



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 009

Wednesday, November 25, 2020

Chair: Mr. Robert Kitchen



Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Wednesday, November 25, 2020

• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)): I'm calling this meeting to order.

Welcome to the ninth meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

The committee will meet today from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. to hear from the Minister of Digital Government and officials on the main estimates 2020-21.

The committee will next meet on Monday, November 30, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. and will 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 in this video conference will work very much like in a regular committee meeting. You have a choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. I would ask that you choose the language that you are going to speak in when you do so.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. To raise a point of order during the meeting, committee members should ensure that their microphone is unmuted and say "point of order" to get the chair's attention.

In order to ensure social distancing in the committee room, if you need to speak privately with the clerk or 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 wearing a mask is required in the committee room unless you are seated.

Finally, we will take the last 10 to 15 minutes of the meeting to do some committee business.

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

Minister, please go ahead.

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

I'm really happy to be here amongst you—virtually—and I want to thank the committee for inviting me here to discuss the 2020-21

main estimates, and I guess the 2020-21 supplementary estimates (B) next week, for the digital government portfolio. This portfolio, I would like to note, includes the Office of the Chief Information Officer and the Canadian Digital Service, both in the Treasury Board Secretariat, as well as Shared Services Canada.

I am pleased to be joined today by Paul Glover, president of Shared Services Canada; Samantha Hazen, chief financial officer, Shared Services Canada; Marc Brouillard, acting Chief Information Officer of Canada; and Karen Cahill, assistant secretary and chief financial officer at Treasury Board Secretariat.

After my remarks, my officials and I will of course be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Mr. Chair and colleagues, as the Minister of Digital Government responsible for our 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. While there is still much to be done, we have already made headway in updating our systems and rolling out better and more powerful tools so that we can improve Canadians' experience and their access to our trusted digital services.

We have an overarching policy, which came into effect on April 1 this year, on service and digital. This policy sets out just how departments need to manage service delivery, information and data, IT, and cybersecurity in the digital era. Importantly, it requires departments to consider putting the needs of people at the centre, right at the outset, when designing and developing their programs and services. It's an iterative policy that we will continue to improve and update. We're actually already looking at what changes should be in the next version.

I would note that we saw this policy come into effect when COVID-19 struck. Our government developed and launched, in just a matter of weeks, digitally accessible programs, such as CERB and the emergency wage program, that normally would have taken months, if not years, to develop and deliver. We collaborated with industry, our international partners and Canadians to develop, consult on and launch the COVID Alert app, also in record time. As a result, more than five million Canadians in eight provinces are now using the app to help slow the spread of the virus. I encourage everyone, in the room and virtually, to download it, if you can.

Looking ahead, we'll be examining our structures, incentives and culture and breaking down institutional barriers, such as silos, so that we can more easily develop and adopt digital—in other words, take an enterprise approach to IT and the Government of Canada, always with the goal of better serving Canadians. We will also continue to work on the next-generation HR and pay solution, committing resources to build a modern, user-friendly human resources and pay solution. That project has been transitioned to Shared Services Canada from Treasury Board Secretariat.

These same themes inform the items included in the main estimates and the supplementary estimates related to digital government. In the main estimates, the Treasury Board Secretariat will be seeking, for the next fiscal year, \$281,600 to contribute to the Open Government Partnership, or OGP. The OGP is the leading global forum for advancing open government around the world. Canada was the chair, actually, and hosted the conference in 2019. We remain a very active member. These 78 member countries have a shared purpose, which is to make government more transparent, accountable and participatory. This is a very important forum for all of its members around the world.

• (1535)

We recently launched the consultation on the next iteration of our open government national action plan, which we worked to develop with civil society. I encourage anyone who's interested to contribute to that plan.

I am going to also mention the supplementary estimates (B), although I know we have another meeting on that, because some of the questions that you may have may weave through both of these estimates.

Shared Services Canada is requesting Parliament's approval to increase its authorities by \$278.4 million, to a total of \$2,490,741,062. These new funds would be allocated as follows: \$91 million for information technology services that directly support the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as emergency relief programs for Canadians; \$84 million for the information technology refresh program, which supports better life-cycle management of assets; \$37.3 million for IT modernization initiatives, such as advancing Microsoft Office 365 in the cloud; \$31.3 million for the secure cloud enablement and defence project, SCED, meeting the need for more secure and high-speed operations during the COVID crisis; \$23.5 million for core information technology services and funding for the public service; and \$10.1 million for secure video conferencing as part of the expansion of the secure communications for national leadership, to better support the cabinet, cabinet committee meetings, and senior officials and decision-makers right across government.

Taken all together, these investments will help provide federal departments and employees with the tools, guidance and capacity they need to improve operations and support the delivery of better services at this time, in a digital age.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. We'd be happy to take questions from the committee.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now start our first round. The first round will be with Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Lloyd, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you for appearing, Minister.

In a previous meeting that we had, when I assumed this role, you told me that the challenges faced by the public service in accessing online networks at the beginning of the pandemic, to work from home, were solved in a matter of weeks. Can you confirm the timeline when full access to online networks was achieved? Was it in April or May, or was it later?

Hon. Joyce Murray: First, I'd like to say that the public servants at Shared Services Canada and the rest of the ministry have done a heroic job, really, to make it possible for public servants to work from home very quickly. That has meant that a number of services, from the tools they need to be able to do their work from home, such as computers and phones, to network connectivity, and collaboration tools like Teams, Microsoft Office—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Minister, that is wonderful, but can you tell me what the timeline was when full network access was achieved?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'm happy to ask Paul Glover from SSC to give you that detail, but I didn't want to lose the opportunity just to remind us all what our public servants do for us in a crisis.

