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

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**EVIDENCE**

**Monday, May 5, 2014**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault**



## Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Monday, May 5, 2014

• (1530)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP)):** Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for coming. I would like to in particular thank the President of the Treasury Board who is honouring us with his presence this afternoon. We usually sit in the morning but today we are sitting in the afternoon in order to include Mr. Clement in our study on open data.

Without any further delay I will give him the floor to make his opening statement. Committee members will then have the opportunity to ask him questions.

Mr. Clement, you have the floor.

**Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon everyone.

[English]

I'd like to thank, first of all, the members of the committee for inviting us to talk about our approach to open data. I've come here with my officials, Corinne Charette, who is the chief information officer of the Government of Canada, and Dave Adamson, who is the deputy chief information officer of the Government of Canada.

I want to mention some of the good news about our approach to open data, but I want to take a couple of minutes to talk a little bit about one of the most recent issues concerning data security, the Heartbleed bug, which made its way around the country and the world. You've probably heard a lot about it over the last few weeks. It's something that you might be concerned about; certainly we are concerned about it, as well.

Due to this Heartbleed bug, there was a vulnerability in the OpenSSL software. It is a global issue. It affected websites all around the world. I should inform you that recently, a dozen companies, including Amazon, Cisco Systems, Facebook, Google, IBM, Intel, and Microsoft, announced they were each donating \$300,000 to fund improvements in open source programs like OpenSSL.

As a government, we learned of the vulnerability at the same time as the rest of the world did, and we took quick and public measures to address the situation. We directed all departments to take down any public-facing websites using OpenSSL until patches were applied. The work was done, Mr. Chairman, quickly, within a matter of days, and secure access to government websites was restored.

The CRA acted swiftly, as well. They had to respond to a privacy breach caused by this vulnerability before the patch was applied, and they did inform affected Canadians.

As you know, the RCMP has already apprehended the person who exploited the vulnerability.

[Translation]

Our government took the right steps to protect the privacy and security of Canadians in an open and transparent manner. Today, all websites using OpenSSL are up and running.

[English]

Over the past few weeks you've also heard a lot about open data from industry and academic experts, such as Ginny Dybenko from the University of Waterloo.

In her appearance before this committee, she expressed the view:

Open data is our next natural resource. Canada has the digital infrastructure. We have the reputation for collaborative management. We have the respect of many in the world in this arena, and we have a hugely developing knowledge worker population...

She went on to add:

Canada should make open data a priority, establishing policies, engaging in long-term planning, and developing capacity.

I'd like to turn to that subject now.

As you know, open data is a growing worldwide phenomenon. It's about making raw data available in machine-readable formats to citizens, governments, and not-for-profit and private sector organizations to leverage in innovative and value-added ways. It has the potential to spur innovation and to drive social, political, and economic change in Canada and around the world.

Recently, the U.S. global management consulting firm McKinsey and Company estimated that open data could unlock trillions—and I say that word “trillions”—of dollars in the global economy. Of course the full potential of open data can be realized only when it is available to as many people as possible. That's why I should let you know that our government is committed at both the national and the international levels to making it as easy as possible to find, access, and reuse government data.

Internationally, back in April 2012, I announced Canada's membership in the global Open Government Partnership. Now more than 60 countries have signed on to the Open Government Partnership, and each is committed to promoting transparency, empowering citizens, and harnessing new technologies to strengthen governance.

As part of our partnership agreement, Canada has pledged to support and promote open government in this country and around the world.

• (1535)

In addition, last June, Canada and the other G-8 members adopted the Open Data Charter which committed them to the following five principles:

First is open data by default, which means publishing as much open data as possible proactively, while recognizing that there are legitimate reasons why some data cannot be released.

Second is quantity and quality, which means releasing open data of quality in a timely fashion and well-described by metadata.

Third is usable by all, which means ensuring that all released data is in open reusable formats.

Fourth is releasing data for improved governance, which is about sharing data expertise and being transparent about data collection, standards, and publishing processes.

Fifth is releasing data for innovation, which means consulting with users on what data they need to drive innovative applications and work with government on solving problems.

Also in 2013, Canada became the co-chair of the Open Government Partnership working group on open data with over 30 countries and 75 civil society organizations represented.

[*Translation*]

This position supports our role as a global leader in open data. At the national level, we are committed to making it as easy as possible for Canadians to find, access and use government data. Last June, for example, we launched the revamped open data portal at [data.gc.ca](http://data.gc.ca).

[*English*]

This portal is a one-stop shop for approximately 200,000 data sets from 38 departments that can be downloaded free of charge by anyone in Canada or around the world.

Another key feature of the portal is the open government licence, which offers users unrestricted use of government data and information. These tools make open data easily accessible and allow creative Canadians to unlock its economic and social value through innovative applications.

We also want to support open data as an enabler of economic, social, and political change by putting as much government data and as much good data as possible into the hands of Canadians. For example, we have an initiative under way called open data Canada. This is a collaborative initiative with provincial and territorial governments to create a seamless pan-Canadian community and environment for open data. This will help ensure a no-wrong-door approach, which will allow citizens from coast to coast to search for and access data from multiple governments regardless of which portal they use to start their search, and also allow use of the same common licence across Canada.

Eventually, using this approach and with the right standards in place, citizens of other countries will also be able to access, compare,

and use open data from Canada, and Canadians will be able to access theirs.

With respect to security and privacy, our forthcoming directive on open government will require federal departments and agencies to maximize the open and proactive release of their data, subject to privacy, security, and confidentiality restrictions. At this point we are still some years away from completing the single pan-Canadian open data community and environment. As more jurisdictions adopt the same common licence, however, and as standards are put in place, this will create a snowball effect. We will see for example that more and better data will be used for better decision-making in business and research, and developing social programs, and in the day-to-day lives of Canadians. Data users could be working for a mining company and using geospatial data to support exploration; or they could be working for a non-governmental organization doing research on a limited budget and benefiting from the cost savings resulting in more efficient and more effective research; or they could be entrepreneurs leveraging their knowledge to create apps that help Canadians.

• (1540)

Sam Vermette, for example, a native of Montreal, developed the transit app that offers real-time transit directions, notifications, and route planning to over 43,000 cities across North America. Since its launch in May, it has been downloaded over 150,000 times.

Mapping apps like the transit app are estimated to have unlocked \$90 billion in value just in the U.S. alone. With all of these uses for open data, you can start to appreciate its huge potential for spurring economic growth for job creation and long-term prosperity.

[*Translation*]

So let me just conclude by telling you about a very positive event, our first national appathon, which took place earlier this year.

The Canadian Open Data Experience, or CODE, was held in conjunction with XMG Studio, a leading mobile game developer. In doing so, we had the pleasure of working closely with that company's chief executive officer Ray Sharma.

[*English*]

You recall that Ray recently appeared before this committee. He is an industry leader who has been quick to see the economic value in the Canadian open data market. I should tell you that working with him was a gratifying experience for me and for everyone else involved.

During the two-day CODE appathon in Toronto, from February 28 to March 2, teams using federal government data were challenged to develop consumer-friendly apps under the theme of solving problems and increasing productivity through the use of open data. In all, more than 900 Canadians from coast to coast participated, creating a total of 111 apps, the best of which won cash prizes, including the grand prize of \$25,000 provided by OpenText Corporation.

It was very inspiring for me to see what creative, entrepreneurial people could do with federal government open data.

I should mention the winning app was newRoots, which matches new Canadians with cities that give them the greatest opportunity to maximize their career potential and to fulfill their goals and those of their families. The app uses open data from Statistics Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, Canada Revenue Agency, and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

[Translation]

And I understand the developers are using their winnings to build a business behind their app. That's just one more example of how open data can serve the needs of Canadians.

