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Chair: Mr. Robert Kitchen



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• (1830)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)): Good evening, everybody.

I'm calling the meeting to order. We're a minute ahead of time. Thank you for being here.

I'd like to welcome you to meeting 10 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

The committee is meeting today from 6:29 to 8:29 to hear from the Minister of Digital Government and the President of the Treasury Board on the supplementary estimates (B) 2020-21.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. Interpretation of this video conference will work very much like in a regular committee meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen to use either the floor, English or French. I would ask that you choose the language in which you will be speaking. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your microphone. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be on mute. In response to a point of order during the meeting, committee members should ensure that their microphone is unmuted and say "point of order" to get the chair's attention.

In order to ensure social distancing in the committee room, if you need to speak privately with the clerk or analysts during the meeting, please email them through the committee email address. For those people who are participating in the committee room, please note that masks are required unless you are seated and when physical distancing is not possible.

I will now invite the Minister of Digital Government to make her opening statement.

Hon. Joyce Murray (Minister of Digital Government): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the committee for inviting me here again to discuss the 2020-21 supplementary estimates (B) for the digital government portfolio.

I'm joining you from the traditional unceded territory of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish peoples.

As Minister of Digital Government, I lead the teams of the chief information officer and the Canadian Digital Service—both in the

Treasury Board Secretariat—as well as Shared Services Canada, to deliver the government's digital service agenda.

Today, I'm joined again by Karen Cahill, chief financial officer for TBS; Marc Brouillard, CIO for the Government of Canada; Paul Glover, president of Shared Services Canada; and lastly, Samantha Hazen, CFO for Shared Services Canada.

As the minister responsible for the government's digital transformation, part of my mandate is to work with my ministerial colleagues to provide federal public servants with the tools and strategies they need to design and deliver the services Canadians expect in the digital era: services that are secure, reliable and easy to use.

To continue our successful shift so far to digital government, we must also change how we work within. Instead of seeing departments as siloed organizations with separated responsibilities, we need to think across government as a whole because that's the only way that we can provide seamless service to the public.

Each of the teams that I lead—SSC, CDS, and OCIO—has a key role, from setting government-wide policy and standards on service and digital, to supporting and modernizing the IT that supports digital delivery, to building the digital tools that are deployed across departments and that serve Canadians on the front lines.

This work is starting to break down the culture of silos and bring in an enterprise approach. This is how we will become a modern, digitally enabled government that delivers reliable service at any time from any device—including in person—the kind of service that Canadians expect.

COVID-19 has highlighted the fact that new policies and programs are important, but even more important is just how we deliver them.

Is a particular service convenient for the person receiving it? As an MP with an office that helps constituents, I can tell you that, historically, sometimes it's not that convenient. However, last spring when Canadians and businesses urgently needed financial support, they couldn't wait and couldn't apply in person, so departments worked together to quickly deliver new programs and services digitally. It was all hands on deck. That's how we delivered programs like the CERB or the COVID Alert app in a matter of weeks.

This urgent digital response to COVID-19 often took public servants outside of their regular processes and comfort zones. That culture change is critical to my work going forward. I'm focused on seizing this momentum so that our government can deliver better, faster and more-reliable services to Canadians in the future.

The items included in the supplementary estimates (B) reflect the increasing need to deliver the types of services that Canadians expect.

In these estimates, Shared Services Canada is requesting Parliament's approval to increase its authorities by \$278.4 million to \$2.49 billion.

This increase includes \$91 million for IT services that directly support COVID-19 emergency relief programs, including rapid deployment of connectivity, collaboration tools, and emergency IT equipment for public servants.

It includes \$84 million to replace data centre equipment for safe storage of information and network tools to reduce vulnerabilities and meet security standards.

It includes \$37.3 million for IT modernization initiatives, including activities that advance a digitally enabled workforce, and \$31.1 million for the secure cloud enablement and defence project to build secure access to cloud services, which will in turn provide better services to Canadians.

● (1835)

It will include \$23.5 million for core information technology services and funding to support partner-led initiatives, and \$10 million for secure video conferencing to expand secure communications for ministerial communications and cabinet committee meetings. These investments will help to provide federal public servants and departments with the tools, guidance and capacity they need to improve operations and support the delivery of better services in the digital age.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I am pleased to take questions from the committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that.

We will go now into the first round of questioning, with Mr. Lloyd for six minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for appearing again before committee.

For my first question, Shared Services Canada—which is under your portfolio, and which exists to provide the federal government with IT and digital services—will spend a reported \$2.1 billion this year. That's over a 40% increase from when you took office.

I also read, in the annual Bloomberg Innovation Index, which measures countries' innovation in things such as the digital economy, that Canada had actually fallen two places, year over year. We've fallen behind countries such as Slovenia, Australia and Italy.

I'm wondering, with a 40% increase in spending on digital services, why are we falling behind when it comes to innovation?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I will say that SSC continues to work to transform the IT and digital fundamentals of the Government of Canada based on modern enterprise standards. As we had discussed in the last committee meeting, there had been, really, decades of underinvestment in our IT infrastructure and connectivity. We started with a huge deficit in 2016, and we have begun the process of investing so we can update and maintain these systems as we go along. That is critical to better serving Canadians.

I'm happy to talk about some of the specific things that will be done with the estimates (B) funding.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I'll move onto the next question, but thank you, Minister.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Yes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Some stakeholders have raised with me the issue of what they view as a disturbing trend, called "project splitting". Project splitting reportedly happens when there's one large project with a large amount of money involved, and it requires a great deal of signing authority and scrutiny. What's been observed, allegedly, is a strategy in the departments to split projects into smaller, bite-size projects so that they do not require more signing authority.

Is this a procurement strategy that you, as minister, endorse for digital government?

Hon. Joyce Murray: SSC is a major procurer of goods and services. I'm very proud of the focus on procuring from small and medium-size businesses. We spend about 87% of our money on SMEs, of which almost all is going to Canadian companies.

We're looking to modernize our procurement, actually, so there is a range now of new initiatives to focus on even more opportunities for indigenous Canadians to supply services to SSC. Also, we're working with a set of associations that represent women entrepreneurs, Black entrepreneurs, people of colour and indigenous entrepreneurs so that we can make sure there are opportunities for those under-represented groups in our procurement. We have some very exciting new procurement models. The digital marketplace, for example, will create opportunities working—

● (1840)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Minister, I appreciate that.

In the last meeting I mentioned a case related to Global Affairs, which had completed a project that led to Cisco offering lower prices than those offered to Shared Services Canada for the same products that Shared Services Canada procured through a sole-source contract. Your team mentioned that it needed more specifics.

The project in question is the Lester B. Pearson rehabilitation project for the local area network. It was completed in August this year, primarily for switches.

In the last one to two years, if it's true that Shared Services Canada purchased the same equipment provided by Cisco to Global Affairs for this project, can you please consider why the cost was so much lower when Global Affairs Canada did an RFP? Why is Shared Services Canada not also conducting RFPs so it can get the best prices for Canadian taxpayers?

Hon. Joyce Murray: As I mentioned, we're modernizing our procurement policies and practices to make them more inclusive, simple, digitally enabled and open to more innovative solutions. I think that for the project that you have just raised, the strategy on that procurement was validated by an independent advisory firm.

There is sometimes the need to consider compatibility with older legacy equipment that is in place. Sometimes we have no choice but to go with an existing supplier to have interoperability. I can tell you that all new data centres are procured competitively and wherever we can it is open procurement.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

That actually leads me to my final question, Minister, for this round. In our previous meeting, the staff had mentioned that no new data centres were being built, but I have been told that the CRA is presently building a new data centre.

Can you confirm that the procurement for this CRA project, including the networking, will be completed in an open, competitive manner based on functional requirements and not on the current requirements, or the previous requirements that only allowed for incumbent players to compete on these projects?

Hon. Joyce Murray: The four enterprise data centres are in place. That's not being procured now.

I will turn it over to Mr. Glover to answer your specific question about the centre you've referred to.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

That was an excellent question. I'm wondering if Mr. Glover would be able to provide us a written answer to that.

We'll now go to Mr. Jowhari for six minutes.

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

Welcome back, Minister, and your officials.

Minister, as you know, we are well into what's called the second wave of the pandemic. We are all doing our best to make sure that we protect ourselves and our loved ones. The government's been in the forefront of making sure that there is sufficient PPE out there. Rapid tests have been well distributed and continue to be distributed to provinces.

Another tool that's being heavily discussed and that you mentioned at your last appearance is the COVID Alert app. I was looking at an update today and I think we're at a 5.5 million people who have adopted it, which is about 15%. I know that we need anywhere between 60% to 80% adoption to be able to really do it justice.

Can you expand on how your department has been involved in developing the COVID Alert? What are some of the challenges with the potential hesitancy about it that's being felt out there?

• (1845)

Hon. Joyce Murray: I would love to answer that question. I'm always happy to promote COVID Alert. Thank you for the question.

It's an important tool for keeping Canadians safe. The first thing I want to say is that there was recently a study by Stanford and Oxford researchers working with the fundamental Apple-Google foundation for these apps, which has concluded that it is effective at any level. In fact, at 15% uptake, their model—which was based on three counties in the State of Washington—suggests that the use of the COVID Alert app at 15% can reduce deaths by 6% and reduce infections by 8%. That means we are already saving lives with COVID Alert.