Mr. Paul Glover (President, Shared Services Canada): Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair, for the member's question.

The short answer is, in each of those months. In March, when departments invoked BCPs—business continuity plans—we worked very quickly to make sure that those who needed the access in March had the access. In every month since then, we have continued to expand the access based on the needs of the departments. We are constantly growing and adjusting the network to respond to the individual needs of the departments as their operations have changed.

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

We're hearing that the access was gained in April, May, and also later. The President of the Treasury Board, in a previous meeting, said that full access was not achieved until October 26. If the network was available in April and May to civil servants, why did the government not designate access to information officials as a priority or as an essential service so that they could do their important work?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Access to information certainly is a very important aspect of our openness and our transparency. At the same time, we were in a pandemic emergency, and people were not sure if they would be able to buy food or pay their rent. There was a very urgent imperative to get money to literally millions of Canadians and hundreds of thousands of employers in the early weeks and months of the pandemic.

I think it was imperative that the Government of Canada worked so quickly and collectively together to be able to do that. I know those who received CERB or rental assistance—

• (1545)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Minister—

Hon. Joyce Murray: —and so on appreciated it very much. We are committed to access to information.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Minister.

You're confirming that access to information and accountability was not a priority during the pandemic. I appreciate that.

Moving on, Minister, your government has made a lot of big commitments to improving information technology in this country. I estimate that Shared Services Canada will spend at least \$2.1 billion this year, which is a nearly 40% increase from when your government took office. Why has this massive increase in spending not resulted in tangibly improved outcomes for Canadians?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I really appreciate the member's question, and I would just confirm the importance of openness, transparency and access to information on the part of this government, and our public servants working around the clock to be able to do those kinds of services for Canadians.

I'm a little mystified at the member's contention that Canadians aren't being served by the investments in Shared Services Canada. There are multiple ways in which this agency has updated and modernized its equipment, helping other public servants to be able to work from home with collaborative and secure equipment and bringing in more security to our connections to the cloud so that, as we modernize our applications and we shut down old data centres to move to the cloud, that data is safe and secure, as well.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Minister.

A point that you made leads me to my next question. The government is saying that it has a cloud-first initiative, and yet we're continuing to spend millions, in fact hundreds of millions, on constructing new physical data centres. I'm confused about the government's priority here.

You say we're shutting down old data centres, physical centres, to move to the cloud, and yet the government is still spending money on opening up new physical data centres. Why is there this discrepancy in the government's agenda on this?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question, because it's a great opportunity for Mr. Glover to help with the understanding of the array of storage that is necessary. We have indeed closed down over 200 legacy, inefficient data centres, and we're opening four enterprise data centres with modern technologies and services and with green underpinnings in terms of electricity, as well as being a broker for cloud services so that the departments, when their applications are ready and suitable, can quickly and easily find a secure cloud provider that could help them essentially have better, faster service at a lower cost.

I'll turn it over to Paul Glover to elaborate on our data centres.

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you very much, Minister.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Glover. We need to move on. Mr. Glover, if you have a written answer you could give us, that would be appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

We're now moving to Mr. MacKinnon for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): In a moment, I'm going to save Mr. Glover from having to send us a letter by asking him or Madam Minister to answer the question in greater detail.

First, as the member for Gatineau, I need to point out that, in the National Capital Region, we were very pleasantly surprised by Shared Services Canada's performance when it came to providing network access to many of our public servants. We know that it has not been perfect or always smooth sailing. Nevertheless, I want to commend your and Shared Services Canada's efforts, Madam Minister. You have mobilized human, technological and financial resources to ensure that the government can continue to function during this pandemic.

Now I'm going to talk about data centres and cloud services. When we came in as a government, we found servers from the previous government under the offices of public servants in remote buildings. IT-wise, it was a real mess. They had no strategy, but now it's clear to me that a lot of thought has been put into data centres, our strategy and our cloud services strategy.

Madam Minister, I'd like you to tell us about the strategy for data storage, data centres and cloud services. Of course, if Mr. Glover would like to add anything, he is free to do so.

• (1550)

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you very much, MP MacKinnon.

Just to start, I'll say that all major organizations are transitioning into a cloud as an essential part of their modernization, and for a very good reason. For those not familiar with the cloud—not too many months ago, frankly, I was not—the equivalent would be receiving electricity services. Rather than having the electricity plant on the site of your building to supply electricity and needing to have enough capacity for your peak—and you're paying for that kind of capacity of the equipment all the time, whether you're at the peak or not—the electricity utilities have the infrastructure and connect with us, and we just pay for what we use.

It's a bit similar with cloud services. Instead of the ministries having the infrastructure and capacity for their peak usage—think about CRA at tax time but paying for that level of equipment year-round—now, with cloud service, they pay for the usage they actually need at any one time, and the infrastructure is managed and handled by the cloud service provider.

I'd love to invite Paul to let the committee know how the transition to the cloud is going.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: We only have a couple of minutes, so I want to invite Mr. Glover to compress, perhaps, his answer.

I do have one other question.

Mr. Paul Glover: Okay.

Thank you, Minister and Chair, for the member's question and the kind words on the work we've done.

The short and quick answer is that we have not invested any money in new data centres—not a penny. We've invested money in closing data centres. We have four enterprise data centres. Those are state of the art. They have uninterrupted power. We are consistently taking workloads out of older data centres, inefficient data centres and end-of-life data centres and moving them to the cloud or to one of the end-state enterprise data centres.

There are costs with those migrations, and there is a cost to put equipment into the enterprise data centre to handle the workloads, but the physical infrastructure is built. As we know what workloads are going in there, we put in the racks—the computers—to handle that workload.