[English]

The sky is truly the limit, Mr. Chair, and we are proud to play an important role in leading our citizens into the next stage of the global information age.

Thank you, and I'd be pleased to take any questions.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister, for your opening statement and for coming today.

We will now move on to questions.

Mr. Martin, you have the floor. You have five minutes.

[English]

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Clement, we're pleased to have you here as the President of the Treasury Board.

I can tell you're very proud of this particular project.

You'll forgive me with all due respect if I say that people have to be judged by what they do, not by what they say, and there's a cavernous gulf between the lofty principles which you're espousing here about freedom of information and the actual practices of this government, where information is hoarded and rationed out in little tidbits. I think the black shroud of secrecy will be the single defining hallmark of the Harper administration. So we find that this emphasis on open data and trying to give the impression that, some time in the future, information will be available by default is really a bit of a diversionary tactic, because nothing could be further from the truth.

Let me point out, within your own remarks, the first bullet point of the five principles you've adopted refers to recognizing that there are legitimate reasons that some data cannot be released. How are we to know that you're not just failing to release data because it could be embarrassing to the government? With your history of muzzling scientists, being virtually anti-information, against the long-form census, and so on, I mean you get to decide what gets released and

when. I strongly suspect if there's anything that could be potentially embarrassing to your government, it's not going to be your default position to put it up voluntarily and give your opponents a stick to beat you with. Who's going to be the arbitrator? Is it going to be up to the Information Commissioner of Canada or the public to be able to appeal for the release of data when this nirvana of open data in your mind becomes a reality?

• (1545)

**Hon. Tony Clement:** Thank you for the question. Allow me to respectfully disagree with the premise, the content, and the conclusion, but other than that, we're on the same side.

I should repeat for the record that we have put online, available for free, over 200,000 data sets. Of course with the open data, by default, that will keep growing and replenishing. That's the reality. That's the action we've taken.

Embedded in that query was a concern about access to information. I can tell you that in the last year measured, 2012-13, our government processed nearly 54,000 access to information requests, which is a 27% increase over the previous year—

**Mr. Pat Martin:** You have frustrated us—

**Hon. Tony Clement:** —and more than six million pages were released, an increase of nearly two million.

Those are the statistics. I believe that when you ask what the legal framework for that is, so that decisions are not made in a capricious manner, we do have a legal framework. We are required by the access to information law, the information laws, and the privacy laws to ensure that we protect privacy and if that is done, the information has to be released and has to be available.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Well, let's see how we're doing on the national stage in the open data context.

When you compare the number of countries that are involved in it, the information is broken down into nine different categories of data sets. Under national statistics, as one of those data sets, the United Kingdom has a 100% release of all information for national statistics, and the United States, another member country, has 100%. Canada has a 40% compliance rate in that category.

In another category...let me see, I'll cherry-pick a really good one.

Under the legislation data set, the United Kingdom has 90%, the United States has 85%, and Canada has 60%.

The largest data set is government spending; this is the one where people have a right to know what their government is doing with their money. It's a fundamental cornerstone of our democracy. In this category the United Kingdom has 100%, the United States has 90%, and Canada has 10%. Even the pilot project you had going, you've cancelled.

What is the reluctance to tell Canadians what you're doing with their money? It's not government's information to ration out in tidbits as you see fit. That information belongs to the people of Canada, whose tax dollars commissioned it and whose tax dollars gave you permission to create it. It shouldn't be like pulling teeth trying to get it out of you. How do you explain this independent analysis of compliance, with the open data index, with such an appalling figure of 10%?

**Hon. Tony Clement:** Sure.

I'm not familiar with the statistics that you mentioned. Let me take one example, the one that's near and dear to our hearts as parliamentarians, which is having more information available on spending patterns within government.

I'm very proud that last year I was able to create a whole new regime, available online, that would allow parliamentarians and the public to compare spending patterns year for year, program by program, and department by department. That was never available online before. This committee complained about how laborious it was to try to search through and mine through the paper that was presented by Treasury Board and by the government. We fixed that, and I think that is a step in the right direction.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you for your answers.

Ms. Ablonczy, you have the floor. You have five minutes.

[English]

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC):** Minister, I guess my colleague opposite got up on the wrong side of the bed.

As we listen to witnesses, and especially those from the municipalities, it's pretty clear that people are using different formats as they put this open data online. I worry about that, because there's no way that we can synthesize information from different sources if it's in different formats.

Is there anything that you're doing to address that?

**Hon. Tony Clement:** Yes, I think that is a legitimate concern.

We have to keep in mind that we're at the beginning stages of a movement that has really started to gain steam over the last few years. What we are trying to do through our open data partnership initiative is to try to work with municipalities, especially forward-looking ones that have been excellent in this area—I think of Edmonton in your province; Vancouver has been very forward looking—and work with them to try to harmonize as much as possible, because it's the same users—I think you hit on this point—who need to have access to municipal information, provincial information, and federal information. The sooner we can get formats aligned where you can cross-reference that information, the better.

It is a work in progress, I grant you that. We certainly see it as part of our responsibility to help herd the cats a little bit and to get to a better place on it.

• (1550)

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** We really support you in that. I think it's going to be very important. This is just in its infancy, but as people go off on different tracks, we're going to have problems.

You just finished, on April 24, the first round table of your consultations on open data. I wonder if you could help us understand what people are saying to you and what users think of the data so far. That is really the key point we're interested in.

**Hon. Tony Clement:** People are excited about our ability to have delivered on the 200,000 data sets.

We have, through all stages of the process, worked with the users community, whether they are academics, entrepreneurs, or NGOs, and they've really helped us. First of all, when we relaunched the portal, for instance, they were really driving the architecture of the portal, so that we knew what they needed and how they needed to get it.

As we go through this next phase of consultation, they keep giving us feedback on what is working, what isn't working, what the next layer has to look like, and how we can better serve them. It's an ongoing process, but certainly we are listening very carefully.

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** What have they been saying so far about the usefulness and utility of the data? What are their main recommendations to improve the process?

**Hon. Tony Clement:** Again, we're just starting the feedback loop.

I would say there's generally a level of satisfaction, but they are always giving us hints and suggestions on how better usable the site can be for the casual user. I remember a concern that was raised: they're experts and they're academics, but how does a student in grade 9 somewhere in the country get access to the data in a way that will help her finish a project, for instance? We are mindful of those issues, as well. It has to be usable by experts, but also usable by Canadians in their everyday lives.

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** One of the concerns we've heard is that the data is static. In other words, it was just kind of gathered from the past and put on the portal, but it's not forward looking, nor does it have links to other information. The example you probably know is charities. There's static information about charities, but not information about what monies they might get from other funders, etc., so it's a problem.

Are some of the things you're grappling with being set aside until later? How is this process happening?

**Hon. Tony Clement:** I think these are legitimate concerns.

One of the things we're trying to do, obviously, is keep replenishing the data so that it is new, modern, and up to date. That is an ongoing exercise. Having open data, by default, will help us in that regard.

Similarly, when it comes to how the data is usable, we are taking into account the feedback we're getting, absolutely.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your answer.

[Translation]

Ms. Day, you have five minutes.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Clement and Mr. Adamson and Ms. Charette, welcome to this committee. We are very happy to have you here. Mr. Clement, if you were able to stay longer we would keep you here for longer than the scheduled hour because we have many questions to ask you.

The President and CEO of the Chicago Open Data Institute recently appeared before this committee and gave us quite an amazing presentation.

One of the charter principles is that data should be open by default. This organization had a list of lobbyists, how many there were and even the sums of money that each one was receiving in contracts, etc. There was complete transparency. He told us that, depending on the policy and the mayor in power, that data could be open, partially open, withdrawn, available to everyone or not, depending on the will of the politicians.