The Canadian Digital Service worked with some open source code that the Ontario Digital Service had started working with, based on an Apple-Google foundation to create an app that.... One of the fundamental parts of this app and why people should feel safe and confident in downloading it is that it was designed with privacy utmost in mind. It does not track users' information. It doesn't track their location. It doesn't collect their data in any way. Even the federal Privacy Commissioner has said he is planning to download it.

Mr. Jowhari, how it works is that if a person with the app is within six feet of someone else with the app for over a certain time period, their phones will exchange Bluetooth signals. That way, should someone test positive, they will be given a one-time key that they can put into their phone and their phone will then send a notification to anyone with whom they were in close proximity for that time period.

We've done some upgrades already to refine it and narrow the window of potential vulnerability more closely. We're continuing to make sure that this is as effective as possible. We're working with provinces like British Columbia and Alberta to respond to their questions and concerns. Both of those provinces could use this app, and I'm optimistic that they will be part of this national program before too long.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you, Minister.

Could we switch topics and talk about the digital platform that's being made available for some of these programs that we are rolling out as part of the COVID-19 response?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Yes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Can you shed some light on what tools and services your department is rolling out in support of Canadians?

Often users find these very difficult to be able to navigate. We are becoming accustomed to tools such as innovation.canada.ca, where you can go in and talk about your business story, and it gives you all of the options.

Are we thinking about something like that, such that if you have a COVID story, you could tell it and they'll give you all of the programs that might be available for you and automatically connect you to the CRA and other services? Can you shed some light on that?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Yes, I can talk about the things we've done already, and they're very much focused on people—very much customer focused, as you're alluding to.

CDS put together “Get Updates on COVID-19”, along with Service Canada, so that individuals could go to one place and put in some non-identifying information and get everything they might be eligible to receive and how to apply for it. That's just one.

Another one is a simple way for ministries to notify people quickly, easily and securely of updates of what's going on and what they need to know. I think there have been over five million updates that have been sent out, many of them from the health ministry. This is a program they update called Notify, found at notification.canada.ca. It's being used by provinces and other organizations, because it just makes it so much easier.

There are other ones I could mention, but I think I will turn it over to Marc Brouillard briefly to add his context.

• (1850)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Once again, six minutes goes by very quickly, so if we could ask someone to follow that up with a written response, we would appreciate if you sent to the clerk.

We will now go to Ms. Vignola.

You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Murray, in votes 1b and 5b, Shared Services Canada is requesting \$91 million for existing and additional IT infrastructure and services, and for cybersecurity.

Which specific departments will benefit from the requested funding for IT infrastructure and services?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for that.

It was significant funding that Shared Services Canada accessed, and \$91 million was for hardware, software and infrastructure that was purchased and deployed in direct support of Canada's COVID-19 pandemic response, such as COVID-19 emergency relief programs for Canadians.

When those public servants had to suddenly work from home, there was a doubling of their capabilities and so on.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: That's obvious, but which specific departments will benefit?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Pardon me?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Which specific departments will benefit, Ms. Murray?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Shared Services Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Okay.

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Other funding is the \$84 million in supplementary estimates (B) for continual refreshing of old and aging applications and equipment. This funding was started under our government. It's the kind for the maintenance and repair upgrade work that was being neglected over the decades, which has led to some of our challenges.

We have \$37.3 million for Shared Services Canada in the modernization initiatives, and migrating workloads out of the old data centres, of which 230, I believe, have already been closed down—so we've closed almost one-third and moved it more modern housing.

There is \$31.3 million for Shared Services—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: —to secure the connections to the cloud from potential cyber-attacks and make it very secure.

I could go on, but I see that you have another question.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much, Ms. Murray.

Has the fact that more public servants have been teleworking led to an increase in security breaches?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Security is absolutely a high priority for me as a minister. And when people were segued to working from home, we made sure that they had access to tools like Webex that have security perimeters. So it is the connectivity, the tools—

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Okay.

Hon. Joyce Murray: —the 15,000 new computers that went to public servants, as well as clear standards and protocols for making sure they are handling data security from their home offices.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: In view of the increase in the number of people teleworking, have you observed an increase in security breaches or not?

It's not a trick question.

[English]

Hon. Joyce Murray: No, of course, very large organizations are always subject to attack. At the same time, we have boosted our focus on that.

I will ask Marc to answer whether there have been breaches. As far as I know, there have not been breaches of our Canadian perimeter, and that is testament to people like Marc who work on that.

Marc, do you have a comment to add?

Mr. Marc Brouillard (Acting Chief Information Officer of Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you, Minister.

[Translation]

No, there has not been much of an increase in breaches. However, there were more attacks on matters related to COVID-19.

With the Shared Services Canada security perimeter, it's as if employees were working on the network. The network remains protected.

• (1855)

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much, Mr. Brouillard.

On November 13, 2020, the Parliamentary Budget Officer sent an information request to SSC asking about the dollar amounts spent on cybersecurity, the CERB, the CRA call centres, and on health measures for first nations.

Did you supply this information by November 27 as requested?

If not, when do you expect to do so?

[English]

Hon. Joyce Murray: This is about openness and transparency, which are very core principles for me and for our department. Yes, our department has been in communication with the Parliamentary Budget Officer. We are working through the answers that the PBO is looking for. I'm happy to have Marc answer in more detail if the member would prefer.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you, Ms. Murray. I'd be very grateful.

Mr. Chair, how much speaking time do I have left?

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds for a question and answer, Mademoiselle.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Right.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer also asked for this information to be submitted weekly.

Does SSC intend to provide this information on a weekly basis?

[English]

Hon. Joyce Murray: SSC is working with the Parliamentary Budget Officer to satisfy the requests of that department in a way that is cost effective and efficient as possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Mademoiselle Vignola, and thank you, Minister.

We will now go to Mr. Green, for six minutes.

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

My good friend, Mr. Lloyd, opened his round of questioning with some really important questions. I'm a former city councillor, and I know that in instances of what I would call shady dealings around procurement, one of the ways staff would do that is to break up big contracts and have them procured out as smaller contracts.

I noted that the honourable Minister had a bit of a chuckle but didn't quite answer the question. I want to make sure I got a chance to put the question back to her. When she became minister, was she briefed on this practice as a point of procurement, given the size, scale and scope of the IT modernization within her purview.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I have not been briefed, nor have I any information that would suggest that that's the practice in the Government of Canada. Procurement is inordinately important, and that's why we're modernizing it to make sure that SMEs and others that are typically disadvantaged with the large projects SSC procures will have access.

I'm happy to turn it over to Paul Glover. He may have more.

Mr. Matthew Green: That's fine. That will suffice, because there is a challenge process. It's listed on buyandsell.gc.ca. We have a whole office of a procurement ombudsman that deals with complaints.

Has your department ever been investigated for complaints or any other irregularities as it relates to procurement? I checked on the site, but I couldn't find it in time.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I just would say, Mr. Green, that with spending the size of SSC's, if we had never been asked that and never been challenged, I would be shocked. I'll put it over to Paul Glover to tell you whether we have or not.

Mr. Matthew Green: It could be a brief yes or no, Mr. Glover. Are there any investigations under way to your knowledge?

Mr. Paul Glover (President, Shared Services Canada): If there are any under way right now, to my knowledge, the answer is no. There have in the past been CITT complaints. We use the ombudsman regularly, and procurement monitors, and it is our intention never to break procurements. It goes against our ability to bulk them up and obtain the best deal for the Government of Canada and the Canadian taxpayer.

Mr. Matthew Green: I think it could be said that in IT sometimes there's a culture that people may be a little preferential toward one system or service. I'm just wondering if there have been any instances that you know of related to the recent modernization that perhaps are not under investigation now, but were within recent memory.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'll let Paul answer that again, because I'm not aware of any.

Mr. Matthew Green: Sure.

Mr. Paul Glover: I would echo the minister's comment. I'm not aware of that. The vast majority of our procurement is done through competitive processes or through mini-competitions through pre-qualified vendors. It might not be open each and every time. We do over 10 or 11 contracts a day every day, so oftentimes we go to pre-qualified....

Mr. Matthew Green: How often are you audited on that?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Again, I'll ask Mr. Glover to answer that.

Mr. Matthew Green: That's fair.

Mr. Paul Glover: Mr. Chair, I will have to provide an answer in writing. I'm not sure off the top of my head.

• (1900)

Mr. Matthew Green: I just happen to have the privilege of being on the public accounts committee as well, where we are often doing studies. I bring this stuff up because there are, as you mentioned, 11 contracts a day. There are significant dealings within this purview related to the emergency funding for CERB.

I would like you to maybe comment on the following. In Ontario, for instance, four of its employees—all family members—defrauded the provincial government of \$11 million in COVID relief. They were in the IT field. When you guys heard this story—and I'm sure you would have been briefed on this—what was your response and what did you do to make doubly certain that this wasn't the case with any of the emergency funding that's happening for COVID federally?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

Through the chair to the member, I am not aware of that. As a British Columbian, perhaps, I'm not aware of the Ontario example. What I know is that we have very strong principles around openness and accountability to the public.

Mr. Matthew Green: I do appreciate that, Madam Minister, but the challenge is that you're the minister of digital government. This is a pretty material thing, and I would put to you that the fact that this happened within the IT department of a provincial government ought to have been brought to your attention—and I say that respectfully to your senior staff.

