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• (1615)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Good afternoon to the members of the committee and our witnesses for today.

I think we all know more or less the rules for how the committee proceeds. Both languages, of course, can be used at any time. When you're not speaking, we would appreciate if you could put your Zoom on mute.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My colleague Monique Pauzé of the Bloc Québécois and I have asked the clerk to send you a note about a document sent to committee members. Unfortunately, it was a link to a document circulating on the web that is in English only.

I'd like to see steps taken to ensure that all correspondence to members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development is in both English and French. I would like people to ensure that documents are not submitted in only one language. Otherwise, the documents will not be in order. Neither language group should have an advantage or be at a disadvantage.

That's why I would like to see steps taken to prohibit distribution of these documents before they are fully translated. Otherwise, witnesses and organizations should be advised that they should not provide documents in only one official language.

The Chair: If I understood correctly, a brief or a document contains a link to a website, and this page on the website is in one language only. Is that correct?

Mr. Joël Godin: Actually, it's a link to the website of the Pembina Institute, whose representatives appeared before the committee. The site has links to documents in English only. As francophone parliamentarians, we feel we are at a disadvantage since we do not have access to the same information as our anglophone colleagues.

The Chair: In such cases, should the document simply be included without the link?

Mr. Joël Godin: Actually, no, the information should not be sent.

The Chair: Should we refuse to accept the entire document?

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes.

The Chair: I agree. That's to be expected.

Mr. Joël Godin: What concerns me, Mr. Chair, is a document made available by the committee could give access to documents in English only or, because it goes both ways, in French only.

The Chair: If the link included in the document leads to a web page in one of the two official languages only, we must refuse to accept the entire document.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Yes, that's it.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you for raising this important point.

[*English*]

We're studying the estimates, and we have with us today the Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Welcome, Minister. It's nice to see you again, virtually. I can't remember when the last time was that I saw you in person, but it's good to see you virtually today.

We have, from the Department of the Environment, Christine Hogan, deputy minister. We also have Carol Najm, assistant deputy minister, corporate services and finance branch, and Ron Hallman, president and chief executive officer of the Parks Canada Agency.

We'll start with the minister. Please go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I'm certainly happy to be with you once again to discuss the 2020-21 supplementary estimates (B) for Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Parks Canada Agency.

I would like to start by recognizing that this meeting, or at least where I am situated, is taking place on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

Mr. Chair, last month, when we reviewed the 2020-21 main estimates, I spoke about the essential work that Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Parks Canada Agency perform for Canadians. Since then there have been significant developments, with the introduction of the Canada net zero emissions accountability act, a central element of this government's strategy to achieve a durable post-pandemic economic recovery and long-term prosperity in a low-carbon world.

On November 30 the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance tabled the fall economic statement, which puts climate action at the centre of our plan to create a million jobs and make substantial investments in nature and nature-based climate solutions, including the government's plan to plant two billion trees.

[Translation]

A resilient economy is not just a more inclusive economy, but also one that is sustainable, competitive and responsive to global demand. We are investing in meaningful climate measures. We know that failure to do so will only increase the costs and the risks of climate change to all Canadians.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us all of the importance of early, sustained action to address systemic risks that threaten our daily lives. The supplementary estimates (B) allow us to continue delivering on important programs, initiatives and regulations that protect the health, safety and security of Canadians, our economy and our environment.

• (1620)

[English]

The Environment and Climate Change Canada supplementary estimates (B) amount to a net increase of \$5.2 million, bringing the department's total authorities to \$2,028,800,000. These funds support significant priorities, such as implementing the pan-Canadian framework and meeting our commitments under the Paris Agreement. They include an internal reallocation within the low-carbon economy fund contributions of half a million dollars. This reallocation is necessary as provincial and territorial delays in submitting their proposals led to delays in accessing funding notionally allocated to them. This, in turn, impacted their ability to initiate approved programs, lowering their capacity to spend the anticipated funding.

There is a transfer of \$3.4 million in grants and contributions to the Department of Natural Resources to support the Forests Ontario 50-million-tree program, advancing nature-based climate solutions. This funding will also help us to protect Canada's nature, parks and wild spaces through the Canada Nature fund, with a carry-over of funding from 2019-20 that will increase its contributions by \$1.3 million. It will help improve the ecological integrity of the Great Lakes ecosystem, with a transfer of \$1 million to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. In addition, the supplementary estimates will also support the implementation of the Canada-wide strategy on zero plastic waste, through a transfer of \$5.3 million in grants and contributions to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the Department of Crown-Indigenous Affairs to help to develop plastics science.

[Translation]

Now let's turn to Parks Canada.

This spring, Parks Canada temporarily suspended visitor access and some services in an effort to support Canada's efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19. This temporary suspension led to a significant shortfall in revenue for the agency for the 2020 visitor season.

Through the supplementary estimates (B) 2020-21, the agency is seeking to increase its reference levels in the amount of almost \$84 million.

[English]

The majority of this amount of money, \$74 million, will be used to partially compensate the agency for the unexpected revenue shortfall due to the decline in visitation from April 1 to September 30, as well as for the remission of a portion of the annual payments on non-residential leases and licences of occupation to businesses located in sites administered by Parks Canada. The supplementaries will also support Parks Canada's collaborative effort with NRCAN by providing \$2.2 million in funding to mitigate the impacts of the mountain pine beetle infestation in the Rocky Mountain national parks in Alberta.

This funding also includes \$7 million that is being moved from last year to this year to protect Canada's nature, parks and wild spaces in support of the impact benefit agreement with the Dehcho First Nations and the establishment of the Nahanni National Park Reserve.

Finally, there are transfers of \$0.6 million from other government departments in relation to environmental and climate change activities.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to stop there. I hope this summary provides committee members with an overview of the 2020-21 supplementary estimates (B).

I'm certainly happy to engage with you in terms of questions and ideas that you may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll go right into the round of questioning. We'll start with the six-minute round, starting with Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for our service to our great country.

Minister, your party made a promise to plant two billion trees. I and many others assumed these were in addition to the trees already being planted in Canada, yet in your economic statement, you now say you won't actually be doing this; instead, you will be actually paying others to do the planting.

Is your actual plan just to put the taxpayer on the hook for trees that were already going to be planted by industry?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Thank you, Mr. Albas. I appreciate your question.

No, these are two billion trees that will be planted incremental to anything that was already being planned to be planted, but certainly we will be working with partners, provinces and territories, indigenous peoples and others to ensure that the planting gets done in an expedited way.

Mr. Dan Albas: Minister, provinces already have planting programs, and those are done largely through rules that force forestry companies to replant areas that they harvest.

Can you 100% confirm to us here today that every tree you intend to plant is not one that would already have been done without your program?

• (1625)

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: The focus is absolutely on incremental trees that are focused largely in areas that are not subject to harvesting for the purpose of economic growth. The focus very much is on trying to ensure that we are using these trees to reforest parts of Canada that have been deforested for a whole range of reasons, including forest fires, mountain pine beetle and a range of other activities.

The focus is very much on the incremental planting of trees.

Mr. Dan Albas: Minister, Beth MacNeil, who is the assistant deputy minister to the Canadian Forest Service, stated in regards to the promise to plant two billion trees:

It is above the requirement and above the numbers that companies and provinces already are committed to planting. When I say “incremental”, that means we’re not paying for what they already have to do by the law in Canada under the regulatory regimes in the provinces.