How can the government explain the fact that it wants to be more transparent for Canadians and provide open data, but the number of complaints being filed with the Information Commissioner of Canada has considerably increased under the Conservatives?

Here are a few numbers: there were 1,465 complaints in 2012, 1,596 in 2013 and 1,957 in 2014, which does not include the complaints filed in the month of March which have not yet been calculated.

• (1555)

**Hon. Tony Clement:** As I mentioned, a record high number of access to information requests were received in 2012-2013, close to 54,000 requests, a 27% increase in the number of requests over the previous year. There were over 10,000 extra requests, an increase of about 2 million pages, for a total of over 6 million pages.

It is important to make it clear that the process was neither set out by members of Parliament nor by members of the cabinet. It is a governmental process; I am therefore in no position to impose a political situation on Ms. Charette or the department.

[English]

It's not a political process; it's a governmental process. We treat it as one that is non-political in that sense.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** I have a supplementary question.

One of the G8's objectives is to provide sufficient, high-quality data.

When I look, for instance, at data on access to information at Library and Archives Canada, I see that in the case of 156 requests, the average processing time was 39 days, and that 167 extension requests were made to various applicants.

How can we claim that the government wants to be open when it cannot even meet the demand?

**Hon. Tony Clement:** I will let Ms. Charrette answer your question.

**Ms. Corinne Charette (Chief Information Officer of the Government of Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat):** We realize that the departments sometimes face a sudden increase in the number of access to information requests, while the size of the team in

charge of processing the requests does not necessarily increase accordingly. There is a fairly set number of people on the team in charge of responding to access to information requests. But there are times when, all of the sudden, they become overloaded with requests.

For example, in the wake of the accident in Lac-Mégantic, Transport Canada was inundated with access to information requests. Obviously, under such exceptional circumstances, the team in place does not have the means necessary to quickly meet the demand, despite all its efforts.

As for Library and Archives Canada, I encourage you to communicate directly with the relevant division in order to obtain more details. I take it that the delays are caused by a workload accumulation due to a period of increase in the volume of requests, and that the team in charge is working hard to get rid of the backlog and to get back to normal.

In 2012-2013, we observed an overall 27% reduction in the number of requests with processing times exceeding 121 days. Over the last 12 months, we have implemented a series of best practices and adjusted processes so that access to information divisions may meet all requests in a timely manner. We are working very hard on this.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms. Day, your time is up.

Mr. Adler, you now have the floor.

[English]

**Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC):** Thank you, Minister, for being here, and thanks to your officials.

As you know, we've been undertaking a study at committee on open data, metadata. One thing we've learned is that you can't just throw data out there; you have to frame it in a way that is comprehensible to people.

Is there any education process that you have undertaken, first of all to show people that data is available, and second, to show them how to use it?

**Hon. Tony Clement:** Perhaps Corinne can add some things, but let me say at the outset that we have absolutely through the CODE experience gotten to various computer science departments and research departments from coast to coast. It was an exciting period for me, because we were able to get to the community that can most manipulate this data and come up with new and innovative things. These are the coders and the designers of mobile apps and those kinds of things. So the word is getting out there.

I would say that on the actual site itself, data.gc.ca, we try to make it easy for people to understand what's going on, what's new, what new things are available, those kinds of things. Some of it is passive; some of it is a question of my going out there as minister, making clear what is available. I think we have to do more. Certainly I think the coding and research community is more aware now than they were a couple of years ago.

In terms of the wider understanding, obviously there's more to do.

Corinne.

•(1600)

**Ms. Corinne Charette:** What we have to recall is that open data, data.gc.ca, is a movement that is basically only three years old, with our formal joining of the Open Government Partnership in 2012. We are still, throughout the federal public service and even in the provinces, territories, and municipalities, in a learning mode. We started off in late 2011 with six departments; we're now at 38 departments and have more than 200,000 data sets.

We're learning, both the users of open data, including the academics, the students, and the non-profits who are using this data, and also those of us within the public service. For instance, as part of our preparation for the CODE hackathon, we named in each department an open data coordinator and worked very hard with the coordinators across the major departments, first to identify high-value data sets, and second to bring them together to ensure that those data sets were properly described, so that users coming online to download them could understand what was in each field and could work on the data properly.

What we found in having these workshops—which we regularly do, and now we have a user community of open data coordinators across the federal government—is that we are all learning together and that in fact departments are coming together. As a result of students working on the CODE hackathon and observing how they use the data, we have learnings that we're bringing back and incorporating into our plans to release more data sets in the future to make them more comprehensible to the average Canadian as well as easier to download in the appropriate formats, and so on.

But three years is still very early days. We're very pleased with our progress, but we expect there will be more education to come.

**Mr. Mark Adler:** Okay.

I was reading that there are between 20,000 and 50,000 hits a month on the data.gc.ca website. Is there any indication who or what kind of people those 20,000 or 50,000 hits are from, whether they are researchers, students, or people who are just curious?

**Ms. Corinne Charette:** We're very preoccupied with maintaining the privacy of our users, so we do not track who comes and downloads; it is anonymous. We get occasional feedback on the site that says, "I'm interested in this data set. Can I have it?" We have their e-mail addresses for the purpose of responding to such e-mail, but in general, we do not track who is accessing what data. It's anonymous.

We suspect it's a lot of academics and students and non-profits and so forth.

**Mr. Mark Adler:** Okay.

There is a portal, I see, for comments and suggestions. Those are taken seriously and evaluated on their merits—

**Hon. Tony Clement:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Mark Adler:** —and then, if warranted, that data will be released.

Is that correct?

**Hon. Tony Clement:** Absolutely.

I'll add one more thing about the CODE experience, the appathon, the hackathon. It was really interesting that some of the coders decided not to do an app that was about a thing. They decided to do apps that would help people get better access to the data on the site. That was their focus as part of their app. This is great. It's the kind of thing you want to get from users: how they, in a more intuitive way, can use the site better.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Adler, but your time is up.

Mr. Byrne, I now give you the floor. You have five minutes.

[*English*]

**Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.):** Minister, you opened your discussion with us with a reference to the Heartbleed vulnerability and the impact it had on the federal government and its operations. You indicated that there was a breach of personal data, which the RCMP is now prosecuting as a criminal offence.

Minister, you indicated that Treasury Board is concerned about the Heartbleed bug and suggested that the committee should be concerned about it. You may be aware that there was a motion before this committee to study the Heartbleed vulnerability; I put forward a notice of motion that there be a discussion on that motion.

You will notice that there is no discussion pending on the Heartbleed vulnerability scheduled for this committee. You will also notice that there is a majority of Conservative members who sit on this committee, who direct the activities of the committee. I can't be any more open than that, but I'm sure you can connect the dots.

Since there are no scheduled hearings on the Heartbleed vulnerability by one of the government operations oversight committees that you feel should be concerned about it, could you outline for the committee what departments and agencies and organizations with OpenSSL architecture were shut down while this vulnerability was being investigated? Can you inform the committee whether there are any investigations now under way concerning breaches of personal privacy that may have not yet led to arrest or conviction but are now under way as an investigation?

•(1605)

**Hon. Tony Clement:** To answer your last question directly, I'm unaware of any further investigations other than the one with CRA that was referenced.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** Could you tell us what other departments, agencies, and organizations in the federal government were shut down for a period of time as a result of the vulnerability?

**Hon. Tony Clement:** All I can tell you off the top of my head is that any website that had OpenSSL, obviously as an inoculation approach to it, was shut down until the patch was ready. We applied the patch, and then we opened it up again.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** You opened your statement with a discussion about this, but you can't inform us of the departments.

**Hon. Tony Clement:** I don't have that information in front of me. I apologize.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** Okay.



Then I'll move to open data, since it does not appear we're going to get too far with that.