We are not building more data centres. We are closing data centres. In fact, last year was a record. We closed more data centres than we ever have—just short of 100—and we're going to continue to close data centres until we have all of our workloads in the cloud, in an enterprise data centre—one of the four—or in a hybrid of the two.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Thank you very much for that.

I know that, in particular, this perhaps has been a difficult week. A number of us have heard from public servants about some applications perhaps not being available. I know there are some issues. Perhaps Madame Murray or Mr. Glover could comment on what kinds of investments remain to be done.

I know the dire situation that we found in 2015. As Mr. Glover just referenced, an awful lot of work has gone into updating and modernizing our network and making sure that data, data centres and the cloud have a coherent strategy.

What are the things now that SSC needs to get done on a priority basis to make sure that we have more predictable, continuous and reliable network access?

• (1555)

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting.

Mr. MacKinnon, that was an excellent question; however, I'm going to have to ask the minister if she would respond to us in writing to answer it because we're at the end of our time.

We'll now go to Ms. Vignola for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

In the supplementary estimates, you're asking for \$133 million for operating expenses. How do you justify the \$133 million?

Could you give me a brief, substantive answer please?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

I'll ask Paul Glover to answer that.

Mr. Paul Glover: I will ask the CFO, Sam Hazen, for a quick answer.

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

SSC is requesting new funding of \$123.9 million in these main estimates, as opposed to last fiscal year. I don't believe that's the number that you referenced, but that's the total amount of new funding that we are requesting in these main estimates.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Okay, but what will the operating expenses be used for, concretely?

[*English*]

Ms. Samantha Hazen: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

The majority of the funding in the main estimates that is new for Shared Services Canada will go towards the workload migration and cloud architecture programs.

There's new funding totalling \$90.2 million. These programs support the government's priority of enabling the digital delivery of services to Canadians, the modernization of the government's IT infrastructure, and specifically moving applications from at-risk data centres to modern hosting solutions, as we were just discussing.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: All right.

What will the capital expenditures requested be used for specifically?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'm having a hard time hearing the translation, Mr. Chair. I'm asking if the interpreter could speak a little louder.

The Chair: Ms. Vignola, could you repeat your question, please?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: What will the capital expenditure requested be used for specifically?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'll turn to Ms. Hazen for that, please.

Ms. Samantha Hazen: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

I had some difficulty with my connection.

Mr. Paul Glover: I heard the question.

[Translation]

I can answer that.

[English]

That is a phenomenon we continue to see. We're storing more and we're using the networks more for video and voice, plus all of the applications.

It is for infrastructure. That will be to replace end-of-life gear or to put network switching gear, storage, servers and those sorts of investments in infrastructure into the data centres and the network. It breaks down into two categories, which are replacing those things that are end-of-life so they don't break and fail on us, and installing new to support the growth that is occurring.

As to the question of why we are seeing an increase in expenditures, it is because the unit costs go down every year with IT—that's Moore's Law—but the volumes go up faster than the price comes down. We're using the networks more and we're using the technology more. The unit cost goes down, but the utilization goes up, which means we need more gear and more capacity.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

I note in the main estimates a decrease of \$44 million for cybersecurity and IT security. I'd like to understand why this reduction decrease has been included. All the experts agree that in the current situation related to COVID-19, cyberattacks have increased.

How do you explain this reduction in cybersecurity budgets?

[English]

Hon. Joyce Murray: I will say that this government has made cybersecurity a huge priority, which is why half a billion dollars was allocated in 2018, and that was used to stand up the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security. A huge amount of that work was done over the next two years.

Paul, if you have a more detailed answer to Madame Vignola's question, I'll put it over to you.

• (1600)

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you, Minister, and I'll also turn to Sam.

The short answer is that some of that is time-limited projects. They were specific projects that we were doing for a specific period of time. But overall, Mr. Chair, the member is right. Security is a growing issue, a growing area of importance, and it is an area we continue to invest more in. This is a phenomenon on the main estimates and the supplementaries, and projects that were time-limited, time-bound.

Ms. Samantha Hazen: If I may add to that, indeed, it's a timing issue. As you heard in the opening remarks, in supplementary estimates (B) there's additional funding being requested for Shared Services Canada for the secure cloud enablement and defence project, and that funding is not included in our main estimates.

The Chair: Ms. Vignola, you have five seconds. Do you have a five-second question?

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Sadly, that's not the case. So I will wait for the next round.

Thank you for your answers.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Green, you have six minutes.

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

I just want to recognize that the minister has been in service to the House of Commons for over 10 years and has spent time within the Treasury Board. There is certainly a wealth of experience brought on to this portfolio. I'm wondering, through you, Mr. Chair, in the lead-up to this, what work, either in her current role or in her past roles as parliamentary secretary, had been considered as worst-case scenario events as it relates to digital services.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Mr. Green, I have to confess that I'm not clear about the question.

Mr. Matthew Green: I think it's safe to say that COVID and shifting our entire public service to a digital format presented an anomaly that you couldn't have predicted. I would assume that is possibly the case. I'm wondering, in the lead-up, what kind of planning or contingencies had your department undertaken in 2018-19 that would have been in preparation for what you would have considered as the worst-case scenarios?

Hon. Joyce Murray: This is a department that is there to serve the public servants right across the government, and the key is having information technology that can allow them to serve the public as quickly and effectively as possible, and also allow us to continue improving and modernizing how we do that.