Minister, is this quote correct?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: As I said, Mr. Albas, the focus is definitely on the incremental planting of trees. It is not to provide a subsidy to forest products companies to do things that they already need to do.

This is a nature-based agenda that is focused on sequestering carbon. It is also focused on enhancing biodiversity, and I think both you and I would agree that it should be focused on incremental trees.

Mr. Dan Albas: Okay, so are you confirming that the two billion number for planting trees is on top of tree-planting programs that are already in place? Is that 100% correct?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: The focus, yes, is on incremental trees.

As I say, we will be working with provinces and territories in the context of how these things get done. Of course, we want to partner with folks who have the relevant expertise, including lots of expertise in the province that you and I both come from.

Mr. Dan Albas: Yes.

Your economic statement also says that there will be no money for planting this year, a small amount for next year, and then it will eventually start to spin up a couple of years from now.

Minister, a huge part of planting trees is ordering seedlings a year ahead of time. Is it really your intent to not even get started on this promise for three years, and then start planting in year four?

I think Canadians who heard your promise in 2019 assumed that the trees would be planted before 2024.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I think Canadians know that nature-based solutions, which include both trees and the restoration of wetlands, are a priority for this government. I think they saw that in context when the Ontario Conservative government cancelled its commitment to tree planting and this government stepped in to provide the money through Forests Ontario to actually continue that program.

We also stepped in during the pandemic to ensure that we were providing money to folks who were doing existing tree planting to ensure that it got done. Because of money that the federal government brought to bear, 600 million trees were planted, and we are going to be rolling out this commitment, which is \$3 billion, to plant two billion trees across this country, and that will begin next year.

Mr. Dan Albas: Minister, getting on to your commitment, existing seedling production is largely focused on replanting commercially viable trees, yet you’ve said you want a more diverse portfolio of trees to encourage biodiversity—a goal which I support, as does my party—but two billion trees is a lot, and spinning up that kind of production will take time and money.

Again, you really don’t plan to get this program going until 2023. How will you possibly have enough lead-time to develop these trees for planting before the middle of the decade?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: As I say, the focus is on expediting this process as quickly as possible. There are some things that obviously take time, as you have observed. I think you and I would agree that we want to get this going as quickly as we possibly can, and that’s the work that folks are going to do. As you know, Natural Resources Canada has primary responsibility for this program, and they are working on it every day.

Mr. Dan Albas: Minister, it’s also up to you to make sure that the trees that are going to be planted are based on science and on what will increase biodiversity and support critical habitat. Could you please give us a little more elaboration? Are we simply going to be giving money to private companies that already have to do it to plant trees that don’t support sequestering carbon or having more biodiversity in our forests?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Again, it’s a very good question. No, it will not be going to subsidize forest product companies.

We just signed an agreement a few months ago with the Government of Alberta on replanting trees as part of a strategy to restore the habitat for boreal caribou in that province. Some of that money will be going to restore boreal caribou habitat. It will not be logged. It will be part of restoration to ensure that we are providing for the survival of that species.

That is something that Minister Nixon and I have worked hard on. Certainly some of the money that is associated with the trees will be going to support the Government of Alberta in its efforts to ensure the survival of that species.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go to Mr. Baker, who is splitting his time with Ms. O'Connell.

Is that correct? Okay.

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Minister, which of the proposed financial allocations in the supplementary estimates will make the greatest contribution toward fighting climate change?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: As you know, on the allocations in supplementary estimates (B), the biggest impact, I would think, is on reducing emissions associated with the low-carbon economy fund. That is referenced in supplementary estimates (B) and is an important part of the pan-Canadian framework. The fund leverages investments in programs that create growth and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. An example of this would be an announcement that I recently made at the University of British Columbia of almost a million dollars for a district waste heat recovery project. It will see a cumulative reduction of 14,600 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, which is the equivalent of taking 4,500 cars off the road.

I think you would also have seen the statements in the fall economic statement around climate change that include grants for people to refit their homes to improve energy efficiency; money to continue to build out electric vehicles and hydrogen infrastructure; and of course the reference to trees and wetlands, with significant funding to ensure that we are taking advantage of nature-based solutions as part of our fight against climate change.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that.

Through vote 5b, the ministry will receive a transfer of \$453,215 from the Treasury Board Secretariat for what's called "innovative approaches to reduce greenhouse gas [GHG] emissions in government operations". ECCC and Parks Canada are receiving 45.2% of all the funding for this Treasury Board Secretariat initiative. What innovative approaches is ECCC taking to reduce GHG emissions, and how will the funds support these initiatives?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Parks Canada and Environment Canada are undertaking four different initiatives. One is a northern housing greening initiative, which is focused on the development of a net-zero, carbon-ready, highly efficient residential unit that will support Parks Canada's carbon reduction goals in the north. We'll be working, obviously, in concert with NRCan.

The second is a renewable energy project associated with a place where we overwinter the horses for Parks Canada for the western national parks. It's called the Ya Ha Tinda horse ranch.

The third is money for a solar array at Kejimikujik campground, which is another Parks Canada initiative.

The fourth is an Environment Canada initiative that is focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions in departmental operations through the electrification of fleet vehicles.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you very much, Minister.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Thank you.

Minister, I don't have a lot of time, but I'd like to go to the Parks Canada funding. I understand the piece for the shortfall, but in supplementary estimates (B) it also talks about urban parks. Obviously, I come from the riding with Rouge National Urban Park in it.

Can you speak to any of the supports for that and to the recognition during COVID of how important proximity to green spaces and parks is for the community?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Irrespective of partisan affiliation, I think we all have come to understand how important these spaces are for Canadians. Ensuring that we have access to places where we can get outside, appropriately physically distance, and enjoy nature has become enormously important in the context of us all spending a lot more time indoors.

Certainly Rouge national park is a powerful example. It's kind of a jewel in the network of how we can help to better connect Canadians with nature and provide them opportunities to get out into nature. It is certainly something we are looking at replicating in other urban centres across the country to ensure that we are appropriately connecting Canadians with nature—because that's an important part of the Canadian identity—and ensure that we are continuing to give people access to the outdoors that they want and that we've seen.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

If I have time for another quick one, I have Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe in my riding. On the funding for the Great Lakes and the supports for effluent treatment, can you elaborate briefly on these supports and how they will help ensure the Great Lakes continue to be great? How they will improve the water quality in our communities?

• (1635)

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: It's a good question. There are obviously lots of important issues around the Great Lakes in terms of runoff, trying to stop some of the algae issues and dealing with some of the broader issues. Environment Canada has definitely been putting a lot of funding into that. It's certainly something that we are working on.

In terms of waste water, we've put in almost \$5 billion in spending on waste-water treatment facilities over the past five years. We will continue to do that.

I think we need to continue to encourage municipalities to move to higher levels of treatment so that we are actually doing a better job of ensuring that clean water is maintained on a go-forward basis.

Of course, we have committed to stand up the Canada water agency, which is going to look at the priorities on a regional basis for water. Certainly the Great Lakes are one of the most important areas in Ontario.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Do I have time?