You indicated a directive is forthcoming on open data that will require federal departments to participate. That's a positive reinforcement. It implies there is some sort of requirement, some sort of adjudication as to whether or not departments are meeting that requirement. It would imply there's an appeal process for anyone who feels that a department or agency may not be meeting that requirement. Could you elaborate on this further to give us confidence in reply to some of the other questions, when I thought you would have relayed some information about the directive on open data, to ensure that we're getting open data, and it's not being politically gerrymandered.

**Hon. Tony Clement:** Sure. I'll leave it to Corinne to talk about the guts of the process.

The reason for doing it this way is that before, Corinne and I, not to make it personal, but as the CIO and the minister, we're constantly encouraging departments to publish more. Some departments put their shoulder to the wheel and were doing that. For other departments, it just wasn't a priority, or they were up to their eyeballs in alligators or whatever was going on, and they weren't responding to the extent that we thought they should be capable of.

Having the open data by default puts the onus on them. They have to publish unless they can convince in a process that it is a violation of public policy or some other legal requirement.

Corinne.

**Ms. Corinne Charette:** Fundamentally, data is collected, aggregated, created by individual programs across government in every department. Larger departments have multiple data sets that they collect and work with as evidenced by the amount we have. We don't yet have an inventory of all the available open data sets that we could wish to publish, so we're working on a policy instrument, a directive on open government, that will require departments to do two things.

The first is to compile an inventory of all the data they collect or aggregate or create by virtue of their individual programs. This is program by program, a data set or an inventory.

Once they have this inventory—and we anticipate that this will take some time, so it's not something that will happen overnight—and a directive is published, departments will have an implementation period to conduct their inventory and report their inventory to us. Then they'll have an implementation period to phase in these additional data sets for publication on the open data portal over the next couple of years. As you may recall from the last time I was here, each time we publish a data set on the open data portal once, it has to be in one of the formats that the open data community is prepared and able to use. Sometimes it requires manipulation. Then it requires descriptions at the metadata level that says what the data set is about, for instance, health information on diabetes, or whatever it is on. Then it has to describe each one of the fields in the data set sufficiently well so that somebody downloading it could repurpose it. This metadata has to be available, of course, in both official languages. Then we have to load it onto the portal.

The directive will allow us to do that.

•(1610)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** I am sorry to interrupt, but your time is up.

I now give the floor to Mr. Aspin. You have five minutes.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC):** Welcome, Minister and officials. Thank you for helping us with our study.

Minister, you're one of the great communicators of the government, so it's not surprising that you show so much enthusiasm for this particular project. I'm just wondering, how would you rank the federal government's initiatives on this open data area? On March 4, we had one of your officials come in and say that Canada had caught up to the United States and the United Kingdom as leaders. Other witnesses suggested we're still catching up, and still other witnesses suggest we aren't even close to those two countries. Could you give us your perspective on how we're doing relative to the other countries, and to the world?

**Hon. Tony Clement:** Thank you. I had no idea that the member was going to start his remarks by such a gratifying description of my abilities.

I think in some areas it's a bit lumpy. In some areas we're ahead or among the leaders, and in other areas we are catching up, but we're catching up quickly. It is one of these things where, because we have the Open Government Partnership now in place with 60 countries, we can start comparing and contrasting. I would say, because we're an advanced industrialized country with an advanced democracy, a number of things we're doing have a degree of sophistication, which I think is commendable. On the other side, when you're dealing with developing countries, their rate of catch-up is accelerating, but they started from a place far behind where we were. That's, I think, the reality of the situation.

When I talk to my counterparts about 200,000 data sets online, they are impressed. They see that as a very impressive total. I'll say this on the record. The United States had a contest where they were trying to encourage more citizen participation in app development. We took it to the next stage with our Canadian open data experience. I think ours was, at the end of the day, a superior process. When we started the process of organizing CODE, my stretch goal was maybe 100 participants. This was a brand new initiative. It was maybe of interest to computer science departments and a couple of other designers, and that kind of thing. To have 900 Canadians, a lot of them young Canadians who are still in school, participate in that project just blew me away. I was very excited about that, and very excited that they were excited about open data from a government perspective. A lot of them came up to me and said, "We had no idea this stuff was available and online", and it really is getting their creative juices flowing.

That's how I would answer that question. I'm proud of where we are, but I do know that we have to continue to make progress.

**Mr. Jay Aspin:** Minister, with regard to that, what would you say the government's overall objective is in this area? Would we want to be in the top 10%, the top quartile, or do we want to be the ultimate leader?

**Hon. Tony Clement:** I think we want to be the leader in open data.

You heard deponents here talk about Canada's next great natural resource. That's a line I've been using in my speeches across the country as well. I really do believe that if we can unlock the value of open data, it does create wealth. It creates knowledge. It creates a more informed citizen. It allows our entrepreneurs to be innovative and productive. Also, by the way, it makes Canadians' lives easier because these apps, when they get put on their mobile device, save time, maybe 5 minutes a day or 15 minutes a day, or help our new Canadians find the right place for them, or whatever it is the app does.

Quite frankly, the benefits are limitless. What I tried to do is engage the public. As I've said, with no offence to my colleagues, bureaucrats thinking of ways to create wealth is fine, but that's not the whole story. We've learned the creativity of the marketplace can really unleash this in a way that will create value for Canadians for years to come.

I really do believe this is the future. If we can be the leader in open data, that helps Canada create jobs and new economic opportunity for the future.

•(1615)

[Translation]

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Martin, you have five minutes, sir.

[English]

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Maybe I can help Jay answer some of the questions with some statistics.

The open data index is put together by independent data experts around the world, based on the open data census. They track how Canada is doing in 10 key data set areas. Here is how it ranks: of these developed nations, United Kingdom is ahead of us, the United States is ahead of us, Denmark is ahead of us, as are Norway, Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, New Zealand, Australia, and not by a little bit but by double the score. United Kingdom is ranked at 940 points out of 1,000. We're ranked at 590 points out of 1,000.

Clearly, if it's our intent to be a world leader, we're laggards in that field. I don't think it's getting the resources it needs. Witnesses have told us that if we want to put this data forward in a way that's accessible, usable, and well-organized—accessible is the word, I suppose—there has to be a lot more spending. We're spending a lot more on snooping on people than we are on sharing information.

I have a specific question for you, other than simply taking potshots at your project, Minister. Specifically, the open data index points out that...

Well, let me read what you committed to on data.gc.ca. Under expenditures you've committed to, as per your G-8 commitments, providing forecasts of in-year available expenditure authorities for

voted and statutory authorities for departments, agencies, and crown corporations.

When you signed on in February 2012, you started a pilot project in that regard. The open data index is wondering why you've discontinued that pilot project, and why we are at 10% in that category compared to 100% compliance for the United Kingdom, 100% compliance for the United States. It's 10% for the Government of Canada.

The one category Canadians really do want to know about is government spending. You can release all the weather forecasting information you want, which is of some utility, I suppose, but people really want to know what their government is doing with their money. How do you explain this criticism by the open data index that this pilot project has been cancelled, and the last report was September 2013 in that category?

**Hon. Tony Clement:** I've just accessed the open data index site. It's great to have NGOs be critical of governments; that's what some NGOs do, and I welcome their constructive criticism. I have no idea about their methodology. I'm going to click on "contributors" to see who contributes to this organization. There are a number of editors from around the world. I don't know who they are or what their credentials are, but I'd be happy to delve deeper into this site that you seem to be quoting.

All I can tell you is that we are part of a 60-nation partnership. We are proud to be leaders in this field, and we will continue to be.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Well, I guess I'm putting it to you that you're not leaders in this field, and that it's not getting the attention that I think it deserves.

**Hon. Tony Clement:** I have the site you're talking about. I don't know anything about these people and what their expertise is, so I really can't comment on your question. But if you're going to ask me questions based on stuff you search on the Internet, go right ahead. Let's keep talking.

