know from the report that the “PBO requested information from the Treasury Board regarding the valuation of administering this legislation and implementing a proactive pay equity regime within the federal public service”, yet the Treasury Board “refused to disclose information or data regarding employee compensation.” This is on page 8 under section 2. Furthermore, “This included the number of employees who were impacted in each occupational group, and related increases in employee wages and benefits attributed to the Pay Equity Act. The information was deemed to be a confidence of the Queen's Privy Council”. It left the PBO to rely on “publicly available sources in its analysis of employee compensation for the federal public service.”

With a Treasury Board and a government that claims to be open by default, how do you justify not giving the PBO the critical information it needs to be able to provide Parliament with a critical analysis on federal pay equity?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Thank you, Mr. Green. I can certainly also say that it's a great pleasure to be with you—although not in person, but virtually. Thank you for your insistence, as always, on a society that is both strong and fair.

Certainly one source of fairness, as you said, is to ensure that people providing equal work are paid equally as well. It's something that we did achieve at the end of the first mandate. We were very proud to pass the first ever proactive pay equity law with the support of the NDP. We're grateful for your support, and certainly grateful for your continuing interest in this. This is an extremely important piece of the commitment that we want to continue.

Given that this is a bit complex, I did in fact talk about this to Sandra Hassan who is going to give you some of the details that you are interested in.

Sandra, you're still there, I believe?

**Ms. Sandra Hassan (Assistant Deputy Minister, Employment Conditions and Labour Relations, Treasury Board Secretariat):** Absolutely, Minister.

Thank you for your question.

As indicated, the Pay Equity Act has been passed, but has not yet come into force. The government is presently working on the regulatory package that is necessary to bring that act into force. One thing—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Thank you for that, but that does not answer the question on why you refused to provide this critical information to the PBO. It begs the question about this government's willingness to be open and transparent.

We're not even talking about the public. We haven't even gotten into the years that people have had to wait with ATIP.

I say this respectfully, Ms. Hassan, and to the honourable President of the Treasury Board and ask: what is your justification, sir, for not fully cooperating with the Parliamentary Budget Officer on this request?

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** If I may finish the answer—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Respectfully, I need to hear this from the Treasury Board president, madam.



**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Because we have full confidence in our ability to collaborate with representatives of the public servants and in our most respectful relationship with the representatives of public servants, the bargaining agent. We also have a very respectful relationship with the PBO because we also believe very strongly in the importance of sharing the information that is useful—

• (1940)

**Mr. Matthew Green:** That's not what's in the report, sir. The report says that TBS refused to disclose information or data regarding employee compensation. This is a budgetary officer of the House of Commons responsible for reporting back to us in a fair way. This is not cooperation. This language, where you refused to disclose information or data, is damning, sir. I'd like for you to answer why you wouldn't cooperate with them.

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** I have three things on that. First, we do have a high degree of esteem for the work of the PBO. Second, we always need to provide the information that is appropriate for the PBO to do its work. Third, the secretariat and all government organizations have the responsibility to provide accurate information that is of the level the PBO is expecting. Therefore, not all information can be provided in any particular format. We need to provide that in the format that is respectful of both our relationship with bargaining agents and our relationship with the PBO.

**The Chair:** Mr. Green, you have 30 seconds.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Surely bargaining agents, particularly those representing the public sector, would want to ensure that the public just doesn't have to take your word for it, that this information would be shared with an officer of the court.

I think we will leave that at this point, and I look forward to the next round. I thank you.

I do apologize to Ms. Hassan. It was a very particular question, and I thought it was only responsible for the president to answer it himself.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Green.

That concludes the first round. Now we're entering the second round. We are going to five minutes per questioner for the first part and then two and a half minutes for the Bloc and the NDP.

We will start with Mr. McCauley.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC):** I have a quick question. It may have been the translation, but when my colleague, Ms. Vignola, was asking about COVID spending, you seemed to state that all of the COVID spending was on the Government of Canada's website, which is the opposite of what Parliamentary Budget Officer stated, whom you say you highly esteem.

Who's right, and who's wrong, or is it just lost in translation?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Thank you for the opportunity to go beyond the translation. I will say that directly in English now.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Time is short, Minister. Let's just get to the answers, please. I don't mean to be rude.

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** You're asking a very good question. I will try to provide my best answer possible.

There are at least three different ways that you can—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Minister, please: You stated that all the COVID spending was on the Government of Canada's website. The PBO says otherwise.

Would you provide us with the URL, please, then, if it's all on the website, or would you like to retract that earlier statement if you are incorrect?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** No. What I tried to say—and I certainly would like to be as precise as I can and should be—is that all of the financial information related to the budgetary estimates process in which you are, obviously, very involved is available on GC InfoBase with a lot more detail than we can perhaps talk about at the meeting.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Okay. So, not that then.

Let me get back to Mr. Paul-Hus' earlier question.

In the Official Languages Act, there is something that is triggered when they are asking for money. A couple of items will trigger a need for a completed official languages checklist and official languages impact analysis. WE would have done this.

The analysis should have included a summary of the official languages impacts and covered the steps taken to assure Treasury Board ministers that the program complied with the Official Languages Act.

It's very clear that the WE program did not comply with the Official Languages Act. It would have triggered an analysis that would have gone to you for approval.

Did you see this analysis, and if you did, why would you have signed off on it to allow the money for WE when, very clearly, it violated the Official Languages Act and would not have passed the small test for the Treasury Board?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Thank you very much, Mr. McCauley, for your interest in official languages. I appreciate that.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** No. I'm interested in Treasury Board guidelines. Please stay on the subject. Did you see the analysis? Did you sign off on it? Did you agree to it? Please answer that.

• (1945)

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** On that particular aspect, there are two different things. First, there is the very important responsibility of Treasury Board to provide guidelines to all departments. Second, there is the responsibility of individual departments.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Very clearly.... Did you see the analysis, Minister? Did you agree with it and sign off on it? These are simple questions. This was \$910 million. Did you see the analysis? Did you sign off on it?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** A simple answer.... There is the important responsibility of Treasury Board to provide official languages guidelines, and you understand that really well. I'm grateful for that ability and interest. Second, there is the responsibility of—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Did you see the impact analysis, Minister? Did you sign off on it?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Then the second is the responsibility of individual departments to provide—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Minister, did you see the impact analysis that is required, and did you sign off on it? It's a simple question. It's required by you under Treasury Board guidelines. Did you do your job? Did you see the impact analysis that would have been done, and did you sign off on it?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Being a very experienced member of Parliament, Mr. McCauley, you will know the distinction between the guidelines provided by the Treasury Board and the individual responsibility of ministers and departments to apply and to demonstrate that they did indeed apply—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Before it was approved, it would have triggered the impact analysis. To get that \$910 million, it would have triggered it. Under sections 2 and 6, it would have been required, and it would have gone to Treasury Board.