The Chair: You have about 15 seconds.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: It's okay, then. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Pauzé is next.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If I may, Mr. Minister, I will go back to trees.

Planting two billion trees will reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, GHGs, by 30 megatonnes by 2030. However, moving forward with the Trans Mountain project will produce 620 megatonnes more GHG emissions by 2030. I'm sure you are aware of these numbers, Mr. Minister.

In addition, it seems this promise is the government's main strategy to combat climate change. At the briefing on Bill C-12, however, officials said you are supposed to table a plan to fight climate change by the end of 2020. That means very soon.

Can you tell us on which exact date we will see this plan?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Thank you very much for the question, Ms. Pauzé.

It is, of course, very important to consider nature-based solutions, such as planting trees or preserving wetlands, as part of a comprehensive plan to combat climate change. We also need to think about all sources of GHG emissions in Canada. These emissions can be caused by industrial activity, waste management, and many other things.

We have developed a plan and will unveil it in the coming weeks.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you, Mr. Minister, but I wish you could give me a more exact date.

You introduced Bill C-12, and we introduced Bill C-215. Both of these bills extend several responsibilities to the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, such as making recommendations and conducting thorough audits. However, nothing would be binding on the organizations being audited.

It would be worthwhile to include in the mandate a measure that would cost taxpayers nothing and that would have a positive impact on government accountability and environmental protection. The measure would involve giving the commissioner status and powers commensurate with the importance of his functions.

Would you agree that a measure like that should be implemented?

[*English*]

The Chair: Minister, I think you're on mute.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Okay.

The Chair: You can't go wrong with that answer, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Thank you for the question, Ms. Pauzé.

Bill C-12 does, of course, provide for increased accountability and many transparency measures.

The role of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development is to review the measures that will eventually be implemented. As I said, I am open to discussing the commissioner's role. It is very important, and we are committed to developing strong legislation.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I would like to come back to the commissioner's role. When the commissioner came to meet with us, he specifically talked about the damning report submitted to the Department of Transportation in 2011. Nothing was done in the years that followed up to 2020. Between 2011 and 2020, we saw the tragic accident in Lac-Mégantic. If the department had acted earlier in terms of the transportation of dangerous goods, that accident might never have happened.

Would you agree that the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development should have more powers, the real power, for example, to compel organizations he has audited to act on the recommendations he makes?

• (1640)

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development plays a key role in providing objective and independent analysis of government affairs to ensure a clean environment for future generations. The commissioner's role is also essential in ensuring transparency.

I have worked a great deal on the legislation and I studied some reports by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. The reports are very important, but it is not the commissioner's role to tell elected officials what they must do. It is, of course, the commissioner's role to identify instances where elected officials are not living up to their own commitments. This work is critical to maintaining transparency and ensuring that Canadians know what is going on.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: So you are not open to the idea of giving the commissioner more powers or resources to do his job. Did I understand correctly?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: As I said, I'm very open to the idea of having a discussion on how to improve transparency through Bill C-12—this is what seems to interest you.

I also believe that the committee will have discussions on the role of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development in the coming weeks.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Collins, go ahead, please.

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Hi there.

First I want to thank the minister for appearing today before the committee and answering our questions.

My first question relates to how the supplementary estimates include funding of \$492,318 to implement British Columbia agreements, but recent information from Environment Canada shows massive underfunding and an underspending of the environmental transfers to the provinces this year.

For example, B.C. was allocated \$127 million but so far has received transfers of around \$550,000. That's only 0.4% of the funding that's allocated—less than 1%. It seems fairly unacceptable. That data is from the amount of money actually transferred to provinces from Environment Canada from March 1 to September 28 this year, and those transfers to the provinces add up to about 8.6% of the total money allocated.

What I find even more troubling is the lack of funds that have been transferred to B.C. for the low-carbon economy leadership fund. It's particularly concerning. It concerns me that this is a continuing trend of not spending the money that's been allocated to programs designed to help us reach our carbon reduction targets.

In 2018-19, actual spending for the low-carbon economy fund was 50% under budget. The government is not on track to meet any of its climate targets. It hasn't met a single climate target. The Canadian net-zero emissions accountability act is a small step in the right direction, but really, there is no climate accountability without climate action.

Minister, can you explain why we're still waiting for the government to come up with a real plan to meet our targets and how we are expected to meet those targets when the money that has been set aside for climate action isn't even being spent?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Thank you, MP Collins, for your question.

I think there were a few questions in there. The first one was relating to the six agreements in British Columbia. Those are reconciliation agreements with the Tsilhqot'in first nation, the Tseil-Waututh first nation, the Musqueam first nation and a few others. They've been led by DFO, but Environment Canada has a role to play in those agreements, so the money is for that.

With respect to the two other issues you raise, I'm going to turn to Carol Najm to respond to some of the specifics, but Environment Canada actually has been fully distributing the monies that are allocated to it. Of the total voted authorities of \$1.89 billion, 99.3% has been allocated or is available.

With respect to your last question, in terms of the climate plan, let's be clear. This government brought in the first real climate plan this country has ever had, with 50 different initiatives that identified 225-some-odd megatonnes in reductions. It didn't get us all the way to the Paris target, but it got us a heck of a long way.

Also, as I have mentioned a few times, I will bring forward a new plan that will show not only how we will meet our targets but how we will exceed them. We will ensure that we are implementing the measures to do that.

Maybe I can turn to Carol to answer your other question.

● (1645)

Ms. Laurel Collins: Minister, before you turn to Carol to answer my other question, you said in your throne speech that you would present that plan immediately. Now, it's been a number of months. The climate accountability act gives this government another six to nine months after royal assent to actually set the target—the new, more ambitious target—for 2030.

If we're going to have a plan to meet that target, that means we're potentially waiting a year for that plan to come out. When are we going to see that plan? Why haven't we seen it yet? If you are saying “immediately”, what definition of “immediately” are you using?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I appreciate the question. I think it underlines the urgency people like you and me and others feel about this issue.

I said in the House of Commons in response to MP May's question yesterday that we will be bringing forward a plan in the coming weeks. Once we do that, we as a country need to consult with the provinces, territories and indigenous Canadians. We will be doing that, but we will have a new, nationally determined contribution well in advance of COP26.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you, Minister.

Let's pass it over to Carol for the remainder of the answer.

Ms. Carol Najm (Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services and Finance Branch, Department of the Environment): Thank you for the question.

I'll ask my colleague Matt Jones, who is responsible for the LCEF to respond and provide the details.

Mr. Matt Jones (Assistant Deputy Minister, Pan-Canadian Framework Implementation Office, Department of the Environment): Thank you, Carol, and thank you very much for the question.

With regard to the low-carbon economy fund and the leadership fund program you referenced, the way we operate that program is to do the initial allocation. The province—in this case, the Province of British Columbia—then brings forward a collection of programs and proposals. Those are quickly reviewed and then embedded in an agreement, which we have signed with them.

They then implement the programs. These are all programs or projects that are co-funded by both the Government of British Columbia and the federal government.

As they go, they submit bills for the federal government's share. The pace of the disbursement of the funds is really driven by the pace of the implementation of individual projects and programs by our provincial partners.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you. You only have 10 seconds left, Ms. Collins.