There were claims, or accusations, of IT staffers illegally issuing themselves blank cheques within the IT department. It is a pretty significant thing, and I would ask that after this meeting you be brought up to speed on that. As you know, the security of the IT department in a time of frenzied spending, investments and supports is critically important.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you. I work hand in glove with SSC. I was briefed several times a week as we were standing up the remote work. I have utter confidence in the leadership at SSC.

I know Paul has something to add by way detail here.

Mr. Paul Glover: Just to reassure the committee, we have a number of checks and balances that would prevent that from happening. There are reviews that have to be done, so you can't negotiate and sign these sorts of examples. There are always multiple sets of eyes.

We also grade our projects in terms of their level of risk, and that determines the level of oversight to make sure that it is provided. That is regularly challenged by our departmental audit committee to make sure the appropriate controls are in place.

During the COVID pandemic, at my request, we actually increased the frequency of our meetings with them to monthly rather than quarterly to make sure they were able to look at what we were doing, and that we had the appropriate controls, because we knew we were moving quickly.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you for that.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I would add that a recent audit of our procurement practices by Deloitte concluded that our practices are sound.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Matthew Green: Yes. We hear from Deloitte quite frequently at this committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Glover and Mr. Green.

That ends our first round. Now we'll go to our second round.

Mr. Paul-Hus, you have five minutes.

[Translation]

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

Madam Minister, I have a few questions for you.

My first question is about the WeChat application.

As you know, the United States wants to ban this application, which is controlled by the Chinese Communist Party. A few months ago, a member of your cabinet used your WeChat account to collect funds to support a lawsuit against Global News because Global News had spoken about the problem of sending protective equipment to China.

First, was this employee dismissed?

Second, are your offices still using WeChat—yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question. I'm happy to put it on record that WeChat is a social media platform that's used by members on all sides of the House. Participation in this group, like Facebook, is guided by posted guidelines.

It was not a member of my staff who posted a fundraiser. It was a member of the public who was part of that WeChat group. The individual violated the guidelines of my WeChat group and is no longer part of the group.

• (1905)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I'm pleased to hear that. However, as the Minister of Digital Government, do you know that WeChat is under Chinese control and could represent a security problem—yes or no?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Mr. Chair, I do want to point out that the Conservative Party of Canada maintains a WeChat account as well, the only federal party that does so. It is important to do outreach to all members of our community. WeChat is a way to connect with members of the Chinese—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Minister, I'm not attacking you. I'm asking you the question because you're the minister responsible.

If my party is still using it, I'm going to speak to them about it. That's a separate matter.

For the time being, what I want to know about is what's happening within the Canadian government and federal departments. Is the application still in service? I believe that it is. Do you think it should be banned from our systems?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus, but I have to say that it's not my role as Minister of Digital Government to weigh in. That would be for CSE or our public safety ministry, and we have not heard at this point any concerns about that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Minister. I will ask representatives of another department.

In your opening statement, you spoke about programs that were put in place quickly in response to the COVID-19 crisis. But this was accompanied in June by the inconvenient fact that the personal information of 5,500 people with a Canada Revenue Agency account had been compromised. Later, we learned that this was 11,200 accounts, some of which were accessible by means of a GCKey, a system that affects 30 departments, and other portals.

We even learned that these figures had quadrupled. According to information that we obtained, almost 50,000 Canadians had their personal information stolen when they were using government sites.

Can you confirm how many people in Canada were victims of identity theft as a result of using programs related to COVID-19?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: First, I'll say that we have a core responsibility to protect Canadians' information, and I take that very seriously. The government GCKey platform itself was not compromised, but like any large organization, the government's systems are constantly under attack using illegally acquired information and

log-ins. We're committed to always responding, and I would like Marc to be able to talk more specifically about the numbers and what—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: All right, I will let Mr. Brouillard answer.

I want to know whether 50,000 Canadians were victims of identity theft.

Mr. Marc Brouillard: I can explain the situation to some extent.

The numbers changed as we conducted our investigation. According to the most recent reported figures, there were 9,300 GCKey accounts. This system is part of the identity program for more than 24 departments. The problem occurred more specifically at the CRA, which uses a different system. Of the 14 million CRA accounts, suspicious activities were identified in 48,500 accounts, which were then suspended.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Do you know the source of the thefts? Were they external or internal?

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Paul-Hus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I'd like an answer in writing stating where the attacks came from, if possible.

Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Marc Brouillard: I can't answer that. It's under investigation by the RCMP.

The Chair: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] for five minutes.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Is that me, Mr. Chair? Sorry, I didn't catch that.

The Chair: Sorry. We have Mr. MacKinnon for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're going to try to return to forward-looking matters, Minister.

Last week, in the second hour of the meeting after you had left, we examined your mandate letter with Mr. Glover. The letter says that you would be conducting Shared Services Canada renewal work with a view to coming up with a common IT infrastructure for the Government of Canada.

Can you update us on this important work? Mr. Glover alluded to plan 3.0. Can you give us a general update on progress being made with this crucial work?

• (1910)

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you very much.

I must say it has been very essential work as we suddenly had to pivot from people working in their offices to working from home.

At the same time, SSC continues to work to transform the fundamental IT and digital aspects of the Government of Canada to modern enterprise standards. There are a number of things that are all happening simultaneously. One key part of the transformation is the shift to the cloud. We now have a cloud-first policy as part of our agenda. Throughout COVID, we've seen more departments shift to the cloud, and we're keeping up with that. All but the most secret information can actually go into the cloud. That gives us the speed and agility to respond more quickly, so that's an important part of our program.

As I mentioned earlier to a different member, this secure cloud enablement in defence spending in supplementary estimates (B) is to make sure that the connections to the cloud are secure and that anything coming at us is identified and neutralized.

Another aspect is secure, remote work capacity. That doubled, literally in a matter of weeks, which enabled Microsoft Teams—a secure suite of tools for public servants that we were planning to roll out over a couple of years—to essentially be rolled out in weeks to 40 departments, including 187,000 public servants who suddenly had access to these more modern tools.

We increased teleconference capacity threefold. Wi-Fi calling was activated for 183,000 mobile accounts. Webex services doubled to 40,000 accounts—that's secure video conferencing—and 15,000 new computers were provided to public servants at the tax department and Service Canada so that they could serve people remotely.

This was an incredible mobilization and a credit to SSC for doing that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: That is indeed impressive.

Last week, Mr. Glover indicated that he didn't want poor or obsolete applications to be imported into new environments like cloud services or our data centres.

Can you describe the work you're doing with your fellow ministers and public servants in other departments to encourage them to upgrade their applications?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: This is a critical part of modernizing. This is where the chief information officer branch works very closely with SSC.

SSC is providing the new enterprise data centre with hosting and managing the procurement of cloud services. Not all of these applications, as you mentioned, are suitable to go into cloud. Someone mentioned to me about the images that if an application is old and challenged, then it would be like moving your house; moving your garbage can, full of garbage, with your furniture; and then unpacking it into the garbage can in the new house.

That's pretty graphic, but we are now doing inventory on every application and giving it one of four ratings. It either is good to move to cloud now or it needs to be updated and upgraded. That's

the service and maintenance that is a deficit from decades of inattention—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. MacKinnon.

We will now go to Ms. Vignola for two and a half minutes.

• (1915)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We were speaking about systems obsolescence. At some point, we were even afraid that the systems would no longer meet demand and fail completely.

Demand was very high during the pandemic. Was this fear generalized?

How did the federal government upgrade systems during the pandemic to make sure that there wouldn't be a major breakdown in all departments?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: In terms of applications, as I was saying, there are four categories. You're talking about the category of applications that really need to be put aside and not go into the cloud. We have stabilization mechanisms to make sure there is a fail-safe so that, should there be a crash, that data will not be lost and the service will not be interrupted. That is part of what we're doing.

The other thing is that there are modernization initiatives for some of the older and very critical applications that are used to serve Canadians. What's happening now is that we are taking an enterprise approach, a digital approach, to these modernizations. In the past government might have spent two years planning a modernization and five years doing the work on a very complex application, and then find out at the end, when you flip the switch, whether it works or not.

We're not doing it that way anymore. We're doing it based on digital principles. There is much closer work with the people who will be using the application. There are small pieces where there are pilots. There is checking: Does that work? If so, we go to the next piece: Does that work? By the time we're ready to use the new application, it has been tried and we know it will work. It's a whole different style of updating that we are applying to our large application modernizations.

Mr. Brouillard may have more detail to offer.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Ms. Vignola, thank you for your questions.

We will now go to Mr. Green for two and half minutes.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

Shared Services Canada is requesting \$84 million under votes 1b and 5b for enabling digital services to Canadians. What digital services would be provided with this funding?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'd like to ask the chief financial officer to answer that question, when it gets down to that granular detail.

Ms. Samantha Hazen (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Chief Financial Officer Branch, Shared Services Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SSC is indeed asking for new funding of \$84 million for enabling digital services to Canadians. This funding is for our information technology refresh program. This program looks to continue the cyclical refresh and upgrade of tangible assets. It serves to mitigate the risk of service interruptions due to failing IT equipment and ensure the ongoing sustainability and integrity of existing IT infrastructure critical to the management of departmental programs and the provision of digital services to Canadians.

Mr. Matthew Green: That sounds great.

Specifically, is there specificity in the investments as it relates to which departments are getting which capital assets, and what their useful expected life cycle would be?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Again, I will turn that over to the department officials.

Mr. Matthew Green: Yes. The question was directed there, your Honourable Minister.

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the member's question.