•(1620)

**Mr. Pat Martin:** I'll ask you questions based on what we heard in evidence. We had testimony that the departments are releasing data that (a) is not useful to citizens, (b) is provided in a format that's difficult to work with, such as printed copies of spreadsheets rather than an Excel file, and (c) is not standardized, which makes it difficult to compare data sets from different departments. These are three legitimate criticisms of the site data.gc.ca, as it currently stands.

What kind of investment, what amount of money is it going to take to fix that, so that it's a state-of-the art, user-friendly, smart website? If you're serious about sharing information, you ought to make it user friendly.

**Ms. Corinne Charette:** We'll certainly look into that site and compare. I believe there have been times when some of the data sets posted were in the wrong format. I would say that those are very few cases, as we work very hard with departments to ensure that they're in readable formats and properly described. We will go back to this index and compare it.

My suspicion is that they are using out-of-date data; in other words, what they've published at that time would have been snapshots of earlier efforts, because at this point we're quite pleased with the quality of how we present data sets online and the consistency of the standards. In fact, the standards for metadata are fundamental—you're absolutely right—to making this usable. We continue to work with all departments across the government, Finance, to ensure that we put the information out as quickly as it is suitable for publication.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I must interrupt you in order to give the floor to Mr. O'Connor.

[*English*]

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Carleton—Mississippi Mills, CPC):** Minister, we've heard from different people about how wonderful this system is, and how we're going to save billions and trillions of dollars. I have to tell you, I'm very skeptical.

I understand the value of the information itself. Providing people with information is good, but I can't see how it's going to turn into billions or trillions of dollars. When you take 100 people and they receive 100 pieces of information, they'll say, "fine", and they'll want another 100. It never stops. It may mean we have to employ more people in the government to provide more information—I don't know—but I just don't see how you're going to save all these billions and trillions.

Maybe you could explain it to me.

**Hon. Tony Clement:** I don't think it's a question of saving the money; it's a question of wealth generation. I'll give you one example of how that's worked already in our society, which is your weather app.

Most Canadians care about the weather. They talk about the weather. They want to know what the weather is, so most Canadians have a weather app on their mobile device to give them the five-day, seven-day, or ten-day forecast. That helps them plan their trips and make sure they are properly and safely dressed for inclement weather, so there's a very positive impact on productivity as well as on safety. That's just one example.

Another great app is by Health Canada, which now publishes via a mobile app any safety recalls. This helps. For instance, if there's a baby crib that has been recalled, a new mom and dad will know about the recall and will be able to better protect their baby from that particular product. That's a social good quite apart from the wealth creation of other apps.

There are map apps. We can go from point A to point B in a safe and quick manner because of open data, because that geospatial data has been made open. Firms like Google, using Google Maps, and others are able to take that data, and with just the press of a button, you can find the transit route when you're in an unfamiliar city. It saves you time and money.

All of these things have been quantified. I think it's a bit of a guessing game—you're absolutely right—about the future, but certainly their present impact has been quite profound in society.

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor:** Okay. I'll move to a different topic.

We've been listening to various experts come and tell us about open data, and basically, most of them are what I would call nerds. They live in that world of coding and research, etc. We really want this material to get to the public, and I understand from earlier briefings that the government's not advertising. They're doing it by osmosis or something, and it'll never get to the public by osmosis. I believe that if you're going to do this, you have to advertise. You need to get on the radio and the TV and advertise that you have these sites, because there are millions of people out there who have no idea about these sites.

● (1625)

**Hon. Tony Clement:** Obviously this is part and parcel of the remaking in a format that is helpful to Canadians of all government websites, which is currently ongoing. That will help when people think of something they want to get, and they'll know where to get it.

I know that some would like us to pour heaps of dollars into this, but I think the better approach, quite frankly, is to use the nerds that you mentioned as intermediaries. They are able to take data and find a way to apply it to a useful app, and then it's up to them to advertise it to Canadians, to say that the app exists, and it's going to help make their lives better. Then these things tend to go viral.

That's the model I'm employing. I don't want to spend heaps more dollars on something when entrepreneurs using their mental agility could probably do a better job than we could anyway.

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor:** I know your department is enthusiastic about this open data, but are other departments as enthusiastic as you are?

**Hon. Tony Clement:** They're starting to be. I have communicated with all of my colleagues about their taking a leadership role within their department to get more open data, and the responses have been very encouraging. My colleagues have started to identify areas, whether it's fish stock information over at DFO, for instance, or other information that should be available but for whatever reason hasn't been made available.

We are collating that information, and we are working with them to publish the new data.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Day, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

According to experts who appeared before the committee, it would be crucial to return to the much discussed long-form census in order to provide Canadians, including businesses, added-value data.

Would you commit to reintroducing the former version of the census, or an amended version of it, making sure that it will be of use to Canadian businesses?

**Hon. Tony Clement:** Statistics Canada tells us that most of the information in the new form is useful. Of course, we must protect the privacy of Canadians. However, we must also make sure that the data from Statistics Canada can be used by Canadians. It is also important that I mention that there are different types of data. Statistics Canada represents part of our website. A lot of data is useful for Canadians, researchers, etc.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** You mentioned there were 200 data sets in 38 departments. Some witnesses highlighted the fact that most of the data was not in RDF format, although that is very important. You had started talking about this.

Moreover, municipality websites are very user-friendly and can be used easily by citizens. They contain first-line information.

Finally, is there a cross-reference between the various municipal, provincial, or federal portals to avoid duplication?

**Hon. Tony Clement:** I can say yes, but I will ask Corinne to give you more details about that.

**Ms. Corinne Charette:** About your first point, the RDF format, I want to mention that it is still in development. It allows networking of data sets between various portals. It requires a lot of work. Within our open data initiative in Canada, we work with provinces and municipalities to allow for a joint search across many portals. We plan to use the RDF format, although not right away, but at some point.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Because in the context of the charter, Canada committed, in particular, to having universal and accessible data.

**Ms. Corinne Charette:** The data is accessible, but the RDF format allows automatic pairing, which requires a lot of classification. We have to make sure to do the right pairing between data sets from various jurisdictions, and avoid mixing data in a way that would not respect the data's integrity or accuracy. We have to think about it a lot. We are talking here about the notion of semantic Web. We are working on these issues, but it will happen further down the road.

About duplications, in the context of the open data initiative in Canada, we work with municipalities. We want to promote portals that use the same licence as us, and common data sets so that this can be truly implemented within a year.

Our colleagues from the provinces and territories, and also from the municipalities, show a lot of good will. There has been significant progress. Data from municipalities is most accessible by citizens because it relates directly to services they use daily. By contrast, data sets available at the federal level, even though they are very important for Canadians, relate less directly to the services they receive. That is why the municipal portals are very popular.

•(1630)

**The Chair:** Thank you. Unfortunately, I must interrupt you.

I thank once again the President of the Treasury Board for being here today for our study on open data. I am sure that committee members greatly appreciated it.

We will now break for a few minutes before welcoming two more officials from your department.

**Hon. Tony Clement:** Thank you.

•(1630)

(Pause)

•(1630)

**The Chair:** We will now continue our meeting and come back to questions from committee members.

Mr. Trottier, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

We've had several presentations from various stakeholders in the world of open data. A few have said that the focus shouldn't be so much on the applications. I know there was the appathon, or some call it the hackathon, which is a source of value. But a lot of witnesses have said that one of the main sources of value associated with open data is just reducing some of the administrative overhead and friction in people's day-to-day lives.

Even within the same level of government, being able to get some data immediately, as opposed to putting together a formal request for data, somebody processing that request and then waiting a few days, the efficiency of government can be improved. The efficiency for people waiting to receive data can also be improved.