We now begin the second round, starting with five minutes, then two and a half minutes. We start with Mr. Jeneroux.

[English]

Mr. Jeneroux, you have five minutes.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here again.

Minister, regarding the plastics ban, yesterday you stated that the vast bulk of what we announced was about enhancing recycling. You also have announced a ban on six plastic items that are currently in high demand, and you also announced that plastics will be labelled as “toxic”.

What impact is the ban of these plastic items expected to have on reducing Canada's GHG emissions?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: As I say, it is important to take a comprehensive approach to addressing the plastics issue. Part of that is about ensuring that we are changing product design. It is about enhancing recycling rates. It's about recycled content standards. On all of these, we have worked very closely with the provincial environment ministers across the country to ensure that we are developing a common plan around that, because it's important that there are not 10 different markets for recycled products.

The other piece of this is that products that are harmful in the environment, difficult or costly to recycle and for which there are readily available alternatives end up on the banned list. There are six items on that list. It is not an exhaustive list.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Minister, specifically to the GHG emissions—

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: At the end of the day, what I would say to you is that Canadians are far ahead of governments and polit-

ical parties on this issue. They want us to take action on plastic pollution in the environment. That's what we've done.

• (1650)

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Minister, I've met with lots of stakeholders, constituents and small business owners who are worried and concerned about the plastics ban. Which items will be included and excluded from the “toxic” label?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: The list of six items has been published now for several months. It includes plastic utensils, plastic bags, plastic rings on six-packs of beer.... They are all well outlined there. I don't think they're a surprise to anybody. They're all things for which there are alternatives and they're all things that are harmful.

Again, I would tell you that the vast, vast majority of Canadian would like to see aggressive action on plastic.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Minister, what's your alternative to non-reusable bags? What's your alternative for to-go packaging for take-out?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: First of all, the only thing that's affected in terms of takeout is a particular kind of packaging that's used that is very, very difficult to recycle and does end up in the environment. It's called polystyrene.

Second, with respect to plastic bags, there are readily available alternatives. For one, there are reusable bags, which many Canadians are using these days, but in their absence, there are paper bags. There are a whole bunch of different things you can use that are not plastic grocery bags.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Minister, I want to go to the clean fuel standard, but on that point, we know there are a lot of grocery stores that have banned reusable bags during the pandemic, just so you are aware.

We heard from the Auditor General that when it comes to some of your policies, it's very difficult, if not impossible, to assess your government's targets, meaning there's really no way to know whether your policies will do what they are expected to do, which is lower GHG emissions. In fact, there really has been no plan outlined when it comes to Canadian fuel standards. There seems to be no commitment to engage, listen to and work with industry to ensure that a Canadian fuel standards policy will achieve results.

The first step before introducing regulations is to be transparent. Will you be requesting input from the Office of the Auditor General on the Canadian fuel standards in order to demonstrate that it will do what you claim it will do and lower Canada's GHGs?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: First of all, let me correct you. The Auditor General hasn't said anything of the sort.

What I would say to you is the clean fuel standard—and it's not the Canadian fuel standard, it's the clean fuel standard—has been under development since 2016. It's been under consultation for three years with industry and with stakeholders across the country. I have personally met with stakeholders who have all kinds of views on this issue, including the CEOs of many of the large energy companies in Alberta, and we have been listening and making adjustments to the policy as we move along.

It is worth 20 to 30 megatonnes in reductions. It will stimulate investments in biofuels and hydrogen and create thousands of jobs across the country. It's an important part of the climate plan. We're not the only one to do it—California's done it, Oregon's done it, British Columbia's done it. Quebec has developed regulations to do it. This is an important part of reducing the emissions associated with transportation.

The Chair: There's time for a quick question and answer.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: I have 30 seconds, Chair.

Minister, I'll point you to.... I guess it shows how much you follow our committee, because he actually said that at our committee.

In my last 10 seconds, can I ask if the economic analysis on the clean fuel standard that I asked you about a month ago has been prepared?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: As I say, whenever a regulation like the clean fuel standard goes to what's called *Canada Gazette* 1, the first phase of the regulatory process—to which the clean fuel standard will be going very soon—there is a robust assessment, including an economic assessment, of it. That will be coming out in the weeks ahead.

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Longfield is next.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here today. You can see a lot of passion around the environment committee for looking at ways to improve our performance.

I saw passion like that recently when I met with the students at Bishop Macdonell High School in the international baccalaureate program in Guelph. Young people are looking at the opportunities that climate change is going to bring them, and also how that integrates with our government's youth policy.

The students I talked to were expressing a real interest in youth employment and the green economy. In the supplementary estimates, we're showing \$11.4 million is allocated to supporting students and youth.

Could you let us know how this funding is going to directly help young Canadians access meaningful skills and work experience for future green economy jobs through programs like the youth employment and skills strategy?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Thank you very much for the question.

It's certainly clear that young Canadians want to develop the kinds of skills and experience that will help to build a cleaner and greener economy. The money in the supplementary estimates (B) is

focused on what's called the Environment Canada science horizons youth internship program, which falls under the federal strategy. It provides financial support to post-secondary graduates to help them gain relevant and meaningful work experience in high-potential environmental sectors like clean tech through hands-on experience and mentorships. That is something I was [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] a company called Terramera in British Columbia and met a number of those folks.

It is an important part of ensuring that youth are brought into helping us to drive the change that we need to see.

• (1655)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

It is exciting to see where jobs are heading. There are going to be jobs that don't exist yet that will be contributing, and the students were really interested, so I'll pass that on to them.

I also had the opportunity recently to announce \$640,000 from the low-carbon economy fund in support of the University of Guelph and their initiative to upgrade their heating systems.

Could you highlight for our committee how the federal government's support for local climate initiatives like this can help us in terms of engagement and encouraging innovation that increases advantages for us and also contributes to our climate change goals?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: The low-carbon economy fund is an important part of the overall climate plan. It's again focused on driving clean growth while reducing emissions.

About \$500,000,000 is available through the low-carbon economy challenge. That portion was opened to provinces, territories, municipalities, indigenous communities and organizations, businesses and not-for-profit organizations, and it's focused on leveraging Canadian innovation across the country. It includes all kinds of sectors—buildings, industrial energy efficiency, fuel switching, etc.

As you just noted, one of the projects that we supported was the University of Guelph's heating system upgrades. That new heating system will reduce emissions by the equivalent of removing 19,000 cars from the road. Innovative projects like that will help us cut emissions and build a more prosperous economy.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The University of Guelph has it coming and going, because they are also training environmental engineers. The people who are developing the solutions are now helping us get those solutions in place. The University of Guelph has also had district energy since the early 1900s, but in the last five years, we've really seen an acceleration, so thank you for that.

Finally, I have a question on the Arctic Ocean. It's kind of funny that Guelph is interested in this, but it comes up a lot in conversations with community groups in Guelph about how we are protecting our Arctic Ocean.