We can attempt to follow up in writing. It is quite an exhaustive list because it is not one class of hardware. We go through and identify through those things that are most at risk of failing, whether at age where we have seen performance issues and feel equipment needs to be changed out. It could be replacing storage arrays. It could be replacing network routers—

Mr. Matthew Green: How come these wouldn't have been in the mains, if you have known this? If this was something that was in your work plan, why didn't it come out in the mains?

● (1920)

Mr. Paul Glover: Mr. Chair, the quick response is because it was not part of the A-base, and it was asked for as supplementary. That's why we're getting it through the supplementary estimates.

Mr. Matthew Green: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Now we will go to Mr. Lloyd, for five minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In our last meeting last week, it was indicated that the bulk of technology spending in the Government of Canada is done by Shared Services Canada, which has a budget of about \$2.2 billion.

An Order Paper question submitted by my colleague, Ziad Aboultaif, asked for a summary of all technology spending by the Government of Canada in 2018 and 2019. The response from the government was that \$6.8 billion was spent on technology that year.

I have two questions. Why is so much technology spending happening outside of Shared Services Canada? Do you, Minister, have oversight over this additional digital spending across the federal government?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Digital government is about supporting the other ministries in being effective in serving Canadians through the IT and digital tools they have. Through the chief information officer branch, we have policies like the policy on service and digital, and policies on security and other matters that provide guidance to public servants in all of the ministries.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Minister, do you have oversight over the estimated \$4 billion that's being spent on technology in other departments?

Hon. Joyce Murray: No. That's not my role to have oversight over all of that spending, though probably SSC and CIOB have a very good handle on the spending in the other ministries as well.

We're the central agency that provides guidance and support through the chief information officer branch, connecting with the CIOs and their teams in all the departments.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Minister.

Something you said in the previous round of questioning really stuck out to me. I want to confirm and clarify.

Did you say that 80% of the digital government spend is being spent on small and medium-size enterprises and primarily Canadian-based ones? Is that currently the case?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Through you, Mr. Chair, that's not the case for Shared Services Canada. I think the member may have misheard that, or I may have misspoken.

Seventy nine percent of our contracts were awarded to SMEs in 2019-20 with a value of \$877 million, and 98% of those were Canadian companies. It was 79% of the contracts, not necessarily of the dollars itself.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay. The vast majority of the dollars are still being spent on large, mostly American-based IT companies?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I don't have the figure for the dollars that are spent on Canadian procurement, but I will ask Mr. Glover if he has that statistic.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I'm going to ask Mr. Glover a question quickly and then maybe he can answer both.

My previous question got cut off. Is the CRA presently building a new data centre as opposed to an enterprise centre? If so, can you confirm that the procurements for this project, including the networking, will be completed within open tender and based on functional requirements and not on the same equivalency requirements?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

I will turn that over to Mr. Glover, but I want to point out that we have a mandate to provide good quality service, through SSC, that is cost-effective and secure. Where that can be provided by Canadian companies, of course we're happy to procure locally.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Mr. Glover, do you have answers to those other questions?

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you, Minister and Chair, for the member's question. I can confirm that CRA is not building a data centre. No data centres are being built. They do have workloads in existing data centres that are being moved to an enterprise data centre. Any procurements related to that will follow procurement processes.

• (1925)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Which procurement processes: the old ones or the new ones?

Mr. Paul Glover: They will be the current ones of the Government of Canada, to ensure that we comply with them. There will undoubtedly be, Mr. Chair, a mix, where we have some specific areas—I've explained in the past—where there is a legacy, and we have to do like for like. For anything that is new and forward looking, we will be open with the vendor community to ensure that there is equivalency and it meets the requirements of the department.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Glover.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Glover.

We will now go to Mr. Weiler for five minutes.

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank Minister Murray and all of our officials for joining our committee again today. I want to pick up on something that was just talked about. It's quite impressive that 79% of the contracts that are signed by Shared Service Canada are with Canadian SMEs. I know that many small and medium-sized businesses face barriers when they're doing business with our government and with the Government of Canada. They often don't have the experience of working with government. They don't necessarily have the dedicated procurement people that big businesses may have. In fact, many of these businesses may find it burdensome and complicated to work within the procurement process. With this in mind, Minister, I was hoping you could discuss, in a little bit more detail, what the department is doing to tackle this issue.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I just want to reinforce that the spending of digital government is substantial. From my perspective it's very important to adhere to our guidelines of cost-effectiveness and security while at the same time, if possible, making opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises, and particularly businesses that help create greater inclusion of some of the groups that find it harder to access government services. We're currently testing an innovative contracting framework that is called "procurement process 3.0" to simplify procurement, to promote more competition and openness, and to ultimately get better results.

We're working with Technation, which represents many IT providers, both big and small. This was the first group I met with, I believe, after the last election as the Minister of Digital Government. I heard loud and clear that innovative small businesses were not feeling that our procurement system worked for them because it was just too much of an investment and took too long to get through a procurement. We are working with Technation to be able to change the contracting processes so that there will be more access for small and medium-sized enterprises. Pilot results have shown to be very promising. More than 80% of the respondents in this pilot participated in an invitation to refine our approach. They found SSC's responses timely and the communication from SSC transparent, and wanted to continue working with us. That's just one of the new initiatives.

Another has to do with what I would consider harnessing private-sector innovation by putting the procurement out: not as in, "We want you to do this for us," but, "We want this outcome. What are your ideas and innovations for achieving that outcome?" I think that's really an exciting approach because it will unleash the creativity of the private sector.

I'll ask if Paul has more examples of the modernization aside from what I already mentioned, which is working with associations that represent some of the vulnerable groups we want to help create more opportunities for.

Paul, are there other things that you would like to highlight?

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chair, if I may on behalf of the minister, there are other groups. We are working not only as the minister said for small and medium-sized Canadian enterprises, but are also looking at what we can do for female-owned enterprises. There is definitely an issue with women in STEM—science, tech, engineering and math—so we're looking at what we can do in that regard.

We are looking at what we can do for visible minority-owned businesses to make sure they're able to access our procurement opportunities. We're very pleased and proud of the results we've had in targeting indigenous communities and indigenous-led businesses to be able to break into this space. We have let over \$35 million in contracts in the IT space to indigenous....

We're trying to make sure that we target all segments of the population so that it is as inclusive as possible and that we are as easy as possible to deal with, while still protecting security and the operational integrity of the network and services we operate.

• (1930)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Glover and Mr. Weiler, for your questions.

This comes to the end of our questioning. I appreciate all of the officials and the minister attending here with us again in such a short time frame. Thank you, again.

To the committee, we are going to suspend briefly while we bring in the president of the Treasury Board and his officials.

• (1930) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1935)

The Chair: We will now resume the meeting.

Minister, if you have some opening statements to present, please do so.

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

I would first like to thank the committee for inviting me back to speak this time to the supplementary estimates (B) 2020-21, which were tabled last October.

With me today, I have the pleasure of introduce to you Glenn Purves, assistant secretary, expenditure management sector; Karen Cahill, assistant secretary and chief financial officer; Sandra Hassan, assistant deputy minister, employment conditions and labour relations; and finally Kathleen Owens, assistant comptroller general, acquired services and assets.

These supplementary estimates (B) are the second of three supplementary estimates planned for fiscal year 2020-21. They outline new and updated spending needs for programs and services that were not sufficiently developed in time for inclusion in the 2020-21 main estimates.

[*Translation*]

The government needs to make sure that it gives Canadians the support they need during the COVID-19 pandemic, while at the same time promoting our country's economic recovery and prosperity.

We do this by investing in critical health care and supporting the safe restart of our economy. Our spending plans, the ones you have in front of you, will help Canada thrive, and remain strong and united.

The government continues to invest in Canadians and the economy, particularly in efforts to respond to the public health threats of the COVID-19 virus and to minimize its health, economic and social impacts.

[*English*]

These supplementary estimates (B) present a total of \$79.2 billion in incremental budgetary spending. This includes \$20.9 billion to be voted by Parliament and \$58.3 billion in forecast statutory expenditures.

As you know, vote expenditures require annual approval from Parliament through an appropriation bill. These types of expenditures include operating, capital, and grants and contributions.

Statutory spending does not require annual approval from Parliament because that type of spending is already authorized by Parlia-

ment through separate legislation, such as the federal-provincial transfers that are pursuant to the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act.

[*Translation*]

In these supplementary estimates (B), most of the \$20.9 billion in new voted spending is for emergency responses to the COVID 19 pandemic, including medical research, vaccine development and purchases of personal protective gear, and medical equipment and supplies. They also cover economic responses to the pandemic, including support for small- and medium-sized businesses, salary top-ups for essential workers, and funding for provinces and territories to safely restart their economies, and bring students back to school.

[*English*]

Overall, funding requirements for the top 10 organizations account for approximately 85% of the voted spending sought through these estimates. Of those 10 organizations, eight are each seeking more than \$500 million to support their priorities. For example, in my department, the Treasury Board Secretariat is asking for \$646.6 million.

In addition, the \$58.3 billion in planned statutory spending included in these estimates reflects the government's key response measures and emergency supports, including \$28.5 billion for the Canada emergency response benefit, \$12.3 billion for payments to provinces and territories for the safe restart agreement, \$3.8 billion for medical research and vaccine development and \$3.3 billion for the acquisition of protective gear and medical equipment.

These supplementary estimates (B) also include \$1.3 billion in non-budgetary measures related primarily to student loans.