Redundancy is always built into the systems to be able to respond to unexpected events. Certainly, in cybersecurity, in network bandwidth, there's always an understanding that there will be things that happen that we didn't predict, but I can't say that I went into these jobs with a vision of what might be a worst-case scenario—

Mr. Matthew Green: Has there ever been any discussion about a lights-out scenario, a situation where there would be either a significant digital cyber-threat or, in the age of hackers, a hostage-taking of our back end?

I say that on the backdrop from some of my other work in committee, where it was revealed that some of our systems are still using DOS. I want to recognize the antiquity of some of our technology, and I want you to comment on some of the vulnerabilities that might still remain.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Yes, the information technology landscape of the Government of Canada has come a very long way in just a few years with the billions of dollars our government has invested. The Auditor General had been flagging that for probably a decade and it had not received the investment it needed.

Mr. Matthew Green: Why is that the case?

Hon. Joyce Murray: May I ask Marc to talk about the planning of—

Mr. Matthew Green: Before you do that, you touched on something that was flagged 10 years ago, which is kind of what I got to at the beginning of my question, which is that we knew there were some vulnerabilities. We're in an act of God, as it were, from a COVID perspective and having to shift all these people offline. A lot of people are furloughed, couldn't get the connection and can't necessarily work.

If it was flagged 10 years ago, I'm wondering why more significant investments had not been made that may have offset some of the challenges we face in COVID?

• (1605)

Hon. Joyce Murray: I will not speak for the previous government, but that is the period in which there was really—

Mr. Matthew Green: You've been the government for four years prior to this, respectfully, so could you speak to that?

Hon. Joyce Murray: That's right. Thank you for pointing that out.

The flags were from 10 years ago. We began investing in 2016, and we have made historic investments in upgrading IT, including \$2.2 billion in 2018. It takes time with an enterprise with the complexity and size of the Government of Canada, and the number of people we serve.

Mr. Matthew Green: Yes, thank you.

You'll appreciate that the reason we're so terse is that we have six minutes and then it stops, and so the longer you talk, the less time we have to ask further follow-up questions. That answer suffices.

Would it be possible to know what the pandemic has revealed about the technological capacity of our government services? What are the specific limitations that our technological capacity has been exposed to during COVID?

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'd like Marc Brouillard, CIO, to tackle that, because he can also talk about what things were imagined before and answer your question about planning for disasters.

Mr. Marc Brouillard (Acting Chief Information Officer of Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat): The way the government plans for these types of disasters is through our business continuity planning exercises. These are done at the departmental level through the identification of critical services. They aren't necessarily related to or require foreknowledge of what the event will be. The fact that we have a snowstorm, a flood or a pandemic that keeps people from being in the office, all will have the same results—

Mr. Matthew Green: I have a quick supplementary on that. Is there an audit of the departments? Are you actively going out and seeking who is doing this and who is not? Is it like a fire drill? Perhaps some departments are lax, and if so, when is that revealed?

Mr. Marc Brouillard: We evaluate which departments have identified critical services and whether they have business continuity plans and have tested those plans.

Mr. Matthew Green: What's the pass or fail on that?

Mr. Marc Brouillard: I don't have the exact numbers. We can get you that information.

Mr. Matthew Green: Do you think we can do that between now and my next round of questioning??

Mr. Marc Brouillard: I don't know.

The point is to make sure we are ready for the unforeseen. We don't know what the next event will look like, but we do know what critical services have to be up and how they have to be up.

To answer the second part of the question, the way we do that is by making sure we plan for resiliency in the systems and the infrastructure, and the work that Paul and Shared Services are doing to make sure the core infrastructure is also modernized. One of the things we've seen is that legacy, underinvested technology breaks, typically at the wrong time, so we have to make sure that our systems are well maintained and well cared for so they deliver on the services for Canadians.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

We've finished our first round. We'll now go to the second round.

We will go with five minutes, starting with Mr. Lloyd.

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

I'm going to continue on the same stream as Mr. Green. I read recently in the Wall Street Journal that China is working on the Manhattan Project of the digital age, namely the race to develop quantum computing.

Does the minister understand the risks of quantum computing and can she tell the committee what actions the government is going to take to address this significant security threat?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

We're very actively looking at how to have artificial intelligence and other more modern uses of data to make decisions and to analyze situations and to be responsible. We have a directive on responsible use of AI for the Government of Canada. The Canada School of Public Service just hosted a meeting with public servants who are involved with AI to discuss all of the issues around responsibility, safety, privacy and appropriate use of technology in artificial intelligence.

I'd happy to have Mr. Brouillard add to that if you have—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Minister, thank you. I appreciate that. You talked about artificial intelligence, but my question was on quantum computing and the risk of quantum computing being used to break all encryptions on any encrypted software, whether it involves Canadians' private data or government's data. I want to know what your understanding is regarding where Canada's at with quantum computing and what actions the government is going to take to protect Canadians' security.

• (1610)

Hon. Joyce Murray: Quantum computing is also an emerging industry here in Canada, actually right in Vancouver. As we do for any other new technologies, we need to make sure that they're used responsibly. I think Marc can talk about the cybersecurity issues that you're raising around quantum computing.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I think you can agree that we should be using it responsibly, but we're talking about sometimes hostile state actors using it against Canadian security systems. What is the government doing to increase protections for Canadians against the risk of foreign state actors using quantum computing against Canada?

Hon. Joyce Murray: We are continually upgrading our systems. Our perimeter has been very effective in keeping out attacks. We'll continue investing in that.

We have a whole-of-government approach to cybersecurity, which has worked very well. The Centre for Cybersecurity has our CIO, SSC, as well as CSE as the key drivers. We have cybersecurity event management plans in which it's very clear, in an almost military way, what to do should there be a breach. I will ask Marc if there is a specific aspect related to quantum computing that he can discuss.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Minister. I think I'll follow up with the officials in the next round of questioning.