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to be up on Ellesmere Island at a climate change research centre. The scientists up there were talking about the silt that was going into the ocean from retreating glaciers. It was really affecting the ecosystems, and in particular the food supply for more southern people, the Inuit people who were south of there. We're also now seeing the collapse of sea shelves and really terrible things with increasing frequency in the Arctic Ocean. What are our short-term and long-term goals to help out there?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: We all know that Canada is warming twice as fast as the global average, and northern communities are warming even more quickly and bearing the brunt. We obviously see a lot of issues associated with the impacts of climate change, such as forest fires, the extent of the duration of snow and ice cover, precipitation, the thawing of permafrost, the rising of sea levels and other issues, many of which relate directly to the Arctic Ocean.

We certainly have been doing a number of things. One is working in partnership with Inuit to protect some of the biodiversity that exists there. You saw last summer some big announcements with respect to Tallurutiup Imanga and Tuvaijuittuq. With the Inuit leadership, we're strengthening Canada's presence in an increasingly open Arctic through renewing the Coast Guard fleet. We're investing in climate adaptations. It's going to be really important, and of course we need to mitigate our emissions.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Madam Pauzé now for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Minister, in your speech, you referred to several items in the Speech from the Throne. I would like to come back to that, specifically to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

This legislation is crucial for implementing climate action like the government's plan. I would like to know if follow-up is under way on the many recommendations made.

Will we be able to see a document on this soon?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: The Canadian Environmental Protection Act is perhaps the most significant piece of environmental legislation in Canada. From 2015 to 2019, the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development conducted a comprehensive study and made 87 recommendations.

We are currently hard at work. Of course, we have taken the committee's recommendations into account. I hope to table a proposal in Parliament early next year.

• (1700)

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you for your response, Mr. Minister.

You also mentioned the low carbon economy fund. According to an announcement made today, you are determined to act along those lines.

However, in a recent report, the department's scientists indicated that methane emissions from the fossil fuel sector are nearly double what the national inventory report suggests. That would mean you must cut emissions by 40% to 45% by 2025, which is virtually around the corner.

Do you have any comment on the reduction target, given the departmental scientists' concerns?

The Chair: Could I ask you for a brief answer, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: The report you are talking about was published two or three weeks ago—I believe—in a scientific journal.

Departments do, of course, discuss the science. We need to make sure that we consider the views of the scientists and, if their claims are correct, we need to take them into account if we want to move forward.

Another report should be released in 2021. If new scientific data is generated, we will need to discuss it and determine how we can do more with it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Collins, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Laurel Collins: Minister, I want to come back to this question of underspending and underfunding in terms of the environmental transfers to the provinces.

You said that the money is going out the door, but the numbers from Environment Canada, through an Order Paper question, show that only 0.4% of the funding that was allocated has been transferred. That's for this year, but the previous year was 50% under budget. Given what Mr. Jones said, and that we know this is a trend, are you concerned about this underspending?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: As I said, it's not underspending. There's a process by which we work through these things, and I think Mr. Jones articulated how that process works.

I work very closely with the provincial ministers of the environment, and there's nobody I work more closely with than Minister Heyman in British Columbia. This has not been an issue with Mr. Heyman, because there is a process, and they are very convinced that the agreements we entered into are being upheld.

Ms. Laurel Collins: How can you explain the numbers showing that we spent less than 1% this year, and the year before we spent 50%?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Again, I can certainly ask Mr. Jones to go through that one more time, but there's a process and a system—

Ms. Laurel Collins: But given that the process isn't working—

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: —but at the end of the day we are fully expending the monies that we asked for from Parliament to ensure we're addressing environmental issues.

Ms. Laurel Collins: But if only 1%...

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I'm certainly happy to have Mr. Jones go back through that if you'd like that.

Ms. Laurel Collins: I'm wondering more about why you aren't concerned that only 1% of this money that has been allocated has—

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: MP Collins, you can repeat it all you want, but it's not true. At the end of the day, the money is being fully expended through the federal-provincial process that exists under these programs. Again, I'm happy to have the fellow who's responsible for the administration of the program, who's on here, explain that.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Absolutely, but the order paper answer to the question showed that it was only \$550,000 out the \$127 million. You do the math. That's less than 1%.

• (1705)

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Again, first, I would ask the expert, but second, if it was really true that we were not fulfilling our obligations under federal-provincial agreements, George Heyman would be the first person to phone me, and he has not done so.

[Translation]

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Wilkinson.

I'm told that Mr. Godin wishes to share his time with Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Joël Godin: That's correct, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have the floor. I will let you know when we have reached three minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Minister, we are currently studying the supplementary estimates. As I read them, I see no concrete measures specific to what Canadians are currently experiencing, the COVID-19 pandemic, a public health issue.

Instead, the department is working on regulations to ban plastic products in 2021. You made an announcement to that effect in October. I have trouble seeing how this can be the priority when many businesses, including those in the food service sector, are using packaging that allows them to survive in the current environment.

Based on the documents I have here, once again, you have done nothing to help the Department of Environment and Climate Change adapt to the current situation to assist Canadians.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: The government certainly has done a lot to address the challenges of COVID-19.

The Fall Economic Statement outlines a number of measures, some of which are designed to support Canadians and Canadian businesses in coping with their challenges. The role of Environment and Climate Change Canada is to assure Canadians that we are protecting the environment, and Canadians—

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Minister, I fully agree with you that the department and the government must work to protect the environment. However, we are in a unique situation, and the government is hiding behind the COVID-19 pandemic to justify action, or rather, inaction.

I'm having trouble understanding. Used masks and personal protective equipment will be thrown away, but no measures are in place to recover that garbage.

In my constituency of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, a company called Logard produces asbestos pipes. Unfortunately, using asbestos is now prohibited, and Logard can no longer sell off its inventory. This example shows that nothing is being done to help our businesses. Logard is a business that complies with standards and wants to continue to do so, but is not eligible for any assistance.

It is more important to help businesses dealing with this kind of situation than to worry about stir sticks and straws, because banning them will have no tangible effect. If you had planted trees, it would have been more positive. Unfortunately, you have not yet planted a single tree.

Mr. Minister, you must strike a balance between the economy and the environment. I am not sure your government is capable of doing that.

The Chair: That was more of a comment, I gather, Mr. Godin.

Your three minutes are up. Would you like to give the floor to Mr. Schmale?

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes. I give the floor to my colleague.

The Chair: Mr. Schmale, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): My thanks to my friend from Quebec for allowing me to take some of his time. I appreciate the opportunity, Chair.

Minister, I don't know whether you're aware of this or not, but for the last eight weeks or so I've been trying to get a meeting with you to go over some local issues that I've been dealing with, specifically on the Trent-Severn Waterway, which comes under the jurisdiction of Parks Canada.

I have issues on lakes such as Long Lake, Pigeon Lake and Canal Lake and at Moore Falls, all under the purview of Parks Canada and specifically the Trent-Severn Waterway. What I want to ask you here.... I'd love to talk to you about this at a meeting, either on Zoom or socially distanced in the same room, but I'll get to a few of my questions.

Specifically, we have a campaign called Save the Walleye. It's a pilot project that we are proposing. It has the support of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Minister Yakabuski wrote about it to you in your former capacity as minister of fisheries and oceans and also in your capacity as Minister of the Environment, clearly supporting this project, yet we have had no movement or even acknowledgement—we're rarely acknowledged—by the Trent-Severn Waterway. This is something that's been going on for five years under my staff and me and previously under my predecessor, Barry Devolin.