I'm going to assume that the answer is you don't know, and I'm fine with that. I would like you to get back to the committee, though, if the impact analysis was done, as was required. Did you sign off on it? If you did not, who from Treasury Board would have signed off on it?

I'd like to move on, please.

According to the government website, in the first quarter, pre-COVID—the first quarter of the year—the economy was doing well, and the average wage settlement for unionized employees across the country for all sectors was 1.6%. During COVID, when millions of Canadians were losing their jobs, you settled and gave a 2.6% increase to public servants, an increase 62% above what the average Canadian would have received during the good times.

Why would you give such a generous increase, when the country was in such a raging economic downfall and running massive deficits? Why would you give such an increase far above what the private sector was giving to unionized employees pre-COVID meltdown?

**The Chair:** Minister, give a very quick answer, please.

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** The answer is: first, it was out of respect for the work of public servants; second, respect for the capac-

ity of taxpayers to pay for the important work of the public service. Third, if you look carefully, Mr. McCauley, you'll see that—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** With a trillion-dollar deficit, you say they have the capacity for more spending. Wow, that's very generous of you, on the taxpayers' backs, Minister.

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** I you look very carefully, you will see that there is a declining scale over the settlement, which is reflective of the advice and comments you have just provided.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Mr. McCauley, your time is up.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** It's about 60% higher than the declining scale of the private sector, if you look at your own website, Minister.

**The Chair:** Order, please.

Mr. Drouin, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. By the way, please make sure when a question is asked that we can hear the answer. I'm having a hard time understanding, particularly in a virtual meeting.

I would like to thank the minister and the senior officials for joining us.

Some members often think that we are responsible for the everyday tasks and that we should do more micromanaging. That is not usually our role. Ours is more like a board of directors. We take care of governance and it is up to the public servants to do the professional work, as they have.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we received feedback from all members of Parliament. This feedback was essential. As a member from the national capital region, I would like to thank all public servants, who did incredible work. If you had asked me a year ago whether it would be possible to create a program in under a month, I would have said no. But we did.

Mr. Minister, I would like to thank you, your team and the entire government.

I would now like to return to the various questions Mr. Green asked. I would like Ms. Hassan to finish commenting in response to Mr. Green's questions, including the one about the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

• (1950)

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** I will turn it over to Ms. Hassan immediately afterwards, but cannot refrain from telling you that what you have just said about the public service is extremely important.

Over the past few months, we have had a clear demonstration of the fact that public servants are dedicated, even in very difficult personal and family circumstances. We are greatly indebted to them.

Indeed, in only three weeks, public servants delivered the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. At the outset, many people, including some members of this committee, wondered whether it was really possible and had some doubts. But we proved that it was possible and, thanks to the capacity and commitment of the public service, we got it done.

That's it for me and I will now turn it over to Ms. Hassan.

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** Thank you for your question.

I'll add to my colleague's answer.

The process is in its early stages. A legislative framework and a regulatory framework will come into force in the next few months. That will be followed by negotiations with bargaining agents at every stage. Many elements therefore remain to be put in place and negotiated, and the regulatory framework isn't finalized yet. Consequently, the estimates that were made were very preliminary. We won't be able to provide those public figures until we've finished implementing the legislative and regulatory frameworks as well as the negotiations that will lead to the initial agreements with the unions for potential pay equity adjustments. So we'll be pleased to do that. At this point, however, we're too early on in the process to have those kinds of figures.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** In other words, you're being asked—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Drouin, if I could interrupt for just a brief second, I want to give you a heads-up that you have one minute left for your question and your answer.

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** In other words, Ms. Hassan, you're being asked how much time you've put into finishing this marathon whereas you're only halfway there. A lot of work remains to be done before everything is finished. Once you have the final figures, you'll forward them to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, as you do in every case. At the moment, these are estimates. A lot of work remains to be done on this matter.

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** I think you're being generous in saying I've reached the halfway point in my marathon because I feel I'm just getting started.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** I see.

I'm going to ask another brief question.

Mr. Minister, I know you're a firm believer in the two official languages, the importance of which we have often emphasized. However, some of my colleagues have alleged that you sign all the

contribution agreements to ensure they respect the official languages. I know that's not the case. Yes, there was an official languages provision in the agreement. Now, this is a hypothetical situation.

Minister, am I right in saying that you don't sign all the contribution agreements that go through the Government of Canada? That seems impossible to me.

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** I think there's been a misunderstanding. People are probably in good faith, but this is a source of confusion that should absolutely be shut down. You have to have a better understanding of how the machinery of government works.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Thank you very much.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

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

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much.

According to page 22 of your 2020-21 departmental plan, the Treasury Board Secretariat is working to ensure a healthy workplace, which is laudable and something we all want. In 2018-19, 59% of employees felt their workplace was psychologically healthy.

COVID-19 changed a lot of things. Has a survey recently been conducted on that issue?

• (1955)

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Mrs. Vignola, I'm very pleased you asked that question. I'm quickly going to hand over to Ms. Hassan on that. However, as you suggest, COVID-19 has definitely caused a lot of anxiety and problems—

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Can you give me a quick answer? Pardon me, Mr. Duclos, but I only have two and a half minutes.

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Yes, the secretariat has done some significant things. Ms. Hassan is the best person to answer you.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much.

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** Thank you.

A great deal of work has been done on mental health issues to provide employees with the necessary tools.

With regard to your specific question on the survey, I must say it's not yet complete. However, we absolutely intend to conduct surveys to ask employees how they are doing. They may respond to them anonymously.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Perhaps Ms. Hassan can quickly answer my next question.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Vignola, you have one minute.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** To improve the psychological climate, what firm has been asked to provide employees with mental health support and what are the costs associated with that support?

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** The Treasury Board Secretariat has established a centre of expertise on mental health. In response to the number of real and potential mental health problems stemming from COVID-19, a specialized subgroup was put in place to examine those issues. We have also designed tools to assist employees in distress and those who find their psychological environment uncomfortable as a result of all these new problems.

We therefore have tools to help people manage all that remotely and to deal with isolation. Actually, among the proposed protective measures, we've asked people to work at home, and many of them feel isolated.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Indeed.

What about the costs of all that?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Hassan. I appreciate that. Unfortunately, two and a half minutes goes by very quickly.

Mr. Green, you have two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Duclos might perhaps recall that the first the question I asked as a parliamentarian in this committee was about settled but uncompensated land claims.

I now see that grants to first nations to settle specific claims and special claims negotiated by Canada by the Special Claims Tribunal had close to \$2 billion, with about \$1.5 billion used up last year. There is a variance of about half a billion dollars, \$416 million.