On the question of security, we're about to undergo a huge logistical challenge with the distribution of vaccines across Canada. We're living in a digital age and we know we're going to need to use digital systems to facilitate this distribution. What actions is the government taking proactively to ensure that our distribution networks are not attacked by organized crime or any other hostile actors who might try to use ransomware to seize up the system and delay the distribution of vaccines to Canadians? What work is being done today to ensure that doesn't happen? That's a gold mine for organized crime.

Hon. Joyce Murray: We do have a supply chain integrity process in place to protect us. My ministry has a core responsibility to protect Canadians' information, and I take it very seriously. I must say that, as it is with any large organization, the Government of Canada's systems are constantly under attack using illegally acquired information, logins or other means to try to access our information. We are continuously finding ways to boost our security and we're supported by CSE, which has—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Minister.

In my final 30 seconds I'll ask whether, in your opinion, the government is ready to protect our supply chain networks from ransomware threats against vaccine distribution. Is the government ready?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Absolutely, we're ready.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you for the reassurance.

I have only about 10 seconds left, so I'll pass on my time. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

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

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

Thank you, Minister Murray, for joining us at our committee again today and to all the officials for joining our meeting as well.

Minister, digital governments around the world are accelerating their efforts to support people and businesses through these challenging times we're in right now. I know I've seen first-hand in my riding how important it has been for businesses to be able to quickly adapt their work, and for their workers to adapt to be able to work remotely and provide their services or their products digitally.

I was hoping you could tell our committee what we are doing to leverage the work of the digital nations to address shared challenges in the face of COVID-19 on the international stage.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Okay, great. Thanks for that opportunity.

Committee members, Digital Nations is the 10 countries around the world that are leading in their advancement of digital to serve citizens better. It's all citizen-centric. We get together in a meeting once a year. Canada was the chair this past year; we just handed over the gavel to the United Kingdom. Officials in these 10 countries work together to identify where there are some key initiatives that they can learn or share with other countries. We partner with different countries on different things.

I'll just give you one example. I had a meeting with the digital minister from Portugal as part of Digital Nations. Portugal has been looking at single identity—in other words, digital authentication—so that people only have to sign in once and can access any government department. It was a very fascinating conversation because that is a high priority for me as we accelerate our digital transformation.

This is a collaborative forum, and the work goes on year-round at the officials' level. It's all about accelerating our collective and individual digital transitions to provide our citizens with the services they need in the way they want to access them.

• (1615)

Mr. Patrick Weiler: That's great to hear. I understand that earlier this month there was an adoption of a Digital Nations charter. I was hoping you could speak a little bit more about what that means.

Hon. Joyce Murray: The Digital Nations charter is a set of visions and principles for the kinds of work that we'll be doing going forward. We had a signing ceremony, which I chaired, just a month or so ago.

We're tackling different projects, actually, as part of Digital Nations. One project that Canada has put forward to work on collectively is about greening government. I'm pleased that we're going to be able to work collaboratively with other leading Digital Nations to find ways in which our digital transformation can also be a solution to climate change problems.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: That's great to hear. We've set some ambitious targets in our climate accountability legislation, Bill C-12, which we introduced last week. It's actually being discussed right now in the House, in fact.

I know that you have a background in working on projects in the private sector to restore the environment, and you have worked in this space also as a minister in the provincial government in B.C. I was hoping that, as the Minister of Digital Government, you could explain a little bit more how we're going to contribute to this plan that is part of the climate accountability bill.

Hon. Joyce Murray: As many of the members know, I've been a climate action advocate for a long time, going on over two decades. My vision for digital government is an enterprise approach, where we take seriously the goals of government as a whole, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

We've been very active in SSC, for example, in looking at how we can green our procurement. One aspect of that is working with our suppliers, because we're a major purchaser of goods and services. In adjudicating these projects, we will be looking at the suppliers' footprint and what their sustainability plans are like, so that we will be influencing the sustainability upstream and downstream in our work.

I would also point to the conversation about closing data centres. There is a major reduction in electricity use and greenhouse gas emissions when there is a shift from an old data centre to the cloud.

Perhaps Paul has other examples of how SSC is working to green government and to help us meet our greening government targets of 40% below 2005 levels by 2030.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Minister Murray, in the first round, you said that once departments are ready, they will be able to find cloud service providers.

Will each department need to find a different provider? Which companies will provide these cloud services? How will we ensure data security if we let external providers manage and store our data?

• (1620)

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

My vision of digital government is that we take an enterprise approach, so that's why Shared Services Canada is organizing the opportunities for the departments to move to cloud and has been a broker and is moving in to manage that procurement on behalf of the departments to make sure the cloud providers will be providing the security that you've just asked about.

There are a number of companies that have been accepted as potential cloud suppliers. I'll ask Paul Glover to tell you a bit more

about the process of supporting the departments in moving to the cloud and working with their applications, which are sometimes a big challenge when their application is not suitable to move to the cloud.

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you, Minister.

To respond to the member's question, we have identified eight cloud vendors. They range from Microsoft to Amazon, Microsoft Azure, AWS, Google, Oracle, a Canadian company called ThinkOn and others. That's all publicly available information. Just visit our website. It's there on OpenGov. You can see who has already been pre-qualified. There are a total of eight that the departments can choose from.

All of those vendors had to set up operations here in Canada, so they are subject to our legislative requirements. None of this data is offshore. We're working with the CSE and the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security to establish the security requirements. They regularly go in and audit those facilities to make sure they are compliant with security requirements, so that we know exactly how the data is being stored and who has access to the data. These are some of the most stringent security requirements, so we have confidence that the data is there and, just like in any other data centre, properly secured.