Sir, is the ministry of the environment or Parks Canada willing to have a conversation about this? Can we have a conversation face to face about it?

• (1710)

The Chair: Be very brief, Minister, because then we have to go on to Mr. Saini.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Absolutely, the Department of the Environment and I and/or my parliamentary secretary are happy to have a conversation. I have to tell you that I don't know a lot about the project, but I'm certainly happy to look into it.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will go to Mr. Saini now.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you very much, Minister, for coming today. It's always a pleasure to have you.

I have three very specific questions. The first concerns one of the commitments we made in our platform. That commitment was to protect the lands to 25% by 2025.

The majority of Canadians live in urban areas, so we don't get a chance, really, to visit these parks. My colleague MP O'Connell mentioned Rouge park. What is our strategy in creating new urban parks to help factor them into the target of 25%?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: The idea of a network of national urban parks is something we are actively looking at. Rouge has been a tremendous success in terms of how popular it is with people who live proximate to it by providing the opportunity to get out to experience nature. During COVID-19, that's been particularly important.

We're looking at opportunities like that across the country in major urban centres. Of course, it requires that the urban centres themselves be interested in exploring that kind of opportunity. It's partly about green spaces and partly about moving towards our target of protecting 25% of lands, but it's also, in my mind, partly about connecting Canadians with nature.

Mr. Raj Saini: The second question I have—and this is important to me just because of the region I come from—is about biodi-

versity loss, which sometimes gets lost in the climate change conversation.

As you know, we're living through the sixth mass extinction event. My home area of southwestern Ontario is particularly at risk, being home to the largest number of species at risk in Canada.

What's the government planning to do to reverse this alarming trend in southwestern Ontario and throughout Canada?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I'm glad you raised that question. We don't just have a climate crisis; we have a nature crisis. A nature crisis is partly about climate, partly about the biodiversity loss and partly about pollution in our environment. Certainly the biodiversity piece is alarming. We have almost 700 species in this country that are either listed as at risk or are in the process of being listed.

We need to take action. Certainly we have done an enormous amount to try to stem that and to adopt a strategy focusing on priority spaces and priority species.

One of the areas is southwestern Ontario, where we're looking at what's called the pan-Canadian approach to transforming species at risk conservation and looking at how we can turn this around in a manner that Canadians will want. They don't want to see this continue. Part of that's about addressing climate change, but part of it is also about habitat.

Mr. Raj Saini: My third question is this. We're setting ambitious goals for carbon neutrality by 2050. It's pretty clear that this is going to have to be a pan-Canadian approach and that we'll all have to come together to make this happen. In the pursuit of this goal, the federal government has a duty to lead by example, and greening government operations gives us this opportunity to lead. How is the government working to lead by example and get government operations down to net zero?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: Again that is a very important question, and I agree with you. The government needs to show leadership if it expects others to take similar kinds of action. As I said before, an approach to addressing climate change that's a comprehensive one is as much an economic plan as it is an environmental one. That holds as true for the government as it does everybody else.

On November 26, with respect to the government's operations, the President of the Treasury Board announced the greening government strategy, which sets new targets for net zero, for green and climate-resilient government operations. The focus very much is ensuring that we are walking the walk as we talk the talk.

Within my own department, Environment Canada and Parks Canada, as I mentioned earlier in the discussion, we have undertaken a number of initiatives that were funded by Treasury Board to start that process internally. We are committed to moving very rapidly forward.

• (1715)

Mr. Raj Saini: How much time, Chair?

The Chair: You have about 45 seconds.

Mr. Raj Saini: I have a quick question. I'd like a quick comment from you, Minister, on the potential of hydrogen as a future fuel.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: I think there's enormous potential.

Hydrogen opens up different pathways. Not everything has to be electrified, which is daunting when you think about the quantity of electrification. Hydrogen can be sourced from all kinds of different places. It offers opportunities with respect to building heat, with respect to industrial processes and with respect to a fuel for heavy-duty vehicles, for which batteries are going to be challenging. It is going to be an important part of our strategy going forward, as it is in Europe, as it is in the United Kingdom and as I'm sure it will be in the United States.

Mr. Raj Saini: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

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

You promised you would give us an hour of your time and you have kept your promise.

We will certainly have an opportunity to see you again to our great pleasure. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you for making yourself available. We really appreciate you agreeing to stay until 5:20 p.m. to make up for a delay of a few minutes. We know that you are very busy, and we thank you for joining us, Minister.

If I have understood correctly, we are continuing with the Parks Canada Agency officials.

We are beginning the third round of questions and answers.

Mr. Albas, go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas: I'd like to thank again the minister for his presence here today. I certainly want to thank the chair, as well as both the deputy minister and the head of Parks Canada for what they do for Canadians.

We've heard from stakeholders who say that calling their plastic products "toxic" will destroy their business and the jobs that come along with it. Did the ministry consider the impacts from naming important products as "toxic" when they proposed this change?

The Chair: Who would like to take this question?

Mr. Dan Albas: It was my expectation that it would be the deputy minister.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead, Ms. Hogan.

Ms. Carol Najm: Committee members, the deputy has left with the minister. I will ask John Moffet to respond to your question, or Helen.

Mr. Dan Albas: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I specifically asked for the deputy minister to be here in her capacity as an accounting officer, and I had questions specific to the policies and whether or not she is following Treasury Board poli-

cies during COVID. This is a great disappointment. Mr. Moffet, I certainly would appreciate hearing from you, but Mr. Chair, this is not what we asked for.

The Chair: I understand. It's duly noted, Mr. Albas.

Go ahead, Mr. Moffet.

Mr. John Moffet (Assistant Deputy Minister, Environmental Protection Branch, Department of the Environment): Mr. Chair, I'm going to defer to Helen Ryan, the associate assistant deputy minister, who is responsible for the plastic waste initiative.

The Chair: Ms. Ryan, go ahead, please.

Ms. Helen Ryan (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Environmental Protection Branch, Department of the Environment): The government recently put out a discussion document that lays out a risk management framework for dealing with plastics and proposed an order to add plastic manufactured items to schedule 1 of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. In the discussion document, we lay out a comprehensive approach in terms of the elements that need to be tackled with respect to the zero plastic waste agenda, including identifying a framework for making decisions about articles that could be banned or have their use restricted, so the considerations around what items should be potentially banned or restricted are laid out in the context of a number of criteria that need to be met.

The consideration around which things should be taken out of the environment through a ban or an exemption is based on whether they're difficult to recycle or hinder our recycling ability, whether there are known alternatives, whether they're found to be prevalent in the environment and problematic in terms of their management and so on.

Those considerations were factored in, and we're currently in consultation with the public and seeking their input and views with respect to the proposal, as well as seeking comments on the proposal of—

• (1720)

Mr. Dan Albas: Ms. Ryan, I think you're going a little further than I'd asked.

Ms. Helen Ryan: —adding plastic manufactured items to schedule 1 of CEPA.

Mr. Dan Albas: Ms. Ryan, I do appreciate it. You've gone a little further and I'm going to be going a little further on this, so maybe we'll go in a direction that I would like the chain of discussion to go.

The minister specifically said that the goal is only to ban six specific items. Why have the regulations painted every single plastic product in Canada as toxic? That is what labelling this substance on that list does.