How can he account for that? Is that money that has been allocated and just not paid, and if so, what is the holdup?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Thank you.

You are indeed right in saying that you have had an interest in that for a long time, and a keen and detailed interest.

I'll turn immediately to Glenn, who will give you an appropriate answer.

**Mr. Glenn Purves (Assistant Secretary, Expenditure Management Sector, Treasury Board Secretariat):** Thank you, Mr. Green. It's a great question.

You're correct. Every year there is a certain amount that's been identified in terms of receiving payment authority from Parliament to settle specific claims of multiple types.

In this supplementary estimates (B), for example, we have funding for specific claim settlements of about \$760 million. In order to settle a litigation settlement there is about \$89 million. There are different classes of these litigation claims that come forward in any given fiscal year.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** I have only about a minute left.

What is the total outstanding claim amount of all land claims that are currently under tribunal?

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** I have a line of sight of when they actually need the funding to be able to make payments. In terms of what the

contingent liability is and so forth, I don't have that line of sight. We can—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Is that something you can get back to us with?

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** We can check with those responsible and get back to the committee, for sure.

Just to answer your question, sometimes we have to move money between fiscal years because the payment can't be made in that fiscal year. Sometimes what we do is to call it a "reprofile" and we move the funding from one year to the next.

● (2000)

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Is it the variance in the reprofile of—

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** —the 2020-21 main estimates that accounts for almost \$1.4 billion?

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** That is a combination of new funding and reprofiled funding in that amount.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Green.

Mr. Lloyd, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming.

I want to follow up on the question from my colleague, Mr. McCauley, and ask the minister if he can commit to us today to provide the language impact analysis for the WE Charity contribution decision to our committee.

Can you commit to that?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Again, I would first like to thank you and commend you for your interest in official languages and the ability of French-speaking Canadians to receive the services they need, like anyone else.

I have said two things to Mr. McCauley, which I will repeat briefly: (a)—

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Minister, I just want an answer. Will you provide that analysis?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** I said that (a) the guidelines the Treasury Board provides and (b) the responsibility that individuals [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** You're not committing to provide that, so I'll move to my next question, Minister.

I did appreciate that the Canadian Press reported last May that you sent a letter to your cabinet colleagues asking them during this time of pandemic to put a high level of importance on access to information, accountability and transparency.

I was so shocked just this last October to see your colleague, the Minister of Health, say a few weeks ago that it wasn't really that important to her and that she didn't consider it a priority. Were you offended that the health minister basically ignored your letter from last May?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Thank you for raising that point.

I think everyone, including all of my colleagues, understands the right that we all have to access information even though we are in a pandemic. At the same time, we all understand that the COVID-19 pandemic is creating enormous pressure on the public service. The public service is stretched and overstretched. Because of that, we also need to be understanding of the challenges they face in trying to meet their responsibility of providing—

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** I understand that, Minister, but your colleague, the health minister, said it wasn't a priority at all. It's not a matter of allocating resources. She said it wasn't a priority. Were you offended that she just disregarded your request that they put resources into transparency?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** What I can tell you is that all departments and all institutions—a total of 131—now have at least partial and, in many cases, full abilities to provide access to information. All departments and all institutions at the federal level, including PHAC and Health Canada, do have the ability now to provide information.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Since when, Minister?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** As of October 26, I can tell you that all departments and all institutions have at least a partial and, in many cases, a full ability to answer the access to information requests.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Okay. We'll hold you to that, Minister.

Here's my next question. Given all the money that's pouring out, which is necessary for this COVID pandemic, and given that there's been a great deal of change in the way that the private sector is working in the lives of everyday Canadians, has your department undertaken any efforts to identify possible savings during this pandemic? If so, can you tell the committee about those?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Thank you, Mr. Lloyd. You're exactly correct in suggesting that we should focus our efforts on the pandemic. That's what we are doing.

Of course, we are also trying to be mindful that if we want to exit strongly and united out of this crisis, we also need to be acknowledging the vulnerabilities and inequality that existed before the pandemic with respect, for instance, to indigenous peoples. That requires—

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Has your department identified any possible savings? I mean, there are so many people working from home. Are there any possible savings that you've been trying to target?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** We have certainly not been in an austerity mode, because Canadians need the services and the benefits of the federal government more than ever.

• (2005)

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Of course, Minister, but you can surely agree that it's not austerity to see that there are things that just aren't necessary right now during this pandemic.

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Well, as I said, we are fully mindful of the emergency, the crisis, and we are focusing very much, as you know, as you have also supported our investments in this particular crisis.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Okay, so you're not looking at doing any savings.

My final question is, with all of the money that's being spent to provide civil servants with desks and chairs so they can work from their home offices, does your government anticipate that civil servants will be working permanently from home in the future? If that's the case, would the government ever be looking at divesting any government properties?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** That's again a very good question, demonstrating significant foresight. That said, it's very difficult now to tell what the lessons will be at the end of this pandemic. As you have noted, technology and distance work are all changing rapidly with the pandemic, and we look forward to working with members of the committee to see how we can best apply those lessons during and after the pandemic.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

We'll now move to Mr. Weiler for five minutes.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for joining our committee today.

I'd like to turn back to the matter at hand today, which is, of course, the supplementary estimates (B).

Minister, this spring we debated and passed in the House several bills that contained vital measures to help Canadians get through the COVID-19 pandemic, and in particular, the estimates and the Public Health Events of National Concern Payments Act provided authority for a variety of COVID-19 spending, such as the CERB and the safe restart agreement, and others.

You mentioned in your opening remarks that these supplementary estimates (B) present information on the \$58 billion in statutory expenditures. How much of this statutory funding is related to the COVID-19 response measures, and how are these items presented in these supplementary estimates?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Thank you, Mr. Weiler. That's an interesting segue from the earlier question by member of Parliament Lloyd.

Ninety-six per cent of the statutory expenditures in the supplementary estimates (B) are focused on the COVID-19 crisis, expenditures such as the safe restart for children at school, to provide PPE—personal protective equipment—to front-line workers, strong investments in vaccines, in treatments, in testing equipment and resources for provinces and territories. Those are all part of that very significant 96% of the budgetary dollars in the supplementary estimates (B).

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Thank you, Minister.

Moving on here, according to page 4 of the TBS 2020-21 department plan:

TBS is responsible for developing policy and providing strategic direction for managing people in the public service, including in areas such as diversity and wellness.

On page 22 of this departmental plan, it says that TBS is working to ensure a healthy, safe and inclusive workplace. The main estimates fund among other things the Office of Public Service Accessibility and the Centre for Wellness, Inclusion and Diversity.