• (1940)

[*Translation*]

To conclude, my officials and I are very appreciative of the time the committee spends studying the government's spending on behalf of Canadians.

We would be pleased to take any questions you may have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Duclos

[*English*]

We will now start the first round of questions with Mr. Paul-Hus.

You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Good evening, Minister, and good evening to the officials who are with you.

We can speak in French, Mr. Minister. That's interesting.

I'd like you to speak about a matter that directly concerns the Treasury Board.

We know that the Treasury Board approves funding for new programs like the funds for the WE Charity. The secretariat's "Guidance for Drafters of Treasury Board Submissions" document states in black and white that submissions must contain: "Where official languages implications are foreseen, an Official Languages Appendix is required to demonstrate compliance with" applicable statutes and regulations. It goes on to say, "In all circumstances, you must conduct an Official Languages Impact Analysis."

When I asked the question last week, you did not have the answer. Can you or one of your officials tell me whether this was done for the WE Charity?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you very much, Mr. Paul-Hus.

You're right in saying that it's always very interesting for us to be able to speak to one another in French, particularly as we are neighbours in Quebec City.

I would like to briefly mention two things about this matter, and then turn it over to Ms. Owens, who can give you further details.

First, the Treasury Board Secretariat deemed that the minister responsible for this file had all the required powers. Second, it was determined that the transfer payments policy was applicable to all transfer programs, including this one.

I will now ask Ms. Owens to provide you with more details.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Well, I'd like to continue with you, Minister.

You're telling me that the WE Charity was a new program. There were \$42 million for the Kielburger brothers. A total of \$900 million had been contributed across the country. You're telling me that there was no need for an official languages impact assessment for this. That's what you're saying?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: No. What I said was that senior Treasury Board Secretariat officials deemed that the minister concerned already had the powers she needed and that she could do the work in compliance with all Treasury Board policies.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: The answer to the final question of whether this was done or not would appear to be no.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I will ask Ms. Owens about the application of the transfer payments policy.

[English]

Ms. Kathleen Owens (Assistant Comptroller General, Acquired Services and Assets Sector, Office of the Comptroller General, Treasury Board Secretariat): Absolutely.

Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the case of the WE contribution, ESDC officials did consult TBS to determine whether the Canada student grant program could be delivered under the minister's existing authorities, or whether a

Treasury Board authority were required. In this case, we determined that it was under the minister's authority; therefore, the program and the contribution agreement never came to the Treasury Board. The Treasury Board had no role, but as the minister indicated, under the transfer of payment policy, it's the responsibility of the deputy head of the department to make sure that all official languages provisions of the act are being respected.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: In short, in Minister Qualtrough's office, it was determined that it was not necessary to do an official languages impact analysis for the WE Charity.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. We can't hear what Mr. Paul-Hus is saying. I can't hear anything, neither the interpretation nor the French.

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): I was able to hear everything, Ms. Vignola.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Me too.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Can everyone hear me?

Mr. Greg Fergus: Yes, we can hear you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Okay. Everything seems to be working now.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: All right. I'll start over. I was at 3 minutes and 28 seconds.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. I paused you when this came about, so go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I will repeat my question for Ms. Owens.

Can you confirm to me that Minister Qualtrough determined that it wasn't necessary to do an official languages impact analysis for the WE Charity?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Ms. Owens, could you explain the work that the department of Ms. Chagger was in charge of? In fact, it was the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth who was in charge of this file, given her authority.

• (1945)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Go ahead, Ms. Owens.

[English]

Ms. Kathleen Owens: Minister Chagger's officials contacted the Treasury Board Secretariat to determine if the program could be delivered within the existing authorities. We determined that that was in fact the case, so the initiative never came forward to the Treasury Board. It would be up to the department to make sure that the Official Languages Act is being respected in the delivery of the program [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: That can't be right. Minister Duclos said that the minister had considered that she had the required authority. Now Ms. Owens just said that the Treasury Board Secretariat had been asked. That's really not very clear.

I don't have much speaking time left, so I'll continue, but we haven't heard the last of this matter, Minister.

I will now comment on the budget.

In your statement, you mentioned a budget for vaccines. I would like to understand. There are \$3.8 billion for vaccine development and medical research, but there is no way of knowing where in Canada this money will go, nor what the contract amounts will be.

The Americans created the Operation Warp Speed partnership. In the United States, the largest capitalist country in the world, everything is there in black and white. The information is available and we know what's going on.

Why, here in Canada, are you asking us to adopt \$3.8 billion in appropriations with our eyes shut, without knowing any of the details?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

In fact, the supplementary estimates (B) 2020-21, which you have in hand, include two items pertaining to vaccines and spending on drugs. On the one hand, there is an amount of \$3.8 billion, which is a non-budgetary appropriation. It is therefore an amount already approved by Parliament. There is also a \$5.4-billion amount which requires approval by the House of Commons and the Senate, which is also for spending on the development and supply of vaccines and drugs.

As you can see, these are substantial amounts. They align very well with this remarkably ambitious program—

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: That's just political verbiage, Mr. Minister. Why can't we know the details?

The Chair: Excuse me, but your speaking time is up.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Duclos and Mr. Paul-Hus.

We will go to Mr. Drouin for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses here today.

I would also like to thank my colleague, Minister Duclos, for being here with us again. We saw one another not so long ago.

Before going into greater depth on an issue that I believe is very important, I'd like to speak about the French language, in response to Mr. Paul-Hus's questions.

Mr. Duclos, I would like you to confirm something. Is the Treasury Board required to determine whether official languages have been complied with every time the Government of Canada launches

a program? I believe I heard your colleague say that it was rather the authorities in each department who were required to ensure that both official languages were complied with when creating programs.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Mr. Drouin

There are indeed two obligations. On the one hand, the Treasury Board Secretariat has an obligation to provide clear guidance on procedures to be followed to implement programs that are consistent with Canada's linguistic duality and diversity. After that, the departments and ministers concerned have an obligation to apply these guidelines when implementing their programs.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much for your answer.

So the Treasury Board establishes the rules and gives guidance, but it is not always the Treasury Board that decides whether or not these rules have been properly applied. Needless to say, we expect departments to comply with the rules.

I have a question about the Centre for Regulatory Innovation.

We spoke today about the fall economic statement. I recall that the 2018 fall economic statement mentioned the establishment of a centre for regulatory intervention. In fact, our committee was getting ready, before the COVID-19 pandemic, to study how to reduce bureaucracy in government, to enable businesses to deal with government more quickly without so much red tape.

Could you give us some information about the Centre for Regulatory Innovation?

● (1950)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: That's a good question, and I'm very pleased that you are taking an interest in it, not only as an MP with a lot of experience in business development, but also as a committee member.

The creation of the Centre for Regulatory Innovation was announced two years ago in the 2018 fall economic statement. The centre was launched recently and is doing very well. Its role is to make the public service innovative and creative in regulatory matters, by streamlining procedures, particularly for small businesses, which need us to adapt regulations to address their needs and concerns.

At this very moment, the departments taking part in this project, which have the centre's support, are testing new ways of designing and implementing regulations. Everyone benefits. It makes it easier for the public service and businesses, especially small businesses, to grow, develop and serve the country.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much.

It's a pleasure to be here representing a large agricultural riding. People often speak to me about farming and the Food Inspection Agency, and some of the barriers that people can encounter when they are required to make sure that food in the Canadian market is safe.

How can we refer stakeholders to the Centre for Regulatory Innovation? Is it an internal process? Are stakeholders outside the government encouraged to do business with this new centre?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Both are possible. Stakeholders can deal directly with MPs like you, who are doing a very good job. They can also contact the External Advisory Committee on Regulatory Competitiveness. This very reliable committee will give them information about how to use regulations to become more competitive and modern in Canada. The committee has been in place since May 2019 and it has already facilitated considerable progress in terms of the revision of regulations throughout the Canadian government. Not only does it have scientists and experts in consumer, health, and environmental protection, but also businesspeople. It's an extraordinarily solid committee. I would encourage you to contact its members. Information is available at the Treasury Board Secretariat's website.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I would like to explore this further, Minister.

My understanding is that it's not a strictly internal committee, but rather one that interacts with other departments. We often hear people talk about red tape between departments, but there is also sometimes red tape between external stakeholders and the government. The Centre for Regulatory Innovation is therefore looking for new solutions to make their dealings with government smoother.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: That explains it very well, Mr. Drouin. I could not do better myself.

I would also like to thank you not only for what you say, but for what you do and for your vision. I am sure that your vision inspires many of your colleagues on the committee.

So thanks for your comments and for doing your work so well.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Minister, I think that—

The Chair: Excuse me—

Mr. Francis Drouin: Okay. My time is up.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, and thank you, Minister.

We will now go to Ms. Vignola for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Hello, Mr. Duclos.

We're also in the same riding. We could just about start calling ourselves the Quebec committee rather than the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

Mr. Duclos, we've spent a lot of money to reserve vaccine doses that will come from abroad. In April, we announced with considerable fanfare that we were spending money on research into a COVID-19 vaccine. There were investments in some Canadian

companies, including one in which we share ownership, Medicago. It took several months before the grants were received, but they did eventually come in.

Of the amounts in the supplementary estimates that remain to be approved, which are for Canadian pharmaceutical companies to develop a vaccine?

• (1955)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you very much, Ms. Vignola.

Mr. Paul-Hus and Ms. Vignola, I'm very pleased to see you on screen. This is really nice. And in fact, all three of us are neighbours.