However, we don't stop there. As the minister and others have spoken about, the path to the cloud matters. We don't want departments all creating their own networks—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Glover. I appreciate that. If you feel that you have anything extra you could add to that answer, would you please forward that in writing? Thank you.

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

Mr. Matthew Green: We've been hearing a lot about the greening of government, and I'm wondering.... This could be a softball for you, Ms. Murray. How has shuttering some of these data centres helped our carbon offsets? I think about what the drain on electricity would have been. Could you comment on that just briefly?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Yes, absolutely, and that's one of the good reasons to do that. The cloud is far less greenhouse gas-intensive than the old data centres especially.

Mr. Matthew Green: I caught something interesting on your profile. It noted that you had a reforestation company and that you yourself were responsible for planting 500,000 trees. Has the government approached you on ways in which you might be able to contribute to its program to plant a billion trees, given that it hasn't planted one?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you for doing your due diligence there, and, Mr. Green, it's not so surprising you're asking about things like planting trees.

I recused myself from that discussion, because although I haven't been part of that company for a while, my husband is still involved with the industry.

Mr. Matthew Green: No, I'm just suggesting that. I'm not saying his getting the contract.... We have lawyers who comment on law. We have accountants who comment on finance. I'm just wondering if your expertise would help provide this government with the ability to actually plant something, given that you've planted half a million trees.

I'll leave it, because I think you know where I'm going with it. I'm hoping, if anybody's watching, that they do take you up on it, because it seems that your track record on reforestation could certainly help a government that claims to have a program on planting trees but hasn't yet.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Mr. Green, I'll put it this way: All our members and Canadians have a hand in the federal Liberal election platform, and my focus was on encouraging the platform writers and the Prime Minister to commit to planting trees and renewing wetlands, grasslands, ag lands and coastal ecosystems.

Mr. Matthew Green: I appreciate that and just hope.... You're not forced to have to answer on that, but we'll leave that for another day.

Thank you so very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Now we'll go to Mr. Paul-Hus for five minutes.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

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

Good afternoon, Madam Minister.

On October 4, your colleague from the Treasury Board, Jean-Yves Duclos, appeared before us and told us that many federal employees could not work remotely because they did not have computers. This is currently having an impact on processing of access to information requests. Actually, a small percentage of requests are being handled by departments.

Do you have a solution for this issue?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thanks for that question.

We have continued to make equipment available. I have to say that this was an unexpected emergency. We've quickly doubled secure remote access capacity. We enabled Microsoft Teams for secure conversations for up to 187,000 public servants. We tripled teleconference capacity. Wi-Fi calling was activated for 183,000.

As you know, the full public service is hundreds of thousands of people, and so—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Excuse me, Madam Minister, but here is my question: given that the Supreme Court has declared that the Access to Information Act is quasi-constitutional legislation—it is a priority for Canada—is it currently one of your priorities to find a solution so that people can do their jobs, in that area in particular?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Absolutely, it's for providing the equipment so that they can do their jobs, whatever their jobs may be in serving Canadians.

I can ask Paul Glover to give you more detail, if you would like, on where we are now in terms of having the tools, equipment and network—

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Ms. Murray.

[*Translation*]

Perhaps you could send me a report on it.

I'd like to ask you another question, but I know time is limited.

Last week, our committee learned that the Government of Canada is signing agreements with Chinese-controlled companies such as Nucotech.

Could you please tell me whether or not your department has approved standing offers with companies linked to the Chinese communist regime or other dictatorships around the world?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: We have clear standards for our procurement.

I will pass it to the officials to answer that specific question.

Mr. Paul Glover: Mr. Chair, I will start with the answer to that.

At Shared Services, we have what the minister referred to earlier as supply chain integrity as part of any procurement process. It is not just the vendor that is selected, but all of the parts that they use, right back through.

We work with the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security. Along the way, as we are doing those procurements, we refer all of the bidders to them for their assessment, so that we have confidence when we make a final procurement decision that it complies with their expertise and their direction with respect to security and the integrity of our operations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Last week, we were very surprised to learn that the departments were not talking to each other. Foreign Affairs had not seen fit to request a security check on Nucotech's equipment. When it comes to acquiring computer equipment of all kinds, are you significantly concerned about the equipment that could come from China or other countries with dictatorial regimes?

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: As Paul mentioned, we do have supply chain protection processes.

For a particular example, I'll put it over to Paul to answer.

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you, Minister, and Mr. Chair.

To respond directly to the member's question, Shared Services is responsible for enterprise IT procurement. We have confidence that anything that is plugged into or connected to core networks, systems and data centres is procured through our infrastructure and our processes. If there are things that are happening, they would be on the periphery and not directly connected to any of our critical data centres or networks.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I'll end by saying that you mentioned contracts with U.S. companies. We received a complaint from the Council of Canadian Innovators that no preference was being given to procuring computer equipment made by Canadian companies.

Can you explain why?

• (1630)

[*English*]

Hon. Joyce Murray: Over 80% of our procurement is from Canadian firms. We need to have cost-effective procurement, and we do our very best, at the same time, to satisfy other objectives, like Canadian-first as well as diversity in our procurement.

Paul, do you have anything you'd like to add to that?

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Unfortunately, we don't have enough time for further additions.

Mr. Jowhari, you have five minutes.

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

I'd like to start by welcoming the minister and the officials, and I thank them for the great work they've been doing, especially during this difficult time.

Minister, you and I have had a number of conversations around digital government and digital transformation, as you know. I consider digital government a key enabler, especially during the economic recovery. I was quite interested when you mentioned in your opening remarks that you're leading the government's digital transformation and that you'll be working with your ministerial colleagues to design and deliver the services that Canadians expect in the digital era, which is great.