I was hoping you could tell us what else TBS is doing to create a healthy workplace and to support the mental health of public servants, particularly right now when we're in an especially challenging time with the pandemic.

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Thank you again, Patrick.

It's so important that you mentioned mental health. In fact, in my region, in my riding not too long ago, we had an instance, a dramatic instance, of the impact of mental health in our society. It's true that we all—I mean a very collective “we”—are going through very difficult times at this particular period in the pandemic, and that's true for public servants as well, so increasing accessibility to mental health services and benefits has been an objective of the Treasury Board in the last few weeks and months. We have done that very collaboratively with unions as it needs to be done. We also have enhanced our mental health portal to make sure that public servants have somewhere to go if they need help.

If we have time, Sandra, would you like to add a few more things that I may have forgotten?

• (2010)

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** Yes, the Treasury Board has been very focused on the health of its employees. In addition to what the minister indicated, we have, of course, extended some temporary measures to allow an expanded list of mental health service providers and have removed some requirements that used to exist. There is, as indicated previously, a centre of expertise on mental health.

In terms of the general workplace, we have been ensuring that our employees' health has come at the forefront to ensure their health and safety. From the beginning of the pandemic, we created a workplace that ensures that employees can work from home. We have expanded their capacity to log in to our infrastructure so as to be able to work their days in a safe environment when the situation in different regions is such that it's preferable, or recommended by the public health authorities, to be working remotely.

Also, when we were developing plans over the course of this summer for a return to the workplace, we worked hand in hand

with the bargaining agents and the occupational health and safety committees to look at the workplaces to ensure that, if and when we would be returning to the office, the employees would be offered a safe environment to work, ensuring social distancing, and with other measures in place, so that when they do return to the workplace, it will be a safe place to work.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Hassan, for your answer and Mr. Weiler for your questions.

We've now come to the end of our first hour. At this stage, Minister, you're welcome to stay if you'd like. I'm sure that members would love to have you here if you want to answer further questions, but I understand if you have to leave. I will throw that out to you. If you'd like to stay, you're welcome to.

If not, then we will suspend briefly while we bring in the witnesses for the next hour.

Minister, do you wish to stay?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos:** Let me say something very briefly.

[Translation]

Our task as members has been very difficult for many months. I say bravo to you and encourage you to continue your good work. It isn't easy to get your bearings in the current situation. Take care of yourself, all of you, because that's how we'll emerge from this stronger and more united.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. With that, I you have to leave, so we will suspend briefly while we bring in the other officials. Thank you.

• (2010)

(Pause)

• (2015)

**The Chair:** We will now resume the meeting.

We're now into the second hour, and we have officials from the Treasury Board Secretariat as well as the Department of Finance. I thank them all for being here today and, hopefully, Ms. McDermott will be able to join us as we go on.

We're going to start the first round with six minutes.

Mr. Paul-Hus, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

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

My first question is for the Treasury Board Secretariat officials.

Earlier I asked the minister whether an official languages impact analysis had been conducted on the WE organization, and he seemed not to know.

Do you have an answer for us? Has that kind of impact study been conducted? If so, do you have the document?

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** I'm not in a position to answer that question because that's not my responsibility.

I'll let my colleagues tell you whether they have that information.

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

Since no one's answering and time is short, I'll move on to other questions.

You're aware of the access to information requests issue. We talked about it a little earlier. According to the online database, in the first five months of this year, 3,155 requests were processed and posted, compared to 15,000 last year. The minister told us earlier that this had recently started up again. However, I would like to know how many access to information requests have been made since the start of the year.

I don't know specifically to whom that question should go. Perhaps Ms. Hassan could answer.

• (2020)

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** I think my colleague Ms. Cahill could answer it.

**Ms. Karen Cahill:** Thank you very much.

Unfortunately, as Ms. Hassan noted in response to the last question, I don't have that information and therefore can't answer. My sector isn't responsible for access to information, particularly since I believe you want an answer for government as a whole.

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Thank you, Ms. Cahill.

Ms. Hassan, I'm going to ask you a question that you may be in a better position to answer.

In an answer given earlier, we were told that 200,000 of the 257,000 public service employees go onto the House or public service network every day.

Are those 200,000 public servants who go onto the network working at home? I imagine if they're on the network, they're doing so in order to work, aren't they?

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** You're right in saying that statistic was provided to you in the context of remote work.

Today we're in the midst of the second wave. Employees who are working from home have been going onto the network since the start of the pandemic, since March, April and May. However, some employees can't do that, for obvious reasons.

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** That's precisely the point of my next question.

As we all know, the Treasury Board Secretariat manages the public service. So we'd like to get a clear picture of what's going on in the public service as a whole during the pandemic.

There are 200,000 public servants across the country who can go onto the network, and that's a good thing. However, what about the other 57,000? Are they on code 699 leave and waiting?

We'd like to get a report stating how many public servants in each department are at home and unfortunately unable to do anything. We're not at all saying it's their fault. We know it's because their work requires them to be at a certain place but that's currently impossible.

How many public servants from each department are at home on code 699 leave? I'd especially like to know how many there are from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** I don't have exact figures for every department, but I can give you the most up-to-date numbers I have.

Earlier you said that 200,000 public servants were able to work at home or remotely. As of September 6, 8,483 employees had used leave 699 code. Many other employees, such as correctional officers, food inspectors, certain nurses who work in the north and police officers, have to work on site. A lot of people aren't on the remote network because they absolutely have to do their work on site.

So approximately 200,000 employees are able to work at home. As I told you, as of September 6, nearly 8,400 employees had taken code 699 leave.

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** I see. Have they—

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Hassan. I appreciate that.

You indicated that you may not have one or two of the answers at this point, but if you are able to get them and submit them to the committee in writing, it would be appreciated.

We now go to Mr. MacKinnon, for six minutes.

• (2025)

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** Mr. Chair, I believe it is Mr. Kusmierczyk next, but I'm happy to pursue questions.

Is Mr. Kusmierczyk...?

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.):** Yes, I believe—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. I apologize; it is Mr. Kusmierczyk.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Thank you, Mr. Chair; I appreciate this.

To all the officials who are here this evening, thank you very much. On behalf of the nine million Canadians who received the CERB and the countless others who benefited from the speed of the rollout of programs over the last number of months, I want to say thank you from the bottom of our hearts to all of the public sector employees—all the government employees who worked overtime, worked weekends and worked diligently to bring these programs forward in a timely fashion to help Canadians out in their moment of need. I want to say thank you on behalf of all those Canadians whom the public sector and public service served so well during these unprecedented times.

Thank you too for being here on a Wednesday evening at 8:30 at night to answer these questions.