Ms. Helen Ryan: The way we access our authorities under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act to put in place control measures is by adding an item to schedule 1 of CEPA. The proposal that's out for consideration and public comment at the moment is a proposal to add plastic manufactured items to schedule 1 of CEPA. The considerations around what items may be banned is the subject of a discussion document.

We do not yet have a regulatory proposal with respect to the bans. We have a framework that lays out how we might approach making decisions about what items should be banned and consultations on that framework itself, and then on the proposed items that we believe meet those criteria, which are the six items being referenced. The proposal at the moment is to add plastic manufactured items to schedule 1 of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act so we can access our authorities under CEPA.

Mr. Dan Albas: I do believe, Ms. Ryan, that this is going to be extremely complicated. I've spoken directly to plastic industry stakeholders, who have told me that declaring their items as toxic threatens things that Canadians count on, including medical products.

Has the ministry heard these concerns from plastic industry stakeholders and has there been any examination into these impacts? Again, I'm not saying that those are the items that have been listed by the minister—these have been very specific—but when the average Fred or Mary on their patio hears there's a general listing as toxic, that raises eyebrows, and they want to know why.

The Chair: Please be brief, Ms. Ryan.

Ms. Helen Ryan: Yes, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for that comment. As I mentioned, we're in the process right now of active and ongoing consultations with stakeholders on these very issues. We are hearing from a broad variety of people on this issue. We will be taking that into account.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, just before my time is up, I have to say again that I am extremely upset that we do not have the deputy minister here in her role as an accounting officer. I know that the government ministers themselves have a terrible record on the accountability act and some of the provisions that are under it, but deputy ministers do act on their behalf under the accountability act, with very specific powers and duties.

The Chair: Understood.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Chair, I very rarely get upset, but this should not and cannot stand. Parliament has passed a law. We've asked for respect as a committee. I would hope we would have that. As far as I'm concerned, we were very clear and very polite in asking for her presence.

The Chair: That is understood.

We'll go to Mr. Schiefke now for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My question is for the Parks Canada Agency witnesses.

Our country's national parks and national historic sites significantly contribute to the protection of Canada's natural and cultural heritage. They are also a key aspect of the tourism industry, as they support the local economies of hundreds of communities across Canada.

What is the economic impact of Parks Canada activities across the country?

[English]

The Chair: Who's taking that question?

[Translation]

Mr. Andrew Campbell (Senior Vice-President, Operations, Parks Canada Agency): That is an excellent question, Mr. Parliamentary Secretary. I will let Michael Nadler answer it.

Mr. Michael Nadler (Vice-President, External Relations and Visitor Experience, Parks Canada Agency): Thank you very much for the question.

The economic impact is in fact impressive. As you noted, our national parks and historic sites are located close to a number of communities across Canada. Even during this difficult period related to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have done our best to work closely with the tourism industry to support this important sector of our economy.

Overall, the impact on Canada's gross domestic product, or GDP, is \$4.1 billion a year, but that amount is distributed across a number of the country's regions.

• (1725)

Mr. Peter Schiefke: What is Parks Canada Agency doing to continue its operations and support local economies, despite the numerous challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Mr. Michael Nadler: Once again, that is a good question.

The spring was obviously difficult. Parks Canada Agency made an unprecedented decision to close its sites to visitors. In May, we planned and announced a resumption of our activities. On June 1, we reopened our sites to the public. Little by little, we increased the services provided to visitors in a number of locations across Canada.

We had two objectives.

First, we wanted to ensure to protect the health of our team and Canadians, but also the health of nearby communities.

Second, we wanted to make sure to be there for Canadians, so that they could benefit from having access to the parks and the well-being stemming from our sites. We also wanted to work with communities and businesses that depend on us for their success. We have done our best to work closely with our colleagues and partners.

[English]

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have about a minute and 15 seconds.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Along the same lines, I would be interested in learning more about Parks Canada's role in relation to the mountain pine beetle, which is something I've been very interested in for quite some time, and its impact on the forestry sector and forests in general. How does Parks Canada work to mitigate the impacts of the mountain pine beetle in Canada?

Ms. Darlene Upton (Vice-President, Protected Areas Establishment and Conservation, Parks Canada Agency): Hi, everyone. Thanks very much for the question. It's Darlene Upton with Parks Canada.

Parks Canada remains committed to the management of the mountain pine beetle. We're working closely with the Government of Alberta, Natural Resources Canada, multiple governments and stakeholders. This past October 2020, Parks Canada participated in a horizontal initiative for protecting forests and communities from the spread of the mountain pine beetle. We have \$2.1 million this year, but over three years we'll have \$6.9 million to focus efforts on management of the mountain pine beetle and its impacts.

Specifically, we're working in partnership with the Municipality of Jasper on expanding a FireSmart program. We've established contracts alongside some Parks Canada partners on some hazardous tree removal. We're looking at collaboration with the Jasper Indigenous Forum for further actions that will take into account the mitigation of fire risk caused by the beetle, and we'll continue over three years on that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have to go to Madame Pauzé.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't know who could answer the following question.

According to the document provided by the Library of Parliament, vote 1b includes a horizontal item of \$500,000 for "government advertising programs". I would like to get some details on that.

Are we talking about an information campaign?

Since I have only two and a half minutes and I have another question, I would ask that you keep your answer brief.

[English]

Ms. Carol Najm: Yes, I can answer.

That money is part of a horizontal initiative advertising campaign. The money will be used to advertise the nature legacy fund involving awareness and consultation.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you for your brief answer. If you have a plan or more details, I would appreciate you sending them to the committee members.

I would now like to come back to the low carbon economy leadership fund. We are seeing that public funds of over \$1.5 billion that were intended for various files will be redirected toward Alberta for the methane file and orphan wells.

It's a good idea to take care of orphan wells, but can you confirm that these public funds will really be used to do that and will not go to private companies?

• (1730)

[English]

Ms. Carol Najm: Thank you for the question. I will turn to my colleague, Niall O'Dea, on the nature legacy fund.

[Translation]

Mr. Niall O'Dea (Assistant Deputy Minister, Canadian Wildlife Services, Department of the Environment): Thank you, Ms. Najm.

I can answer the question on the Canada nature fund. That fund consists of \$500 million for the 2018-23 period, and its goal is to protect the environment and nature by providing support for preserving species at risk, but also for the establishment of protected areas—

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I apologize, Mr. O'Dea.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. Just a moment, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: The question is not at all about the Canada nature fund. I was talking about the low carbon economy leadership fund. I will put my question to you again.

What I was saying is that the \$1.5-billion fund for various files was to be used to help Alberta with methane issues and the cleaning of orphan wells. I wanted to make sure that public funds would indeed be used to clean orphan wells and would not go to private businesses.

[English]

The Chair: We're talking about the fund that was announced by the government during the pandemic to help rehabilitate orphan wells and—

Ms. Monique Pauzé: It's the Orphan Well Association.

The Chair: What Ms. Pauzé is asking is whether you can assure the committee that this money will go to orphan wells and not to other private companies in the industry.

Ms. Carol Najm: Helen Ryan will be able to answer that for you.

Ms. Helen Ryan: Thank you.