Can you outline some tangible initiatives and results that Canadians should expect as a result of this plan?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you so much for giving me an opportunity to talk about it, because I'm quite excited about it.

Not only is my vision an enterprise approach to person-centred service—which means all the departments coordinating, which, as we've heard, is important for security and other reasons—but it is about the public. It's about Canadians, and it's about secure, reliable and easy-to-use services from any device so that public servants can provide better one-on-one service for those who don't use or have devices.

There are some very specific things that I have heard are very frustrating to Canadians, and I'm aiming that we can help transform how they experience their transactions with the Government of Canada. My vision includes no more having to use paper forms and faxes, but being able to do it digitally. It includes no more confusing and hard-to-find government benefits and services, but a digital way of finding out in a centralized way what you're potentially eligible for. It includes no more having to call and sit on hold to get an update on your transaction.

After all, you can order something from Amazon and you'll get a text telling you exactly where it's at and when you're going to get it at your door. We can aim for that as the Government of Canada. There will be no more complicated log-ins with credentials that are easily forgotten or different credentials for every department. There will also be potentially automatic tax filing for simple returns for as many Canadians as possible, partly so that those who leave benefits on the table because they didn't file their taxes can get the benefits. Two billion dollars don't get collected by those with the lowest incomes, surely because they weren't able to get through a complicated tax form.

That's the small package. I am aiming that we can have some tangible forward movement on those things over the coming 12 months, so I'll be pitching to my colleagues to work together on that.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you, Minister.

You know I would be remiss if I didn't ask about Phoenix and NextGen. As you know, I've been following that initiative for a very long time. Can you provide the committee with an update on the progress of NextGen? I know you touched on it in your opening remarks, and you kind of passed it on to Shared Services, but can you expand on that, please?

Thank you.

Hon. Joyce Murray: First, I want to say that it is so important that we can pay our public servants accurately and on time. In fact, the work being done in PSPC on Phoenix has meant a major, 68% reduction in the backlog of transactions, so congratulations there.

NextGen is a separate initiative, and really we are being guided by lessons learned from the past, and we are taking the time to get it right. We're using a digital approach, which means applying digital principles, and things are going well.

• (1635)

Mr. Majid Jowhari: You said you passed it on to Shared Services Canada. Can you expand on that?

Hon. Joyce Murray: The early part of the NextGen process was to have the three gates to determine who would potentially be qualified suppliers to work with the Government of Canada to do an HR-to-pay, a full system. That was under the auspices of the Treasury Board Secretariat. The Treasury Board Secretariat is not so much a ministry that operates major IT-based activities, whereas Shared Services is, so at a certain point it seemed appropriate.

That point came about when, through exploration and consultation, the wide field of potential vendors had been narrowed down to three. Right now, we have three vendors that are qualified to work with the Government of Canada. We are very engaged in an exploratory process with one lead vendor, SAP, working with one of our departments, the heritage department, to test the different requirements that public servants have for HR-to-pay in the heritage department. That exploration will lead to a pilot to see if SAP can satisfy and supply HR-to-pay.

We're doing this in sprints. We're checking out, we're learning, then we're doing the next thing, and we'll continue in order to have a successful outcome.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you, Minister.

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

That ends our questions for this round. I appreciate the minister attending and coming to visit with us today. We will look forward to seeing her again on Monday evening.

We appreciate your time and efforts.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I can't wait.

The Chair: We're going to suspend briefly, for about two or three minutes, while we bring in a new witness, and then we'll be right back.

• (1635) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1635)

The Chair: We will now resume the meeting and continue with our questioning.

We'll go to the first round of the second session of questioning.

We will start with Mr. Lloyd, for six minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for coming in today.

Since I took on this position, a number of stakeholders have reached out to me with a deep concern about government decisions to sole-source IT contracts to American-based companies.

Why is the government concentrating its significant annual information technology spending on a small cluster of mostly American-based IT companies?

Mr. Paul Glover: There are two parts to that question. I'll try to be brief to allow you follow-ups, because I suspect you might want to do that.

The first is that, as an enterprise service provider, we need enterprise-grade solutions. Microsoft is the vendor in this space, and we have set up a large relationship with them for things such as Office

365 and Teams. IBM and Unisys are the mainframe vendors; we have specific relationships with them, and it moves like that. The same is true, frankly, with networks. Most networks around the planet run on Cisco and Cisco gear.

As one of the members, MP MacKinnon, pointed out earlier, when Shared Services was created we didn't even know what was given to us. We had to inventory all that stuff. As we've done that and as we try to fix it when it breaks, it's important that we replace it like for like so we know it works.

• (1640)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Glover, are you saying—

Mr. Paul Glover: Perhaps I can finish my answer.

When we are replacing broken equipment, we do it like for like. When we look forward to modernize, we are far more open. It is done through a procurement process that allows us to get the best possible technology moving forward, and that is done through open and competitive processes.

Finally, we are working to make sure that Canadian SMEs are integrated into this process and system and that our contracts encourage resellers, vendors and large multinationals to set up shop here—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Glover, are you saying there aren't any Canadian companies that can provide the type of enterprise software you were talking about that you're currently going to IBM, Cisco and Microsoft for?

Mr. Paul Glover: No, Mr. Chair. I don't think that was what my answer said at all.

I said that when you look at some of the predominant...those were a number of examples. We have BlackBerry, a great Canadian company that is deeply entrenched into the IT infrastructure and services we use, and we will continue to use them.