I want to turn to TBS to talk about the supplementary estimates, which indicate that TBS is transferring \$1.8 billion to various departments for innovative approaches to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in government operations. I want to get a sense of what specifically this funding is being used for.

**Ms. Karen Cahill:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair. It's an excellent question.

We have a number of initiatives, and we transferred that money to a number of departments.

By the way, this information is also available on the “greening government” website. I can certainly provide the URL for that website to the clerk of the committee.

For example, under Public Services and Procurement Canada, there is a project to drive PSPC's procurement towards a low-carbon economy. This project will allow them to develop a science-based tool that will quantify the number of GHG emissions associated with procurement.

That's one example, but there are many others. Under the Department of National Defence, for example, money is being transferred for CFB Kingston to reduce GHGs. This project will design and install a net-zero heating source system in seven buildings on the base that currently rely on a steam heat source for a gas-fired central heating plant.

There are, then, a number of projects. In some cases, the projects are not only for one single year, but will last over a number of years. You may see these projects in front of you on many occasions. These are only two examples, but there are many examples on our website.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** That's great. I really appreciate this. I know that about 89% of the emissions we generate federally is generated by facilities and that about 11% is generated by fleet. I know that it differs ministry by ministry.

I want to ask you whether ministries set their own goals. Do they ever go beyond the goals set by the federal sustainable development strategy? Are there some ministries that go above and beyond the reduction targets?

**Ms. Karen Cahill:** This is an excellent question. I cannot respond in detail, but I will definitely aim to find you the answer and respond to the committee.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I have just one last question. When a ministry puts forward a project like the one at CFB Kingston for the net-zero heating sources, or PSPC comes up with this low-carbon-economy tool to measure GHG emissions, is that information and those best practices readily shared across ministries? Is there a way that happens?

• (2030)

**Ms. Karen Cahill:** I would suspect that through the Centre for Greening Government there is sharing of information on best practices. One of the objectives of the Centre for Greening Government is to ensure that a department can benefit from its own best practices and share this information within the department.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** That's terrific. That's good to know.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk. You actually have 20 seconds for a quick question and answer.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I'll use that time to say what a tremendous job you're doing chairing this meeting this evening, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Vignola, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much.

According to page 3 of the 2020-21 departmental plan,

in 2020-21, TBS will support the Department of Finance Canada, as appropriate, to meet the government's commitment to undertake a comprehensive review of government spending to ensure that resources are efficiently allocated to continue to invest in people and keep the economy strong and growing.

I imagine that plan was written before the pandemic.

However, has that spending review been conducted? If so, can you tell us the status of the review? Has TBS been involved and, if so, to what extent? If the review is complete, when can we expect the results to be made available?

[*English*]

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** I think—

Is there an issue with my microphone?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** The loud-speaker volume is so high I can't hear the interpreter, even though the volume is at maximum. Can we lower the sound in here, please?

I apologize for interrupting you, Mr. Purves.



[English]

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** Ms. Vignola, thank you. I will take this question. You're absolutely correct. My short answer is that the events of the pandemic did effectively supersede that work and so there's no report forthcoming on that front. The pandemic has effectively been the focus of the government, including our colleagues at Finance and us at Treasury Board, as we work through the issues.

**The Chair:** Ms. Vignola, before you start, give us a second while we correct the sound. I've stopped your time.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** That's good, thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Ms. Vignola, you have the floor.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** So I understand the pandemic put a stop to work on the report.

Will a return to some degree of normalcy aid in preparing it, or has it been completely set aside until you can determine whether you can resume work on it?

[English]

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** I think for the time being the focus has been on the response to the pandemic. We would effectively be updating this departmental plan in this fiscal year through the departmental results report and would proceed on that basis.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I see. Thank you.

According to page 32 of the 2020–21 departmental plan, TBS will introduce “technology that will help TBS employees manage their information and work together.” That must have been done on a somewhat expedited basis. It refers to the Teams collaboration tool, SharePoint, Zoom and other similar sharing tools.

What is the cost of this initiative? Have contracts been signed to provide services here, such as installation and training? If so, what firms are involved?

• (2035)

**Ms. Karen Cahill:** Thank you for your question.

Yes, we've introduced new technology that lets all Treasury Board Secretariat employees work remotely and collaborate with colleagues both within the department and in other departments.

As for the cost of our Microsoft 365 implementation project, I should note that it's divided into two components. First, Shared Services Canada is responsible for providing licences to all departments. I can't tell you the cost of that. However, I can tell you about the costs the secretariat has borne.

[English]

Mr. Chair, should I continue?

**The Chair:** Ms. Vignola, do you want to ask another question?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** My sound was interrupted for a moment.

You said that Shared Services Canada was responsible for one component, but I unfortunately didn't hear what you said about the other component, for which your organization is responsible.

**Ms. Karen Cahill:** Yes, I stopped at that point because I saw that you were having problems.

The part our organization is responsible for represents \$700,000. That's mainly employee salaries and work we've done internally.

As to whether any contracts have been signed, perhaps you should put that question to Shared Services Canada because it's the department responsible for buying the licences.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I see. Thank you.

Going back to the insurance issue, we discussed that earlier, but it's still a bit of a mystery to me.

There are 257,000 employees, and I imagine the vast majority of them are covered by insurance plans. I mean, if the situation is similar to the one I experienced in a previous life, some part-time employees may not be covered. We know how much insurance plans generally cost. I'm talking about the public service health care plan here. In instances where the employer contributes to a plan, we know how much contributions increase from year to year.

I'd like to know why the total cost of the insurance plan is included in the main estimates. In other words, why do we see a portion of the costs in the main estimates and the rest in supplementary estimates (A), (B) or (C)? That's what I'd like to understand.

I'd also like to know whether those costs increase given the general aging of the population. That phenomenon must affect the public service in the same way it affects the rest of the population.

**Ms. Karen Cahill:** I'll answer that question.

We can definitely see a \$511-million cut to our appropriations in the main estimates. That doesn't mean we don't attach any importance to public service insurance plans. The fact is there is a funding plan for those plans. We're working with the Office of the Chief Actuary and the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions to estimate the costs of social benefit programs and insurance plans. We request increases and cuts to appropriations every year.

You probably heard the Treasury Board president mention a figure of \$585 million under Treasury Board Secretariat vote 20b in the supplementary estimates (B) for the 2020-21 year. That reflects an increase in the social benefits program and insurance plans that we offer our employees.

Mrs. Vignola, I understand why you were wondering why this isn't automatically in the estimates. That can actually be attributed to the way this vote is established. Don't worry, however, people are always covered and we always pay the employer's share.

I don't know whether Mr. Purves or Ms. Hassan wants to add to my answer.

• (2040)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Cahill.