Can you comment on that? Are there things that you see with open data that are driving those kinds of efficiencies, both on the giving as well as on the receiving end of open data?

•(1635)

**Mr. Stephen Walker (Senior Director, Information Management Strategies, Chief Information Officer Branch, Treasury Board Secretariat):** Certainly it's a really good point. One of the witnesses, David Eaves, I think, talked pretty significantly about this when he was here.

It's important to be able to associate the benefits of open data far beyond just what the economic impact might be in the first place, the social impact specifically.

One of the most popular data sets currently that we make available has to do with new arrivals to Canada. Municipalities require this data in order to develop their own settlement services and provide supports locally. If they had to figure out how to develop that data themselves, they wouldn't have it in time to have supports available to those newcomers.

In other areas, I think that oftentimes the data is being provided in a non-formatted version so that it can be reused for many different things; it doesn't come with a preconceived notion of what the user is trying to get out of it. I think one data set could support the development of multiple uses, as opposed to the single use that we originally developed the data for. We have to be careful about making sure that when we make the data available, we don't preconfigure it to look like what we planned on using it for in the first place.

In terms of making it easier for individuals or intermediaries to use that data, to factor that data into other data that we don't have and don't own in order to be able to provide new services, especially services which are research oriented, social benefit oriented, logistical analysis oriented, these are things that go far beyond just the capacity to drive economic value.

**Mr. Bernard Trottier:** Were you a participant, or an observer, I suppose, at the recent CODE, Canadian Open Data Experience?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** I was, yes.

**Mr. Bernard Trottier:** With any of the applications that were developed, did people see economic potential behind those applications? Was there a sense that there is a market?

Let's say that people spend a dollar each, or whatever it is, to download an application. Is there a sense that there's a real market and some real opportunities in selling some of these applications to users out there?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** It was an interesting event. It was the first one we'd ever done.

As the minister said, the response was overwhelming and unexpected to us. The feeling of entrepreneurial pursuit was rampant right across the event. There were a lot of teams there, thinking about how to build the next application, how to get a new tool available on iPhones, at 99¢ a shot. There were a lot of other teams that were there, like one of the eventual winners, who I think now is thinking about it economically. They didn't set out to develop an app that was going to provide them with a return on investment; they were looking at a tool which might provide assistance and support to other Canadians.

Some of this, I think, is driven by a sense of innovation, which does not necessarily have to be attached to profit. I think we saw the full gamut at CODE. Across the 110 teams, there were people who were specifically looking for the next silver bullet in terms of apps, right to organizations that had no interest beyond social benefits.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Trottier.

Mr. Byrne now has the floor.

[English]

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** My question will be directed to Mr. Adamson.

Mr. Adamson, Mr. O'Connor raised a question about advertising. Mr. O'Connor's belief is that advertising plays an important role in getting open data and data.gc.ca active in people's lives, I think Mr. O'Connor is correct. There is a role to play here.

The minister's comment in reply to Mr. O'Connor was that it's not the government's job to advertise open data, that it's the job of the app creators to do that, if I'm paraphrasing correctly.

If you apply that logic, Treasury Board should not allow any advertising of tax relief for Canadians through the economic action plan; it actually should be H&R Block and TurboTax that do the

advertising. I think that we would agree that's probably not the best way to get your information.

Why are we not advertising this program and this initiative? We have a multi-million dollar advertising program within the Government of Canada and for the minister's statement to be that it's inappropriate to use those resources to fund an initiative that the government itself claims to be a hallmark initiative of openness and transparency, there is a disconnect there.

Could you explain, Mr. Adamson, why we're not engaging in an advertising campaign to use some of those resources to get this initiative a little bit further along?

• (1640)

**Mr. Dave Adamson (Deputy Chief Information Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat):** The Government of Canada undertakes promotional activities, but we don't advertise for everything. I'm not sure that this isn't a question more for the president than for me.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** As the deputy chief information officer with a role to play in open data, what do you intend to do to promote open data within government to the Canadian people?

**Mr. Dave Adamson:** Can I ask you to take this?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** There are a variety of activities that we can undertake to promote the existence of the open data portal, even the existence of our partner portals within other jurisdictions.

The minister talked about the most successful promotional activity to date, which was CODE. This brought profile to data.gc.ca that we had not seen before, and the impact has been immediate in terms of awareness of this site in general.

We're also going to move forward with a second round of round table discussions right across the country in five cities, bringing in open data users, non-open data users, academics, business, and municipal public servants, all of whom, of course—which I think the minister was referring to—have access to a broader network. We promote it that way.

There is a social media communications plan in development in support of open data as well, and in fact in support of all the open government activities.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** In terms of the forthcoming directive on open data, when do you anticipate it would be forthcoming?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** Currently, the plan for the directive is to be issued later this summer.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** What would the key elements be to the directive on open data in terms of a positive requirement for government departments and agencies to be able to report open data?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** There are a few. It is a draft directive at this point and it has not been approved, so I'll be speaking to draft requirements.

As Corinne Charette mentioned, the primary requirement is that first we will have to know what data exists comprehensively across the government. Departments will be required to complete data inventories—

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** Mr. Walker, perhaps I could interrupt because I am limited in time.

Notwithstanding your inventory, which obviously has to be completed, it does not impact the second element of this which is that regardless of what the inventory includes, you will still have to determine the requirements that federal agencies and departments will have to report.

Could you outline what those requirements would be?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** There are a few more. All departments will be required to publish all data that is not subject to privacy, confidentiality, conflict of interest.

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** For example, VIA Rail would have to report their off schedules. VIA Rail would report things when the train is off schedule. They collect that data, and they'll have to report it on open data.

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** It's a good point. The policy will be applied to schedule 1 and 2 organizations, not crown corporations.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I must interrupt you, Mr. Byrne.

Ms. Ablonczy now has the floor for five minutes.

• (1645)

[English]

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** I have just some short snappers, I think.

First of all, has Treasury Board considered creating databases that users could contribute to?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** The answer is yes. I think most of the major portals internationally are considering it. None of them has done it yet. I think we're along with them. We're working dedicatedly with both the U.S. and the U.K. now. All of us are trying to figure out how to meet security conditions and privacy conditions, when what you're really doing is you're publishing a federal data set, in our case. Users are adding to it, data from other areas, so it's no longer just our data. We no longer own that data set. Then they want to republish it, via us, back out to the world. Does it still fall under the open government licence that we have? Who's responsible for the quality of that data? Those are the concerns that jurisdictions have, but we're working together to try to figure it out.

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** That sounds reasonable. As you're doing this, do you talk with public servants and other departments? Part of what you're trying to do, I think, is improve efficiency within the federal government. Is there any forum where this is being discussed, or moved forward?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** There is a variety. As Corinne mentioned already, we've established 50 open data coordinators across the federal government. There is an open data coordinator in over 50 of the departments that we're working with currently.

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** Do they get paid more money?

That was a joke. Sorry.

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** That might be beyond my scope. There is an ADM committee for the federal government that looks at all open

data and open government issues. There are periodic open data workshops that bring together people from both the business side and the technical side. The consultation and communication with departments are continuous.

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** Is there anything that's going to be published or available to the committee about the kind of comments you're getting back in this process? We're interested. We understand that it's somewhat confidential, but at the same time we're interested in....

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** We could certainly provide a summary of feedback that we've received.

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** That would be very helpful. Maybe the clerk could make sure that we receive that.

With respect to the database, instead of being made public, is there an inventory? Is there a place where someone can see that there's a list of databases that can be looked at?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** Absolutely. It's already made available from data.gc.ca. I'm not sure how many of the members have had a chance to actually visit it, but it's remarkably easy to use. You just show up on the front page and punch in a subject and it searches all the data sets. If—

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** It's like an index.