You're quite right to point out how proud we are to have Medicago facilities in our region. It's now in my riding, but it will soon have a presence in yours too.

Medicago is a story of success and pride. It received more than \$170 million from the Canadian government over the past few weeks, as the first Canadian company to be developing a vaccine here in Canada. It's a source of considerable pride in Quebec City and in the province of Quebec. We take pride in supporting its considerable efforts in health, not only to develop but also produce a vaccine for 38 million Canadians.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you Mr. Duclos.

Nevertheless, I'd like to know how much from the supplementary estimates will go towards this research, whether with Medicago or another Canadian pharmaceutical company. Has an amount been set aside for our pharmaceutical companies?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: The reason we can say that we're talking about our companies, is that we're injecting \$170 million in your riding and mine. That's certainly remarkable. I'm perhaps being somewhat chauvinistic, but I'm unaware of regions other than yours and mine combined that have received as much support from the Canadian government in such an important set of circumstances. We're talking about people's health and lives and, down the line, economic health. It's extraordinarily important for the Quebec City region, for Quebec as a whole, and indeed for the whole country. We're reinvesting in the capacity to develop and produce extremely innovative vaccines.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

I would like...

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: In all, we're investing approximately \$10 billion for the supply, development, transportation, storage and administration of vaccines over the coming months.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: We're now talking about vaccines from abroad, but also from Quebec. I believe that a Calgary or a Vancouver company also received grants in April. We therefore have what it takes in Canada to lend a hand.

I'd like to discuss another matter.

In your statement, you said that eight organizations were asking for over \$500 million each. For the Treasury Board Secretariat, it was \$646.6 million. This amount includes \$20 million for the initiative to upgrade applications. Approximately the same amount has been requested for negotiated wage settlements. Once again, nearly that amount is allocated to the stabilization of the Phoenix pay system.

Why were these expenditures not foreseeable enough to include in the main estimates, thus requiring us to put them in the supplementary estimates now?

The stabilization of the Phoenix pay system is certainly nothing new. As for the negotiated wage settlements, they should have been expected because they were negotiated.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: This can be explained by another success story. Over the past few months, we succeeded in signing solid agreements with many unions that were respectful not only the public service, but to the capacity of Canadians to pay for government services. This, in large part, explains why these items are appearing now.

I will now ask Ms. Hassan or Ms. Cahill To give you further details, since you want to be well informed.

Ms. Karen Cahill (Assistant Secretary and Chief Financial Officer, Treasury Board Secretariat): I can answer this question, Minister.

I'd like to thank the MP for her question.

In short, it's a question of dates. When the main estimates were being prepared, these items had not yet been approved. The collective agreements had been neither signed nor negotiated. So the reasons are simply the result of timing. That's why they are in the supplementary estimates (B) 2020-2021.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much.

You mentioned, Mr. Duclos, that you like clarity and simplicity. All kinds of measures have been implemented since mid-March to deal with an altogether exceptional situation. As a parliamentarian, but also as citizen, I'd like to have a table with three columns showing a list of the measures taken to deal with COVID-19, the expenditures thus far for each of these measures, and the expenditures expected for these measures. In other words, I would like to see what we are doing, how much it costs and how much it's going to cost.

Is it possible to get these figures? How much time would it take to come up with a simple table like that?

• (2000)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: We'll do everything we can to simplify life, Ms. Vignola

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Duclos.

[English]

Unfortunately, we are at the end of our time. I'd appreciate if you could answer that in writing, if possible, and submit that to the committee.

We'll now go to Mr. Green for six minutes.

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

We know the honourable minister was an economist in his previous life, so I'm going to challenge him to use word "economy" to be able to give the best answers he can using the fewest words possible, so I can get to the most questions.

The Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada is requesting about \$760 million for the specific claim settlement fund, which is used to provide compensation to first nations in accordance with settlement agreements. How many settlement agreements are included in this funding request, using the word "economy"?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Yes, we like to have the greatest output for the smallest possible input, but that's a bit difficult because this is a difficult question. In order to speak as little as I can, I'll switch immediately to Glenn. He will hopefully be able to give that greatest output from the smallest input.

Mr. Glenn Purves (Assistant Secretary, Expenditure Management Sector, Treasury Board Secretariat): Mr. Green, the most recent information I have is as of June 2020, there were 131 claims under assessment and 338 in negotiations.

Mr. Matthew Green: How does the department forecast expenditures, and what role does the TBS play in the development of these expenditure forecasts?

Mr. Glenn Purves: With respect to the forecast for expenditures and the fiscal year in which they're going to be paid, that really comes from that department. That department will step back and say that these are the claims it expects to make and the payments in this year versus next year. Often, we will see specific claims adjustments coming in supplementary estimates because there's always a revision to these sorts of forecasts. The purpose of having supplementary estimates is to bring payment authority to Parliament on these adjustments.

Mr. Matthew Green: Do you have any idea, Glenn, from start to finish—from the time that a claim is first brought before the courts to when it's paid—what the timeline is for that? How many decades does it take?

Mr. Glenn Purves: I don't have a line of sight on that.

Mr. Matthew Green: That's fair.

Mr. Glenn Purves: Yes.

Mr. Matthew Green: Maybe you'll have an answer to this question. The Department of Finance is requesting \$1 billion for the Province of Alberta to close inactive gas wells and rehabilitate gas sites. Who owns the gas wells that are inactive, and who is responsible for these gas wells?

Mr. Glenn Purves: These are transfers, effectively, to the province. I do know that these are amounts that would go to the Province of Alberta. In this case, I believe in Saskatchewan the amounts have already gone. I think it's the ones for Alberta—

Mr. Matthew Green: In the transfer, are they required to disclose on a line-by-line basis exactly whose liability we're paying for?

Mr. Glenn Purves: I don't have the line of sight on that in particular. I just know that this is effectively a transfer to the Province of Alberta.

Mr. Matthew Green: Was it just \$1 billion because that's a big, round number, or is that an actual rounded, estimated amount?

Mr. Glenn Purves: I think this is based on need and the amounts they've quantified as needing to be spent to deal with these orphan wells. Again—

Mr. Matthew Green: Why is the public paying for the cleanup costs, when private companies, having already earned a profit off of these wells, are let off the hook?

Mr. Glenn Purves: I don't have an answer to that in particular because I'm not responsible for that—

Mr. Matthew Green: That is also fair, Glenn. I'm going to keep it with you because we're running out of time here.

The allocations from the Treasury Board's central votes—the additional information broken down by organization in supplementary estimates (B)—indicate that you have authorized, through vote (5) for government contingencies, an allocation of just north of \$800,000 for the Leaders' Debates Commission to maintain limited operations and ensure that the commission is prepared to organize debates for the 44th general election.

Did the Leaders' Debates Commission request funding as a part of supplementary estimates (B)?

Mr. Glenn Purves: Yes, this would be a request from the commission to have access to that funding if needed, as a contingency.

• (2005)

Mr. Matthew Green: Okay.

Mr. Glenn Purves: It's effectively been identified as an allocation, and they can draw from it. They have not drawn from it, though.

Mr. Matthew Green: That's good. It would potentially be an interesting indication of an early election.

TBS is requesting \$2.8 million, under vote 1(b), to settle claims arising from the White Class Action settlement agreement. It looks like the court approved the class action settlement for RCMP officers whose disabilities were clawed back from their disability pensions. To date, how many people have made a claim as a part of this settlement, and what is the average claim amount?

Mr. Glenn Purves: I'll turn this over to Karen Cahill, who would be the best person to answer this question, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you. Thanks for your answers as well, Glenn.

All the best over the holidays.

Ms. Karen Cahill: To date, we have 1,021 people who have put their claims forward. The average amount is about \$53,000 per claim.

Mr. Matthew Green: Do you expect an additional request of funding for this settlement?

Ms. Karen Cahill: No, we don't expect any additional funding for this settlement at this point.

Thank you.

Mr. Matthew Green: Is there a cut-off date for future claims?

Ms. Karen Cahill: No, there are no cut-off dates for future claims. It's been left open in terms of putting forward claims from former RCMP members.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

We are finished the first round.

We will now go to the second round.

For five minutes, Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair and witnesses. Minister, welcome back.

Minister, I want to go back to the official languages impact analysis. On your own website, it states that an impact analysis is required if you answer “yes” to any of these questions, such as “Is your submission seeking the Treasury Board's approval for a new service or program?”—the answer would be “yes” for WE—and “Is your submission seeking Treasury Board's approval toward a grant or contribution to a non-government organization?”—the answer would again be “yes”. They would have had to do an official languages analysis.

It sounded like you were trying to pass off the responsibility for this to Minister Chagger when it says right on your own website, regarding the responsibilities of Treasury Board, that the program analysis ensures that the official languages appendix has been completed. It's in your department's responsibility, but it was not done. You say that it's someone else's responsibility, when your own website states that program analysis ensures that the official languages appendix has been completed. They review the official languages impact analysis if it's required to provide one. Your own rules say one was required, yet you approved this money without it being done. Can you tell us why?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you for the question, which I effectively answered in French earlier, but since we are a bilingual country—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Answer.... Your department is required to do—

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: —I will answer in English as well.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Your department is required to ensure that it's done. To meet the minimum standards requiring that it be done, under Treasury Board guidelines, it was required to be done. Under Treasury Board guidelines, your department has to ensure that the official languages appendix has been completed, yet you didn't. Why?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I provided an answer to that earlier.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: No, you did not. Why did you not ensure that it was completed?