We have a little bit of extra time to allow for the disturbance in the sound, so we'll go to Mr. Green for six minutes.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

According to page 4 of the 2020-21 departmental plan, the Treasury Board Secretariat will work with departments to increase diversity at executive levels of the federal public service, including increasing the number of women in senior decision-making positions. It is generally understood that the federal government has met these targets to have women occupy half of senior decision-making positions.

How does the Treasury Board define diversity?

Ms. Hassan.

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** Sandra, are you available for that question?

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** Yes, I was putting my microphone on "unmute" and on the English channel.

In the work that's being done by OCHRO at Treasury Board, the definition of diversity is quite broad. There are, of course, the four employment groups. You mentioned one, which is women, but we also have visible minorities, aboriginal peoples and the disabled. We look and talk more about diversity and inclusion nowadays. We include in the work that we're doing not only the four legislated employment equity groups, but also—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Ms. Hassan, would it be fair to say that the gender-based analysis plus has largely benefited white women in particular in this regard, or have you done work to disaggregate the data to demonstrate your efforts towards Black communities, persons of colour, disabled communities and others?

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** You're absolutely right, Mr. Green. What you call "white women" is not the only group the federal government is looking at—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Can I ask a specific question? I don't want you to dismiss that. In your analysis of the women who are taking up 50% of the leadership roles, does it also happen to be true that the vast majority of those women are white?

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** I don't have that data with me, but I'm one of those women. I am a woman, and I do come from a visible minority, so I'm part of those groups. It's not only white women.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Ms. Hassan, I'll share with you that in the course of the Black Lives Matter movement, this government said a lot about the need for disaggregated race-based data. If you don't measure it, it doesn't get done. While I certainly applaud and celebrate your success as a racialized woman, as a visible minority,

there are subsets within the language of anti-racism that include anti-Blackness, particularly within government, and anti-indigeneity.

Have you undertaken any work, as has been signalled by this Liberal government, to disaggregate the data to be able to provide a real clear framework on equity as it relates to employment?

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** The work is ongoing at the Treasury Board Secretariat on data collection, as you mentioned. We are very, very sensitive to the issues that were put to the forefront in regard to the Black Lives Matter movement. We've also seen in Canada unfortunate events happening with aboriginal peoples as well.

Yes, the work is ongoing. Hopefully, the specific data you're looking for, which I do not have with me, is—

• (2045)

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Can I ask you, then, about the federal Pay Equity Act and that policy? Have there been any early discussions? I know that many people, including Minister Bardish Chagger and many other folks, have spoken about how they are directing for disaggregated race-based data. Is anything aside from gender included in the equity approach to pay equity?

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** With the Pay Equity Act, the way the policy has been developed is that we will be looking at the groups and determining whether the group are female or male predominant or—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** But no disaggregation within that?

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** No.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** For instance, we wouldn't get any information as to whether or not there was systemic favouritism, as was suggested today in the House, of one particular subset or group and not others?

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** That is not in the legislative framework we have for the purposes of pay equity. The data you are looking for is certainly available. As I indicated, I do not have it with me.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Could you provide it to the committee, for my own edification?

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** We can look at the data that is available. When employees join the public service or throughout the years are invited to fill out the disclosure in regard to employment equity, that data can be very helpful in determining the representation in the various groups and levels.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Green.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** I certainly look forward to that discussion.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** We've now finished our first round.

We will go to our second round, starting with Mr. McCauley for five minutes.

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

Ms. McDermott and Mr. Halverson—I'm not sure if Mr. Halverson is there—you were providing the finance committee with bi-weekly updates on the COVID spending programs—the active spending, the budgets—up until prorogation happened. Then it stopped. Would you be able to start providing that to our committee on a regular basis?

**Ms. Alison McDermott (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Economic and Fiscal Policy Branch, Department of Finance):** Maybe I'll take that answer.

Yes, we were providing those estimates as required by the emergency response act, although we went a little bit beyond the requirements of the act—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Would you be able to provide that to our committee?

**Ms. Alison McDermott:** If there were to be some kind of requirement imposed on us, we certainly would. But I would also mention that we are preparing a fall update, as mentioned in the Speech from the Throne—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'm going to move on and ask a quick question.

Mr. Duclos was not aware of this, but since you're in Finance, do you guys know when there will be a budget out—not a fiscal update, but an actual budget?

**Ms. Alison McDermott:** Typically, we would have a budget in the spring—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'm sorry, I know all of that. Do you know when the budget will be out?

**Ms. Alison McDermott:** I don't think we have a date, but what comes out this fall—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Okay. That's fine, thanks—

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, the honourable member knows that it is not the job of Treasury Board to give a date for the budget. The honourable member knows well that the Minister of Finance will make that announcement when she is ready. I would just like some respect for the folks who are in from—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Okay, Ms. McDermott—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, that's debate.

• (2050)

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** She doesn't work for the Treasury Board, Mr. Drouin. She works for Finance, I believe.

**The Chair:** Mr. McCauley, continue, please.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'm going to move on.

Mr. Purves, the government is providing, I think, \$500 per public servant working from home, for chairs. Do you know how much that has cost us, or how much it will cost us?

If we're buying 200,000 chairs, for instance, what's the plan when the public servants return to work, with those chairs?

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** Just stepping back, I don't have those costs with me.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** That's fine.

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** There's no incremental funding provided to be able to cover that, so it's coming from reallocated resources from existing votes.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Perhaps you can get back to us when you have those numbers.

A year from now, six months from now, hopefully when we have a vaccine and the public servants are returning to their offices, what's going to happen with those assets?

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** I don't have the answer to what's going to happen with those assets. I think, if we step back and look at our experience here at Treasury Board, there's been a real effort to use existing equipment here and to bring that back. I would imagine it would be brought back into use.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Great, thanks.

I want to get back to the question by my colleague Mr. Paul-Hus, who was asking about purchasing. There are purchasing guidelines under the contracting policy from TBS. It lays out the policies for procurement and rules to follow. When we were asking about the Government of Canada buying PPE produced with forced labour, we heard from your colleagues at PSPC. They said that we didn't have to worry because people in Communist China...and the government self-attests that they're not going to do that. That simple self-attestation by companies abroad violates the Treasury Board guidelines for contract policy.

What is your role to ensure that PSPC and other departments are following your Treasury Board guidelines for this? Again, PSPC is in clear violation of your guidelines for foreign purchases.

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** We have been working very actively with departments with our polices and our guidelines to ensure that the COVID response is being addressed—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** But this is not just—

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** —as expeditiously as possible. I'm not an expert with respect to my role as it pertains to contracting guidelines....

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** These are Treasury Board guidelines. Who within TBS, then, would advise PSPC that they're violating TBS guidelines and Government of Canada guidelines on purchasing?