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** Yes.

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** Is it alphabetized?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** It's alphabetized. It's by department, by subject, by licence, by format.

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** Okay. One of the witnesses said that this data should be in RDF format. I have no idea what that is, but talk to us about that, and about your perspective.

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** I heard that one. I think what they really were talking about was that we need to look at RDF going forward, just as they do, and everybody else does. None of the jurisdictions is currently making their data available in RDF. It is a developing standard that all jurisdictions are going to be encouraged to look at as we go forward.

We have very specific standards that we use for accessibility currently for all of our file formats, the same ones that are used by the U.S. and the U.K. and all of the other countries that we've been talking about.

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** Are you looking at it?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** We'll be doing that with the other jurisdictions collectively.

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** Okay. That's reassuring.

The U.S. has something called challenge.gov, which lets the public have input into solving problems of the government. Do we have anything like that? Are we looking at anything like that? Is there any merit in this kind of approach? It sounded interesting.

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** Yes, it's a bit more broad than open data. It's basically a crowd-sourcing challenge site. I think, like many jurisdictions that are interested in finding a cheaper, more efficient way to do things, maybe we'll start looking at that down the road as well.

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** At this point there's no...

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** No, there is no crowd-sourcing platform for the Government of Canada.

• (1650)

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you for your understanding.

Mr. Martin, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

**Mr. Pat Martin:** I'm interested, witnesses, if any of you have heard of or are familiar with the open data index put forward by the Open Knowledge Foundation that I was quoting from. Are you familiar with that international organization?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** I am, yes.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** How do you feel about the figures that I was reading to the minister of our progress and our place in relation to other developed nations? Was that a surprise to you, or do you track those things in the global—

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** Yes, there are two main indexes that are currently being used. One is called the open data index and the other one is called the open data barometer. I think another witness might have mentioned the other one as well along the way.

Both of these tools assess a certain number of jurisdictions against specific types of data. For example, we're not being assessed on whether or not we have the best licence or the best portal or the best policy, just what data we make available.

In many cases, Canada is disadvantaged because the federal government doesn't own the data that they're asking for. So when they say 10%, for example, on financial information, that information is way out of date. But we would never get to 100%, because they're talking about data that the provinces and the municipalities also have.

The U.K. doesn't have that problem. They have all the data for everybody at all levels and they can make it available, so they can get to 100% fairly easily. We just don't have that data.

Another tough area for us is health. Another tough one is education. These are provincial jurisdictions and we just don't own the data. I think going forward we're going to have to use the open data initiative, and there are other collaborative activities with the jurisdictions to find ways of partnering on how to get their data out as well.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Okay, fair enough. Thank you.

Let me ask a simple straightforward question then. What are the total costs incurred to date in relation to the federal government's open data initiative to the best of your ability, all parts rounded up to the nearest \$100 million if you need to?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** Oh, \$100 million. I could talk to the last couple of years quite easily. The total for both last fiscal year and this fiscal year in its entirety would be somewhere close to \$1.6 million.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** You said \$1 million?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** Yes, and that would cover the technical platform, the development—

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Coffee money for this committee is roughly \$1.6 million per year isn't it, Gerry?

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** That's just for sandwiches.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** That's the total?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** Yes, that was the 2013-14 amount. The plan for 2014-15 is about the same. It would have been less the two previous years before that, and before that, zero.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** If I'm not mistaken, we've spent \$1.2 billion building a building for CSEC and 2,000 full-time employees to spy on Canadians, and we're spending \$1.6 million a year to provide access to information.

Thank you for that answer. I'm very surprised to learn that, actually.

Can I ask a specific question? What's the relationship between the Treasury Board's open government steering committee and the advisory panel on open data?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** The open government steering committee is the cross-departmental ADM level committee. It has representation from 35 departments that meet regularly to help plan the open government activity moving forward.

The open government advisory panel is a committee that exists as an advisory group specifically to the minister only, made up of outside, non-government employees.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** That's very helpful.

This is my very last question and it's very specific.

David Eaves, who is a member of the advisory panel, apparently said that in prioritizing data to be delivered to Canadians, the government should focus on opening data that will be the most use to other countries in terms of encouraging economic development and obtaining the best return on investment.

Has it been the focus of the advisory panel to provide information that is of interest to other countries, or is the priority to provide information that is of use of Canadians?

I'm a little confused with the tone of that recommendation to the minister.

• (1655)

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** I'm not sure of the context of his comment. I certainly know that he has been consistent with his feedback that we need to prioritize data. The CIO mentioned that it's pretty hard to make all the data available in one fell swoop, so we need to be able to try to target the data that would have the biggest impact sooner.

We do that mostly in terms of Canadians.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** This is the first time I've heard an emphasis on international investment, etc.

Is it the purpose, is it one of the stated mandates of the open data initiative to entice investment and economic development by virtue of other countries getting access to our information?

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Please be brief if you want to have time to answer the question.

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** It has been highlighted for a few specific subject areas, and agriculture specifically, mostly as a result of G-8 discussions. Canada has been asked, as a number of other countries have been asked, to publish data related to its agricultural activities because it is immediately useful to developing countries.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Adler, you have the floor. You have five minutes.

[English]

**Mr. Mark Adler:** Thank you for being here today.

I was wondering if you could elaborate a bit on whether there are any ongoing studies in terms of how we're stacking up against other jurisdictions, both internationally and domestically.

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** The area of measuring impact associated with open data is an ongoing concern and pursuit for most jurisdictions.

As was mentioned, I chair the OGP committee on open data, and we've been asked by the OGP to make a specific line of activity related to the measurement of impact. The provinces here in Canada are preoccupied with it. In the United States, the state governments as well as the federal government are preoccupied with it. So is the U.K.. Everyone is preoccupied.

There are so many different ways, so many different facets that are going to have to come into play in order to measure impact. It will take some time to get to what I hope will be a regularized framework that will be applicable from jurisdiction to jurisdiction so that we're measuring apples to apples. That work will be collaborative as well as consultative. Many countries, including the U.S. and the U.K., have agreed to work with us on that.

**Mr. Mark Adler:** You kind of pre-empted my next question because I wanted to know if there are uniform definitions, if specific words mean the same thing in different jurisdictions so that the data that you get in one jurisdiction is comparable to the data you're getting in another jurisdiction, and you're actually measuring apples to apples.

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** That's another key area.

Most of the time when people are talking about standards and open data standards, that's what we're talking about. As an example, there's an undertaking for OGP countries to come up with a standardized view of the metadata that should be used to describe open data, regardless of where it is, because there aren't gigantic variations among ourselves, the U.K., and the U.S. There are small variations. The G-8 has taken on the exact same activity. They want to be able to map open data from all member countries, and to do so, we have to come close. We don't have to be exact, but we have to come close on the alignment of our metadata. So yes, that's a formal activity of ours going forward.

**Mr. Mark Adler:** It is. Yes.

Do you anticipate at some point there will be some standard regime in place that will have an accurate definition of all these specific terms and references?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** Yes, and there are a couple of organizations currently, Schema.org and World Wide Web Foundation. There are different actors. Someone already mentioned the Open Knowledge Foundation. There are a bunch of organizations that are feeding into the development of these standards.

As I said, at the end of the day we just have to get to the point where the data from one jurisdiction is comparable to the data from any other jurisdiction. We have to come close on these standards, and you'd be challenged to find a jurisdiction that isn't interested in doing that. Most of them want to be able to compare their data to another jurisdiction's data.

• (1700)

**Mr. Mark Adler:** In terms of—

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** If I could just say one more thing....

**Mr. Mark Adler:** Yes. Please do.

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** Canada has signed on to the international aid transparency initiative, IATI, which is basically an offshoot of just that kind of thinking, that Canada can't compare its international aid data to any other country's and no other country can compare theirs to ours. IATI gets founded and establishes international standards, and now all international aid data can be compared to each other.