With respect to the orphan well fund, this is not a fund that's administered by Environment and Climate Change Canada, but we are working closely with our colleagues both in the Department of Finance and Natural Resources Canada with respect to that.

The fund is subject to specific agreements and does target orphaned or abandoned wells, and there is a monitoring and reporting provision with respect to that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Collins, please.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is going back to Mr. Jones.

The minister seemed to suggest that the information I referenced might not be true, but Environment Canada is the source of that information. If there is an issue getting the money out the door through the low-carbon economy fund, isn't there a problem with the program? This is an important part of the pan-Canadian framework, and it doesn't seem to be working.

Mr. Matt Jones: I apologize if I didn't provide all of the information that I should have the last time around. I did describe the nature of the process, but an important point to note is that the numbers reflected in the documentation that you're referencing shouldn't be taken as an indicator of the work being done.

There is a problem with a delay in receiving the invoices from our partners in the Government of British Columbia. The work has been happening, but there has been a lag on their end in submitting the invoices. Very soon I will be following up with them again on this. It will jump up as soon as we get those—

Ms. Laurel Collins: Even if you include the lag numbers... There was \$974,000 to UBC recently. Even if you include the projects that would be included in that lag, that only brings it up from 0.4% to 1.2%. That's still quite concerningly low.

Mr. Matt Jones: That project was under one of the challenge funds. I agree that it isn't represented in the numbers yet, but on the leadership fund, we are co-funding a number of initiatives in partnership with the B.C. government. Those are ongoing programs that they are implementing, and costs are being—

Ms. Laurel Collins: Just because I have a very short amount of time, do you expect that to bring it up to 100% of the funding, or is it going to be similar to last year, when it was only 50% of the funding?

Mr. Matt Jones: I won't know until I see the invoices from them, but I can say it will be quite a significant jump. As I say, it's been quite a long time since they've submitted their bills.

• (1735)

Ms. Laurel Collins: You would hope so, given that it's 1%.

Even looking back on last year, where it is 50%—you must have all of those invoices—do you see that there is a problem getting money out the door if only 50% of the allocated money is spent?

Mr. Matt Jones: Not necessarily. It's really typical for these kinds of programs to take a little bit of time to get established, for the proposals to come in and be evaluated, for agreements to be signed, and then for them to start the implementation process. There tends to be a bit of a lag—

Ms. Laurel Collins: I only have 15 seconds, but I would say that this is an important part of our emissions reduction plan. It is concerning that we're only getting 50% out. This right now looks like only 1.2%. I do hope that we can follow up about this. If there is more information, can you please submit it to the committee in writing?

The Chair: Before we go to Mr. Jeneroux, given that we started late, I was wondering if the committee members would be agreeable to continuing until 6:10.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Chair, I've already been informed by my members that we won't be giving consent to continue on. I'm really disappointed with how this meeting has shaped up, with no offence to the officials who have spoken. You're all doing great work, but I'm really disappointed how this has worked out.

We have other members who have planned their schedules. That's my personal objection.

The Chair: Okay, do the Conservatives wish to end now?

Mr. Dan Albas: Yes. I believe it's past 5:30.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I have a point of order.

Are we ending the meeting now? Is that correct?

The Chair: It appears so, yes.

Mr. Yvan Baker: On a point of order to Mr. Albas' concern, I want to express that I share his concern that it is typical that the deputy minister is available to speak to issues of financial accountability at these types of meetings. It was also very clear to me at our last meeting that Mr. Albas requested the presence of the deputy minister and we all agreed that would be the case. I want to express support for Mr. Albas' concern on this issue.

The Chair: I have a very quick question for the committee regarding future meetings, but I'd like to thank the witnesses for their presence and for their responses. I had a question I wanted to ask Parks Canada, but I'll have to let it go.

In terms of Monday's meeting, members, we have votes, and I suspect that if we're lucky we'll get to start late again, but I have a feeling that the votes could go on for quite a while.

In the interests of getting as much work done as possible before we break for the holidays, what we wanted to do Monday was discuss the outline of the report on ZEVs. I've seen the outline and it's very good, but we should still discuss it.

Also, we wanted to talk about witnesses for Ms. Collins's study on enforcement. I would propose, if members are in agreement, that I try to organize a meeting of the steering committee to discuss these two issues, such that even if we skip the meeting on Monday, we could start with Ms. Collins's study on the Wednesday with some initial witnesses, probably from the department.

Would members be agreeable to proceeding in this way and that I try to get a steering committee meeting going? It might be tomorrow or it might be Tuesday, but I think we can probably get the analysts started on their work and we can probably organize some witnesses for next Wednesday if we proceed in this manner.

Are there any objections?

Go ahead, Madame Pauzé.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: This is not an objection. I just want to make sure that we could say, before the holiday break, what we want to see in the report on the federal legislation on zero-emission vehicles and the electrification of transportation.

The Chair: Perhaps I misspoke. I saw the overview of the report that was to be created, and I wanted to discuss it with the steering committee to at least get its approval and enable analysts to begin working on it.

Normally, we would have done this together, in committee, but we probably will not meet on Monday, so I wanted to do this in a steering committee meeting.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: My apologies, I did not understand.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is everyone in...?

Go ahead, Mr. Albas.

• (1740)

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have a question about capacity. Will there be enough time for you to be able to hold the steering committee meeting so we can plan this? I'm afraid that if capacity is not currently built into the calendar, there will be no steering committee meeting and then we will not be able to proceed with Ms. Collins' study on Wednesday as you suggested.

I need some assurances that we do have the system capacity for that, or else we will have nothing next week and everything gets wiped.

We still do have the supplementaries to decide what we're going to be doing with that.

The Chair: Right. We have to vote on the....

Mr. Dan Albas: It is past 5:30, Mr. Chair, so....

The Chair: We're going to try to see if the capacity exists. If it doesn't, then we're stuck, but I think we might be okay.

Mr. Dan Albas: Will we have a meeting Monday, Mr. Chair, if there's no steering committee? I would suggest—

The Chair: It all depends on how many votes we have. If we have nine votes, I think we won't be able to meet at all. That's the problem: We don't know what's happening Monday. If we can meet Monday, then yes, we should meet Monday, but I'm trying to plan in case we can't meet Monday so that we don't waste Wednesday.

I hope that answers your question, but can I proceed to ask that we vote on...?

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Chair, we've already said it's past 5:30. I'm sorry. I have—

The Chair: Then we're not going to vote on the estimates today.

Mr. Dan Albas: No.

The Chair: Okay, we'll have to do that some other time.

Mr. Dan Albas: Yes. I'm sorry how this worked out, Mr. Chair, but I do appreciate your leadership on these issues.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'd like some clarification about the discussion we just had. Did we set a date for that subcommittee meeting?

The Chair: No. We're trying to. We don't know what the capacity is right now. All of this happened very suddenly.

If there are—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Sorry, I have another question.

I was under the impression that we would vote in committee on the votes in the supplementary estimates (B) before the Monday votes. Is that not the case?

The Chair: If the Conservatives wanted to vote, we could vote today, but that doesn't seem to be the case. So we will not vote today; we will vote in the House on Monday. We don't have a choice, unfortunately. I hoped we could vote on this today, but we will see.

[*English*]

Thank you very much, everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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