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** We have teams that have particular oversight with respect to procurement and transfer payment guidelines and policies that work through these matters. Again, guidelines effectively are set out, and departments have a lot of responsibility to ensure that they are meeting these guidelines as they're written.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'll read right from the TBS contracting policy—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Oh.

Apparently you are to work and address management issues on those guidelines, so it's not just a matter, as Minister Duclos said, of sloughing off that to another department. TBS is responsible, according to your own guidelines.

We can follow up in the next round.

**The Chair:** Mr. McCauley, you have 10 seconds.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Jowhari for five minutes.

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

I'd also like to start by acknowledging the great work that our officials and civil servants have been doing over the last nine months in making sure that the government wheels work.

I have two questions, one of them on the main estimates.

It is my understanding the Department of Indigenous Services is requesting about \$12.7 billion in the 2021 main estimates, which is second only to National Defence. This is an increase of roughly about \$550 million from the 2019-20 main estimates. They are also asking for about \$330 million in supplementary estimates. Can anyone from the department explain what kinds of initiatives are being funded through these estimates, and why has the funding increased this year?

Thank you.

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** Yes, certainly. I'm very happy to answer that question.

The Department of Indigenous Services used to be amalgamated with the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, what we call CIRNA.

In the separation and the creation of the new department, the department took on a host of measures, including working on non-insured health benefits for first nations and Inuit, which used to be within the purview of Health Canada. Every year a transfer goes from Health Canada to be able to deal with that, but there's also an augmentation in that, as well.

When you look at the supplementary estimates (B), we're going from about \$13.5 billion to \$14.5 billion, an increase of about \$1 billion on the voted side, of which you have about \$300 million dealing directly with the COVID response, meaning funding to support indigenous businesses. There are indigenous businesses that are finding short-term dislocations in their funding and their support. Effectively, there is funding that's been able to help them with their needs.

A host of different issues are listed on the page proof in the supplementary estimates (B) that go into all of those measures, but the particular ones, again, are for non-insured health benefits. About \$256 million there is going to provide prescription drugs, dental care, vision care, medical transportation and medical health counselling for first nations and Inuit needing this access.

There's the first nations child and family services program as well as Jordan's principle, an initiative under the oversight of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. In particular, these two measures account for about \$240 million for child and family services, as well as an additional \$74 million for Jordan's principle, beyond the amounts for Jordan's principle that have been outlined already as part of supplementary estimates (A) and included in part of the main estimates.

Altogether, it's going towards a whole host of measures ensuring that first nations and Inuit are looked after with respect to a whole host of health, social and education issues.

• (2055)

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you, Mr. Purves.

I have about a minute. I'd like to ask one final question.

In the supplementary estimates (B), about \$19 million is provided for Phoenix stabilization. This is an area that I've been following since 2015. Can you give us an idea of what that money is being used for? Give us a quick update of where we are and whether any employees have not been compensated.

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** Sure.

Karen Cahill would be best positioned to answer that question.

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

**Ms. Karen Cahill:** The \$19 million that you see in our supplementary estimates (B) is for the office of the chief information officer to help provide new processes, stabilize the data and exercise a business owner role with respect to Phoenix stabilization, and also to help bridge to the next generation HR and pay system that we'll be piloting.

Where is this work at? We are pursuing the work very hard to ensure that when it comes time to move the department into the NextGen system, we will be able to do so.

This fall NextGen has undertaken a pilot with Heritage Canada and will potentially onboard more departments. As you know, SAP is the vendor that has been selected to do so.

With respect to the employees not receiving pay, where are we at? I would refer that question to PSPC. This work is under their purview.

• (2100)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Cahill, for your answer.

We're now going to two-and-a-half minute rounds.

Ms. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thanks very much.

I'll continue talking about the Phoenix pay system.

In the initial months of the pandemic, we had an interesting update on the number of actions that had been taken. I understand that Public Services and Procurement Canada is responsible for that, not you. Whatever the case may be, as Mr. Jowhari mentioned, we've set aside \$19 million to stabilize the system.

I'll begin with this question: is that enough?

**Ms. Karen Cahill:** My short answer is no because that funding covers only one year. Since the work will have to continue over the next few years, we will probably request additional funding.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Is there a timeline for replacing the Phoenix pay system? You've found a company and what seems to be a suitable system, but do you have a timeline for replacing the system? When will you be able to say it's finished, it's done, it's been replaced?

**Ms. Karen Cahill:** Unfortunately I can't give you any details on the timeline.

On April 1 of this year, responsibility for the new next-generation pay system was transferred to Shared Services Canada, which is now the department implementing pilot projects and managing the timeline.

That will be a good question to put to the Shared Services Canada representatives when they come and testify before this committee, Mrs. Vignola.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I have a final question.

I've been hearing about the new-generation pay system for some time now, in fact since I began sitting in the House last year. What makes this new-generation system so different? The fact is that pay is still pay. What does this new-generation system have that's so new and that makes it so fantastic and marvellous?

**Ms. Karen Cahill:** I can't give you any details. Once again, that would be a question to ask my colleagues at Shared Services Canada. All I can say is that's the name they chose to give the new pay system.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much.

That will be all for me.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

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

**Mr. Matthew Green:** I know it's been quite a hot seat here for two hours—late on into the evening—and I'm satisfied with my opening rounds of questioning to the staff. However, I want to provide a message of support and solidarity to all of the front-line public service sector workers. I would ask that you give, through this experience, feedback to your staff that we certainly appreciate their work during the tumultuous time of COVID. Although it's our responsibility, at least my and the opposition's responsibility, to hold

government accountable, that's certainly never and not a reflection of front-line workers and staff, whom you all are leading in your respective departments.

I appreciate your candour and anticipate getting to know and work with all of you over these next weeks and months—hopefully, barring a snap election, as stranger things have happened—as you continue to deliver the type of quality of services that Canadians have grown to expect and demand.

With that, I will relinquish the remainder of my time and thank all of the public sector workers who have helped steward us through this very tumultuous time.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Green. I appreciate your kinds words for the officials who are here today and those who work tirelessly for us.

We still have Mr. McCauley and Mr. MacKinnon.

Mr. McCauley, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** As a point of clarification, Chair, we've now been sitting for officially two hours. It's 9:04. I'm wondering, if committee members have more questions, if we could perhaps invite the officials later, at a regular time. It has officially been two hours, and normally our time would be up and we would probably dismiss our witnesses.

• (2105)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** If Mr. MacKinnon gives up his time and I take five minutes, we will be done in five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Mr. Chair, the clerk had—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I know that the officials had offered to stay as long as possible. I appreciate their staying the extra time. We basically have 10 minutes of questions left. I'm hoping that 10 minutes would be good for them to stay in that time frame.