Mr. Francis Drouin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I'm having a hard time hearing both the question and the answer.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's true, Mr. Drouin.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I'm very happy to provide you an answer, but I need just a little time, not too long—you'll see.

In fact, your colleague MP Drouin, who just spoke, also provided the appropriate answer. Treasury Board provides guidelines so that responsible ministers do their jobs. The secretariat assessed that the authority that the minister in question required was available to that minister and, therefore, the minister could and had to implement that according to those guidelines.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Minister, your own website states that your department ensures that the official languages appendix has been completed. It was not completed. Your department, according to your own website, states that you're responsible to ensure that it is completed if it's required. It was required and your department did not ensure it was completed. Why did the Treasury Board violate its own rules for ensuring that the official languages impact analysis was completed?

• (2010)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I think you deserve a—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Was it because this was done specially for WE, and just rushed through? What other rules were overlooked in this?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I believe you and members of the committee deserve an honest and clear answer. To avoid confusion, I would therefore invite Madam Owens to again state the way in which that operates.

Ms. Kathleen Owens: I'm happy to answer. I'm sorry if I wasn't clear earlier.

In the case of the WE contribution agreement, it did not come to the Treasury Board because it was determined that the program was within the minister's authorities. Mr. McCauley, in the guidelines you're referring to, the appendix referred to submissions to the Treasury Board. That is what the guidelines require, to accompany a submission.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You're saying that the WE money didn't go through Treasury Board at all. It surpassed Treasury Board. It was approved on its own without Treasury Board approval.

Ms. Kathleen Owens: I was saying that it's within the minister's authority to implement the program and sign the contribution agreement, so the department would have had to do the official languages assessment.

Your question is best directed at them with regard to what official languages assessment they did in that case.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay.

We have an ATIP request that came back, stating that an official languages assessment was not done. Is that correct?

Ms. Kathleen Owens: I have no line of sight on what the department did.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I have an ATIP that says that one was not done, so here we have Treasury Board ignoring the rules.

I find it quite shameful that a unilingual MP from Edmonton is the one standing up for French language rights when you have the minister from Quebec City itself refusing to follow his own rules.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, I have point of order.

If the member actually knew and spoke with the official languages community, he would understand that they are actually asking the Treasury Board to take over, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: This is not a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Would you rule on it, please, before he continues lecturing?

Mr. Francis Drouin: They're actually asking the Treasury Board to take over that, but the Official Languages Act has not yet been presented.

I just want to clarify that point.

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

We have now come to the end of Mr. McCauley's time.

Now we'll go—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks.

Mr. Chair, I just have a point of order.

Could we please—

Mr. Matthew Green: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Green.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Robert....

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, with all due respect to Mr. Drouin, Mr. Drouin's role on this committee, as I understand it, is not to answer on behalf of the honourable minister.

I believe, if you find it, you will find that he took the tail end of Mr. McCauley's intervention in a way that I think lacks courtesy, quite frankly.

Mr. Duclos is a learned man and can answer for himself, and to run the clock out on an intervention is not a point of order.

The Chair: Thank you. That's debate.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, you have—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order as well, please.

The Chair: Mr. McCauley, yes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We've seen this continue from my colleagues across the way. When they don't like questioning, they interrupt with a point of order.

I would appreciate it if the chair could immediately act on that point of order to stop them from monologuing out our time. Also, traditionally, when there is a point of order, the person who was speaking originally has an opportunity to address that point of order.

I have nothing further to say, but I would appreciate the chair's stopping this process of having the Liberals monologue out our time on wasteful points of order that are nonsensical and mostly debate.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

For the record, when points of order are called, I do stop the clock so that you can get the complete time you have and so that the time is not wasted.

I would ask that all members, when they are looking at a point of order, do so on an issue that is truly a point of order.

Thank you.

With that said, Mr. Kusmierczyk, you have five minutes.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for again appearing before our committee. It's always terrific to see you here. I very much appreciate your succinct and comprehensive answers as well, so thank you very much for that.

Minister, last week you announced the publication of the updated greening government strategy, which sets new targets for net-zero, green and climate-resilient government operations.

The supplementary estimates (B) include \$1.8 million for innovative approaches to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in government operations. We know that the Government of Canada owns about 20,000 cars and trucks. I just want to know what the updated strategy includes for the greening of the Government of Canada fleet.

• (2015)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Irek. That's indeed great that you followed that important announcement.

Indeed, the Government of Canada is the largest real-property owner in the country. That's why we want to proceed through our ongoing greening of federally owned assets, including the fleet, to support both the agenda to reduce pollution and also to support our domestic green building capacity.

I am also pleased to say that it addresses, as well, the issue of procurement. We want to make sure that those we procure from get the greatest benefit from that strategy, the benefit, as I said, of investments in a more green and clean environment, but also a larger economy that supports more middle-class Canadians, innovations and all sorts of great social impacts.

On that, I would end by saying that we have a particularly strong agenda around the procurement of either zero-emission vehicles or hybrid vehicles, starting right now with the purchase of a minimum of 75% zero-emission or hybrid vehicles for the Government of Canada fleet.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Minister, thank you very much for that.

As you are aware, in our community here in Windsor-Essex, we proudly build the first plug-in hybrid electric vehicle minivan, the Chrysler Pacifica, at the Windsor assembly plant. How might this program impact a manufacturing plant such as this, or how might this program impact just procurement and the clean technology sector in Canada?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: We are very proud and you should be very proud and very happy to have the Chrysler Pacifica made in Canada, in particular in your area of Canada. That's a great source of strength for your community, your families and your workers. It's also a great source of pride for everyone else in Canada.

We know that the future of our fleet overall, and the government's fleet in particular, is around building and procuring the zero-emission and hybrid cars. It's great that you, as a member of Parliament, are able to support that industry and we look forward to having other regions across Canada also benefit from the economic impacts of investing in a green economy.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Minister.

In terms of the \$1.8 million that was distributed for innovative approaches to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, some of that was shared with the Department of the Environment, Parks Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Department of Foreign Affairs, and so on. A number of departments were selected.

Can you speak to why or how those particular organizations were selected?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: There are all sorts of important criteria. Obviously, one of the most important criteria is to reduce our impact on the environment. We know that we have only one planet. We know we want to let our children and grandchildren live on a green planet, a planet that will also protect their health and the health of those they love.

It's also about building an economy that is going to be ahead of others, because we know there are billions of dollars of future growth in green tech, in the green production of clean goods and services. It's all about connecting the social, economic and environmental agendas of this government and, we believe, of every future government in the years to come.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to Ms. Vignola for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much. Two and a half minutes of speaking time is short, but I'll take it.

Minister, you know as well as I do that the melting glaciers and the thawing permafrost, among other phenomena, could lead to other problems with respect to the bacteria and viruses we will have to cope with.

In our budget forecasts, whether in the current supplementary estimates or others to come, are there funds set aside for research into bacteria which, while for the time being are contained in our natural freezers, could escape fairly quickly? Are funds set aside for preventive research?

• (2020)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you very much, Ms. Vignola.

That's definitely a lesson we learned during the pandemic. We have also begun to make the most of it and will certainly keep that in mind over the coming months and years. What I'm talking about here is the importance of being prepared for all health eventualities. Unfortunately, other pandemics like this one are likely to occur in the future, and we need to be even better prepared. We must have the capacity to develop and produce vaccines and to have any other technologies that will help us protect everyone. We need to protect the human, physical, and economic health of our country.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you, Mr. Duclos.

One of the roles of the Treasury Board Secretariat is to monitor expenditures. How will the monitoring of COVID-19-related expenditures differ from the usual monitoring of main estimates and supplementary estimates?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: That's an excellent question. You can find part of the answer by looking at how the various expenditures are listed in the estimates. Most expenditures focus on managing the health crisis and the economic crisis. That's precisely what needs to be done. We're in a crisis, and so we need to be disciplined and to focus our energies in order to get through it, while remaining as strong and united as possible.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Mr. Duclos, I'd like to speak briefly about the WE Charity.

You pointed out that somewhere between having documents translated and being able to offer services in French, there was a whole universe. You were told that WE was dealing with nine school boards. Anyone who has ever worked in education knows that there are 72 school boards in Quebec, 57 of which are franco-phone and 9 anglophone. The others are rather different...

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Vignola, but I must interrupt you.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: All right.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Your time is up.

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

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

I want to pick up on Mr. McCauley's question about this idea of authorization. Maybe this has been covered and I missed it, but the PBO noted that the government introduced several bills to authorize spending for COVID-19 related measures and therefore did not seek authorities from the usual supplementary estimates process.

Ms. Vignola put this question previously, but, specifically as it relates to authorization, how did that legislation change the way in which government bills were put through the TBS for review?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: There are two things. First, I hear there is some confusion around how departments and the Treasury Board work together in managing and implementing programs. Second, I feel that members of this committee deserve the clearest possible answer, so, if you would like, I can ask the secretariat to provide you with a simple, short answer that will summarize what my official, Madam Owens, said very clearly just a moment ago, so that—

Mr. Matthew Green: Okay, we can do that now. Thank you.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I'll ask Madam Owens to repeat what she said earlier.

Mr. Matthew Green: If that is the only answer...I thought we might get greater clarity.