Some of that will continue to be subject related, subject specific, like that one for aid.

**Mr. Mark Adler:** Okay.

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** There's another one for extractive resources. There's another one for financing.

**Mr. Mark Adler:** Do you get together with your counterparts in other areas and other jurisdictions on a regular basis to discuss these kinds of things?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** Yes, continuously.

**Mr. Mark Adler:** Where do you see this in five years or ten years? Not that we're going to hold you to it, but....

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** I think that if we continue to follow the road we're following now, the aspirations we have for federated open data will be met. We'll be talking about a world where you can go to any one of an unlimited number of portals, search data and be able to pick which jurisdictions you want the data from, and then have that come back to you in one common set of returns.

I think there are other areas where progress is still required, such as licensing. There's the fact that you need to be able to make the data available without restriction for any kind of reuse. That's a longer road going forward. We're doing well. I think Canada's doing well. There are other places where there's still a lot of work in front of them.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[Translation]

You time is up.

Ms. Day, you have the floor for five minutes.



**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today. This has been very instructive.

Can you tell us what means the government intends on using to decide whether information should be in the portal or if it is confidential?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** That's a great question.

If we assume an open-by-default regime, then we're just accepting data that can't be published. All the rest of the data, by default, will be published. So what is the criteria that we will use to accept data? We have an operational checklist that we use currently and share with departments, and it's called the selection criteria for open data. Basically, it looks at whether or not the data has been tested for personal data concerns, such as confidentiality, security, and whether or not the Government of Canada owns the data. There are two or three other criteria factors that are listed.

Ultimately, the owner of the data is the individual department. We will hold the individual departments responsible for assessing their own criteria, but we will tell them or help them to define what that criteria is. Then we will have a quality assurance as the data is provided to be published on the portal.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Are those criteria currently public?

For example, if I wanted to put information about the Department of the Environment in the portal, would I be able to find out beforehand which criteria might prevent me from doing that?

**Mr. Sylvain Latour (Director, Open Government Secretariat, Treasury Board Secretariat):** The specific directive has not been published yet. We have a draft that departments can consult and comment on. However, we use existing legislation. When we need to determine what constitutes confidential data, the Privacy Act applies. The same applies for other situations.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Who decides what will be allowed or not? Does the department decide?

**Mr. Sylvain Latour:** Under the process we follow, the deputy ministers must designate a person who is responsible for information management within their department. It is that individual, who is appointed by the deputy minister, who is responsible for telling us that the criteria are being met and that the information can be published.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Last year, the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada announced that 90% of federal scientists did not feel free to speak about their work to the media and that 25% of them had stated that they had to omit some of the information or modify it.

Who gives those criteria to the scientists?

**Mr. Sylvain Latour:** I apologize but I cannot answer that question.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Mr. Walker, can you respond?

How can one say that the government wants to implement open and transparent initiatives when information is controlled in this country?

What directives do you give the departments for the purposes of controlling information?

• (1705)

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** There are two points.

First, we have to allow individual departments to apply the criteria individually, because there are individual legislations and mandates within each department that may place restrictions on that data. Certain legislation doesn't allow for the data to be shared.

Second, you heard us talk about how the inventorying of data will be a requirement under the new directive. We plan to publish the inventory so the public will see what data existed within the department and what data had been published. If they have questions or queries about why data was not published, they'll be able to address those directly to the department responsible.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Is there not a discrepancy between the statement in the G8's Charter on open data, that is that there be transparency by providing free and universal access to data, and the fact that there is "a certain degree of control over information"? I am putting those words in quotation marks because I do not want to target any one individual.

The minister said earlier that it was not necessary to know those people for information to be in the portal. I am hoping he was joking.

**Mr. Sylvain Latour:** Before information is made available, we have to make sure that we are allowed to make it available. In some areas, information is circulated rather freely between various individuals with no consideration for who has rights, who is responsible and who is allowed to make the information available.

We have to make sure in all cases that we are not giving access to information that could be prejudicial to a sector other than our own. In the case of research, information belongs to a university or a researcher. We must do our due diligence and make sure that the information being published is Canada's, that we have the right to publish it and that it is not prejudicial to anyone.

The minister must implement processes for that purpose. The Treasury Board directive, which is currently in a draft form, will require that departments do this, but they have the control over their data.

**The Chair:** Ms. Day, your time is up. Thank you.

Mr. Aspin, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

**Mr. Jay Aspin:** Welcome to our committee this afternoon, gentlemen.

I'm going to focus on some internal questions to TBS with respect to open data, and three questions in particular.

Has the federal government established some kind of a dialogue with public servants to identify which data sets should be prioritized for release to improve efficiencies within the government?

Who would like to answer that, maybe Mr. Walker?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** Sure.

Yes, we have. As we mentioned, we've identified a lead-specific open data coordinator in every department. We then charge the open data coordinators, let's say in Environment Canada, to be able to go out to the business areas of Environment Canada, find out what data should be prioritized for release. It goes back to the data coordinator, and the data coordinator comes back to us. That goes along with the ongoing development of the portal, the development of standards. This is in consultation with all the departments that are participating in open data.

**Mr. Jay Aspin:** Okay, because according to several witnesses we've heard, public servants represent a large segment of the open data users.

Has the government's open data portal transformed the way public servants work with one another? For example, has it fostered better decision-making internally or a more efficient utilization of public services?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** I think the answer is yes. I'm not sure we can quantify the answer specifically, but certainly for a department to make a decision to share a data set with the world, they've shared it with the rest of the government by default. What we see happening is all kinds of increased collaboration on the development of data sets specifically that meet multiple mandates from different departments. We see efficiencies in the management of the data, because instead of the same data set being maintained and managed in multiple departments, it'll be managed in one place.

So I would say yes, we've seen both efficiencies and a larger tendency toward collaboration among different departments.

• (1710)

**Mr. Jay Aspin:** As Treasury Board Secretariat is responsible for many government-wide initiatives, which particular data sets would be most useful to officials within the department in terms of open government data?

Could you make that assessment?

**Mr. Stephen Walker:** If we're talking about the federal public service...because I think, too, that when the point was originally made by the witness, he meant the public service in general. Certainly for federal data, provincial and municipal employees are a gigantic number of users for us. I think federally some of the more generic, underlying foundational data sets like census data or geospatial data are really of more significant use to multiple departments, because they can be used to augment the information they already have in many different ways.

**Mr. Jay Aspin:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

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

That ends our testimony for today's meeting. I would like to thank the witnesses again for coming today. I know that their expertise will help the committee members with this study.

I am now going to suspend the meeting for a few minutes, and then the committee will continue its business.

• (1710) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1710)

**The Chair:** Order please. We will continue our meeting starting with the agenda. We have a notice of motion from Mr. Trottier.

[*English*]

**Mr. Bernard Trottier:** I'd like us to go in camera. I just want to talk about the study and some witnesses.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Trottier has moved that we go in camera.

The motion is not debatable.

Mr. Byrne, did you have a question?

[*English*]

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** Before we go in camera, could the motion be read?

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Trottier has not tabled his motion yet, but he has moved that the committee go in camera.

I am now going to ask for a vote on the motion moving that the committee continue its business in camera. I am going to ask the committee members if they would like us to proceed in that fashion.

[*English*]

**Hon. Gerry Byrne:** Could we have a recorded vote, Mr. Chair?

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** A recorded vote has not been requested, however if you are requesting it, we can do that.

I apologize, but I am being told that it is too late for a recorded vote because the vote by a show of hands has already begun.

(Motion agreed to)

We will now suspend the meeting for a few minutes in order to give the technician time to make the necessary changes for us to sit in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]







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