I'm looking to see if there's any shaking of heads or thumbs up or thumbs down.

Seeing none, we will go with the five-minute questions and finish up.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Thanks. I probably don't need five minutes.

Mr. Purves, I realize it's not your direct responsibility, but maybe you could direct me to who would be looking after this. The guidelines say that TBS works with departments and agencies to address issues in compliance with contracting policies.

Who within TBS would do that? It would be nice if we could have a whole slew more TBS people here, so we could not put you on the hot seat. Where would I follow up with that?

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** Why don't we get back to you in writing on that question.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Perfect.

I have another last quick question for you. Were you at the Treasury Board meeting when the WE Charity submission was discussed?

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** I'm trying to think. I don't recall. I don't know how to—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Okay. You might be back with us for the supplementary (B)'s, so maybe let us know then.

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** Usually these appearances at cabinet meetings are cabinet confidence.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'm not asking you to divulge anything if you were there.

I'm not sure if this is possible, but the team that put together the GC InfoBase appeared with us a couple of years ago. A phenomenal couple of guys developed that. Is there a reason or a way we can get all the COVID spending loaded onto GC InfoBase? You mentioned that FINA was getting it. The PBO was quite clear that there's a lack of transparency in that regard. Can we get it loaded there?

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** Understood. I think it's a great question. It's something we can certainly look at for GC InfoBase.

When we think about the COVID expenditures and so forth, I want to take maybe one minute to explain the scoping issue.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I just have one last quick question. Can I ask that, and then you can answer them both at the same time?

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Actually, go ahead and answer. I will come up with the last question. Sorry.

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** Sure.

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** When we think of the COVID expenditures through the estimates, we're reporting effectively for appropriation-dependent organizations that draw from the CRF. There's a broader scope of supports that are being provided, like liquidity supports and Bank of Canada liquidity. Things like the wage subsidy are like tax expenditures, and so forth.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I realize it's not the ideal way to do it, but if there were a way to do it...

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** We can certainly look at GC InfoBase. There is a lot of information out there. We can see about centralizing things.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Did you read the PBO report that came out this morning on the supplementary estimates?

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** I did.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** They were quite critical about the lack of transparency. Why is that still happening? This lack of transparency is mentioned in every PBO report. They were quite adamant about it and quite pointed in their comments about the lack of transparency.

Is that political? Is it administrative? How do we fix this?

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** I think, again, I'm going to have a follow-up conversation with the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

I think you know, Mr. McCauley, that we strive to ensure that we have as much transparent information, both as we report through estimates as well as through our GC InfoBase. It has been shown in the past that the committee itself has come up with suggestions, which we have followed up. I think it's incumbent on us to have that conversation with the PBO as well.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I think I'm out of time.

When are the departmental results reports coming out? Is everything kind of—

• (2110)

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** The public accounts have to come out first.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** They are coming out in a couple of weeks, I understand.

**Mr. Glenn Purves:** Yes. There's no fixed date now for the departmental results reports, but they are slotted to be coming out after the public accounts.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Okay, that's wonderful. Thanks very much. I appreciate it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

Thank you, Mr. Purves.

We now have Mr. MacKinnon for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's my pleasure to be the last speaker this evening.

I heard my official opposition colleagues insinuate that certain individuals were abusing leave code 699 and were sitting around doing nothing. I, in fact, know that's false.

Ms. Hassan, could you explain to us the circumstances in which leave code 699 may be used? That would reassure the members of the committee. Contrary to what the Conservatives claim, it isn't a code for do-nothing public servants.

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** Thank you for your question.

We've made sure to take care of our employees since the start of the pandemic. Code 699 is an exceptional leave code that we used at the start of the pandemic, when we sent everyone home to comply with public health directives and to ensure the safety of our employees and communities.

In the circumstances, few of us could access our computer systems. That code was then used in situations where the employer didn't permit employees to access systems or the network.

Similarly, at the start of the pandemic, schools, child care centres and babysitting services were all closed, and many of our employees had to try to work with children in the home.

Several months later now, the pandemic is part of our everyday lives. We have adjusted to directives as the situation has developed. Consequently, when the child care centres, schools and babysitting services reopened, we adjusted the directives to ask parents to try to make up missed working hours.

The directives were altered again on October 22. Leave code 699 will continue to apply but in more exceptional instances. For example, it may apply where employees are still unable to enter their workplace, whether regularly or on an exceptional basis. We were given the example of laboratory researchers who must work in rotations: in one in every four weeks, a team may not go to the laboratory because others are there. Consequently—

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** Thank you, Ms. Hassan. I am going to interrupt you here or else I'm afraid we'll run out of time.

What I understand from this is that the Government of Canada is skilfully managing this, adjusting to needs and, like any modern or progressive employer, not only managing human resources compassionately but also accounting for it all. Thank you for that.

I have one final question. I believe Mr. Lloyd insinuated that the Government of Canada was selling properties and doing so as a direct result of COVID-19.

I don't know whether my question is for you or your colleagues, but could you tell us whether the government is considering selling Government of Canada properties as a direct result of the COVID-19 crisis?

• (2115)

**Ms. Sandra Hassan:** As your question concerns the management of the property portfolio of the Government of Canada, you can put it to our colleagues at Public Services and Procurement Canada when they appear before your committee.

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** Absolutely.

With that, I thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Paul-Hus, you have a point of order?

[Translation]

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

I simply want to say that I condemn the remarks by the parliamentary secretary, Mr. MacKinnon, regarding what we purportedly said. The beginning of this question was very—

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** That's a point of debate, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Your question was very insidious, Mr. MacKinnon. You don't do that when you want to maintain a good working atmosphere.

In my question, I took the trouble to say that, if public servants were at home—

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Mr. Chair, that's a point of debate.

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Excuse me, but I have the floor.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** In any case, that's not a point of order.

[English]

**The Chair:** Order.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** I want to say that we made a point of saying that people were at home and involuntarily so. However, it's our duty to ask questions.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have come to the end of the meeting, and I appreciate everyone's comments and questions.

It's 9:16 and we called the meeting to order at 7:09, so for us to have completed this with just seven extra minutes with all the questions, I appreciate that.

We will be sending a letter to the minister to ask him back to discuss the supplementary estimates further, and hopefully we will see back here again many of the officials we saw here today.

Mr. Purves, Ms. Paulin, Ms. Cahill, Ms. Hassan, Ms. McDermott and Mr. Halverson, thank you all for staying the extra time. This day went a little longer than we expected.

I would also like to thank all of the other officials here in the room, as well as the interpreters and clerks and staff who are here, for staying the extra time.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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