On Ms. Vignola's points—I believe she was cut off—but the question was, can you provide the committee with a complete list in writing of all the COVID-19 related measures that have been announced to date, and can the TBS provide the committee with a breakdown of the planned spending for fiscal year 2020-21 for each of those COVID-19 related measures announced today?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Even better, you'll find that on the open government portal's website, which lists over 300 such files and investments.

Mr. Matthew Green: I would love you to summarize it, sir. As much as I would love to go through the open government site....

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: You type "open government portal" and you'll find it easily. Otherwise, you can of course write to me on my P9, and I'll send you the direct web link.

GC InfoBase is where the totality of the financial information you're seeking is available. In fact, there is a specific page on all of the COVID-19 specific measures. Obviously, today's fall economic statements come with a lot of other details covering all sorts of different ways, which I suspect you will want to use. Again, if you would like further guidance from the Treasury Board Secretariat, they will be happy to do that.

• (2025)

Mr. Matthew Green: That was a masterful session in your responses, Mr. Minister. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

We will now go to Mr. Paul-Hus for five minutes.

[Translation]

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

Minister, there would appear to be a small trend among Liberals with respect to French. As you know, Ms. Lambropoulos gave us a sample of it when she said there was no decline in French in Montreal. Furthermore, we saw that Ms. Chagger did not consider it necessary to comply with the guidelines from Treasury Board, for which you are responsible. Indeed, it is up to the Treasury Board to apply them. However, the minister deemed that it was not important to conduct an official languages impact assessment for the WE Charity.

How could you, as the President of the Treasury Board, accept such a situation?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: First of all, Mr. Paul-Hus, you and I, like quite a few of the people watching us on screen, are proud francophones and proud Quebecers. We take pride in our language and our culture. This is also true for other francophones outside Quebec. We will always be there to defend the French language. This means that we must always make an effort to ensure that when we have a role to play, we support the diversity and the linguistic duality of our country. That is what I will always do.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: You're not answering my question. The fact that you, as the President of the Treasury Board, can speak English and French, is of no importance. And yet, during your term as President of the Treasury Board, one of the Treasury Board directives was not complied with. It doesn't matter whether the person at issue is Ms. Chagger or someone else, but what I want to know is how you could accept that your guidelines were not being followed. As you are also the vice-chair of the Cabinet Committee on COVID-19, you no doubt have burdensome responsibilities with tentacles everywhere, but at the end of the line, you remain responsible.

Do you consider that Ms. Chagger failed in her task?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: The primary responsibility of the Treasury Board Secretariat officials I have had the opportunity to meet and with whom I work regularly are to ensure that the departments and ministers in question have the necessary powers and authority.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Duclos, as a francophone...

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: In this instance, it was determined by senior officials that this was the case. They are therefore responsible for...

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: So you're saying that the senior officials were at fault. It was the senior officials of the Government of Canada who felt it wasn't important to comply with a Treasury Board directive on official languages.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Not at all.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: And yet, that's what you're saying.

At the beginning, Ms. Chagger was said to have had responsibility but did not exercise it. She did not deem it necessary or appropriate to conduct this analysis, even though it was among the essential factors to be taken into consideration. Then you told me that the officials determined it wasn't important to conduct this analysis. You said that they had recommended to the minister not to do it. That's what you're saying.

Is there such a serious systemic decline in French within the machinery of government, that Treasury Board directives are ignored?

Not only that, but you are a Quebec francophone. You should have found that appalling.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: You, Mr. Paul-Hus, as a former military man, are no doubt well aware of how important it is to separate responsibilities.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Yes, but ultimately, Minister, command responsibility always falls to the general. If there's a problem with operations, the general will end up as the person held accountable. Soldiers in the field do what they are told. If there's a problem and the soldiers haven't done their work, it's the general who pays the political price afterwards.

Minister, you are the person in charge. You simply have to tell us whether you're accepting accountability for the problem that occurred. Are you going to do that, yes or no?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I am the general of the officials at the Treasury Board Secretariat, and I make sure that they do their work. In this instance, they did their work.

If you would like to question the general of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, you can do that too.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I would be happy to speak with Minister Chagger.

I will now set aside the subject of the WE Charity and return to the Treasury Board.

My colleague, MP Luc Berthold, as the Treasury Board spokesperson in our shadow cabinet, made an access to information request in September to obtain the briefing book, and received an English-only version of the briefing book. He then made an access to information request for the French version, and never received a reply. This was three months ago now.

Can you explain this situation? Why would a Quebec colleague be sent a document in English only from the Treasury Board, and was apparently unable to have it in French?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: The answer to that is quite clear. This Quebec colleague, and anyone who requests a document in French, is entitled to have it in French. So if something or other is not working, you know how to reach me, Mr. Paul-Hus.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Exactly. As he had received the document in English only, he submitted another request to have it in French. He is still waiting for a reply. Someone at the Treasury Board is not responding. I simply wanted to point this out to you.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: You know how to get in touch with me. Ask your colleague Mr. Berthold to follow up with me.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I would be happy to do so.

Thank you.

That's all for me.

● (2030)
[English]

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. MacKinnon for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If I'm laughing, it's because I truly enjoy being able to spar every day alongside Mr. Duclos to defend the French language and the right of public servants to speak in their language within the federal government, whether in English or in French. I am heartened that Mr. Duclos is the President of the Treasury Board. He is someone who ensures respect for Canada's official languages every day.

Thank you, Mr. Duclos, I'm keen to continue to do battle by your side.

My questions concern a matter of particular interest for Canada's public servants, particularly those in the national capital region.

When we came to power in 2015, the entire public service had been without collective agreements for several years. In some instances, it was four years. In our first term, we negotiated and signed agreements with all public servants and unions. In some instances, we needed two rounds of collective bargaining. In the current term, we closed the loop by signing agreements with the Public Service Alliance of Canada and other unions in the second round of bargaining. Canada's public servants were thus able, twice over, to benefit from renewal of their collective agreements, which eliminated a number of uncertainties for them.

I would like you to comment on this and to explain how you undertook these negotiations. In a pandemic, when people are seeking reassurance wherever they can, what can public servants expect so that they can look to the future with confidence?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you for this very good question and for your excellent comments.

I would like to remind everyone that in the fall of 2015, after a decade of neglect under the previous Conservative government, the 27 collective agreements with the core public administration had expired. In some areas, bargaining had been blocked for years.

Our government quickly took up the task and worked hard to restore and rebuild a culture of respect for the Canadian public service. We signed agreements with bargaining agents representing more than 99% of employees. We all know that not only in politics, but also in the public service, respect is the key to quality services for Canadians.

In the last round of bargaining, we signed collective agreements that covered over 80% of public servants. We also participated fully in the work of the Public Interest Commissions when negotiations reached that phase.

I would like to assure you of one thing, Mr. MacKinnon, and of course this is for all colleagues in the national capital region, in addition to all other MPs who are fortunate to have public servants in their ridings, and that is that we will always work with public servants respectfully, because they have extraordinarily important work to do to serve Canadians from sea to sea, particularly during the pandemic.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Thank you, Mr. Duclos.

As there is not much time remaining, I would like you to tell us more about what the public service went through for several years

without collective agreements. It may have had an impact on the organizational culture within the public service or led to a number of failings in the workplace.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Definitely.

We need to sign agreements not only because it's a matter of respect and recognition for the work of public servants, but also because it's all about their ability to serve citizens. We're all in the same boat. To succeed in getting through the storm we are experiencing now, we need to work together. If some people are rowing backwards and others forwards, then we'll go around in circles and never get through the storm.

• (2035)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Once again, minister, I'd like to thank you for your work. I also thank the public servants for whom you are the general, and those for whom you are not the general. Everyone in the Canadian public service is serving us very well.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacKinnon.

This concludes our questioning.

Minister, I would like to thank you and your officials for coming back here for us on the supplementary estimates. I appreciate your time with us. You are welcome to leave at this point.

I'm going to ask the committee to hang on for a couple of minutes here. I have a quick question I'd like to ask as others leave the meeting.

Committee, I just want to bring up very quickly the issue of voting on the supplementary estimates. Basically, we've heard from two ministers at this point in time. We have not heard from the Minister of PSPC. We have requested and invited that minister to appear, but we've not received a response. At this point in time, basically, the order of reference for the committee to study the supplementary estimates (B), 2020-21 will be expiring soon. The committee can wait to see if the Minister of PSPC can appear, or we can vote on the estimates now.

I'm going to ask the clerk to briefly explain why we're bringing this up now, so that you understand the procedures. Then I will ask you if you want to vote on the supplementary estimates (B) now.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Paul Cardegna): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Standing Orders state that the order of reference for the supplementary estimates will expire three days before the last designated allotted day in the period. Unfortunately, we don't know when the last allotted day in the period will be, because the government hasn't yet designated it. However, the government must designate it by December 10, which is Thursday of next week. Because of the three days before it is deemed reported back, it is more than likely that the order of reference will lapse sometime at the end of this week, or very early next week. That is one of the reasons the chair has decided to bring the question to you now.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Does the committee wish to vote for the supplementary estimates (B) at this time?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

The Chair: I do not see a consensus for this. We will need a motion to move forward, or we will suspend this conversation until the next meeting.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Let's suspend.

Mr. Matthew Green: I would suggest we move to suspend.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Let's suspend

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I agree with Matthew.

The Chair: We will suspend this until the next meeting. I would like to thank everybody who is here, the interpreters and the AV staff who are working with us, as well as the clerks and the analysts.

With that said, I adjourn the meeting.

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