Absolutely, there are Canadian companies. We seek them out. We seek out those small and medium-sized enterprises to help them grow, to make sure that the Government of Canada is one of their first customers.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: These companies have approached me. They're very frustrated because there are so many sole-source contracts—very large contracts—going to these American companies, and they feel that they don't even have the opportunity to bid.

I recently learned that Shared Services issued a sole-source contract for a service. Global Affairs issued a competitive bid for the same service, and Global Affairs got the service for 40% cheaper. Can you address why Global Affairs is getting the same software that Shared Services Canada is getting for 40% cheaper when they go with a competitive bid as opposed to a sole-source contract?

Mr. Paul Glover: Mr. Chair, the member's question is more than a little vague without specifics, but I can tell you that we use standard procurement processes. We go to the street to make sure that our processes are competitive. We use pre-qualified vendors to make sure that we are getting the best deal possible. We also, on some of our larger deals, engage some of the specialists—the Gartners of this world, the Lloyd's, the Accentures—who are experts at ensuring value for money to make sure that, when we go toe to toe with negotiating some of these big contracts, we get the best advice possible.

With specifics, I would be more than happy to follow up and respond in writing.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay. Thank you.

I'm going to change tack here a bit and follow up on the quantum security questions that I was asking the minister.

We know that quantum computing poses a huge potential risk to our security systems and our encryption systems, and I'm hoping that maybe our civil servants can provide a little more clarity on this. What is being done by the government to address the threat of quantum computing?

Mr. Paul Glover: Mr. Chair, I'll start and maybe ask Marc Brouillard, our CIO, to also answer.

At Shared Services, we do have what we call a future-looking series of programs where we are assessing technologies that are in their infancy. I would say that quantum is not in what I'd call its infancy. It is maturing quickly. We have experts in this domain. They are working with some of the larger Canadian companies that are active in this space. We also work with academia—some of the leading researchers in universities across this country—to understand technology—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Can you tell us what the threats are to Canada's...? Can you illustrate that to the committee?

Mr. Paul Glover: Quantum generally... The short answer is that it has the ability, both through brute force and because of the states in which it's able to assess things, to render current encryption technologies pretty much obsolete when they get that figured out. That's what the literature suggests, and that's why we have the program—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: How will that impact government operations if we're not prepared for that?

Mr. Paul Glover: Well, we'll have to be prepared. That's the short answer. There is no not preparing for that.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Give us an example of what would happen if we weren't prepared, please.

Mr. Paul Glover: In all sincerity, Mr. Chair, with respect to the member's question, if encryption gets compromised, then you can't communicate, or we would have to assume that all of our communications are accessible. That's why we monitor the technology and the developments, and we will make sure that we are ready.

• (1645)

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

We will now go to Mr. Drouin for six minutes.

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

I want to tell this committee that I, too, have been hearing a lot from industry.

Mr. Glover, I do want to touch on Gartner. I know that when Gartner talks about network infrastructure, it says that the infrastructure and operation leaders “should never rely on a single vendor for the architecture and products of their network, as it can lead to vendor lock-in, higher acquisition costs and technical constraints that limit agility. They should segment their network into logical blocks and evaluate multiple vendors for each.” The blocks are defined as data centering, LAN and WAN.

I'm just wondering, within all these blocks, is Shared Services comfortable that it's operating in a multivendor environment, as Gartner would probably advise the Government of Canada?

Mr. Paul Glover: The short answer is, sort of. I apologize for that vagary. Gartner is correct. That is the strategy, but we're not there yet. We are working towards that. We inherited numerous departmental networks that were non-standardized and were all behaving somewhat differently. Part of that enterprise approach is to simplify, to standardize and to move—and this goes to the previous question—to zero trust networks with some of the latest state of the art... We are working towards what, as the member points out, Gartner recommends.

That's why I differentiate between when we are fixing legacy and when we are moving forward. We do want to make sure that we are not ever dependent on solely one vendor. We have more than one mainframe vendor. We have more than one network vendor, etc. We will continue to make sure that we do that as we move forward, but I have to confess that we're not there yet. There is more work to do because of the legacy that we inherited.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Those legacy systems would have been inherited, I can safely say, August 4, 2011, nine years ago, through the order in council.

Mr. Paul Glover: That's correct.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Do the life cycles for these technologies date from five to seven years, or are they longer than that?

Mr. Paul Glover: There are two parts to that. There is what I call “iron gear”, which can run quite well for many, many years. Then there are things like switches that are a little bit more active and disk arrays that are more likely to break. There are different classes of hardware. They all have a different lifespan and expectation there. In addition to that, the software is accelerating even more quickly, rendering some perfectly reasonable hardware no longer viable because it can't keep up with the processing speeds and requirements.

I don't mean to complicate the answer, but it is variable.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'd love to go back to where you said you're not quite there yet and you're trying to move forward. I would ask about the status now. Are we...? For instance, if I tell my wife I'm a vegetarian but I eat vegetables only once per month, she would kind of challenge me on that.

Without naming any vendors, are we at 50-50 capacity, or 60-40 capacity, or are we at almost 100%? What is the strategy for Shared Services Canada, if we would be close to 100%, to reduce that so we can manage the risk and make sure we get at least two OEMs per network block, as Gartner is suggesting?

Mr. Paul Glover: Mr. Chair, I'm looking at my notes for the numbers.

I would suggest that today it is probably somewhere around 70-30 in terms of the split the member is asking for. I would also say that, moving forward, we are committed that any new...is open and competitive.

In saying that, we are also saying that it must be interoperable. When you run a network the size that we operate, it is important that all of the pieces talk to one another smoothly and efficiently. That is something the industry is getting better at. It will be easier for us to be more agnostic about who the vendor is, moving forward, and it doesn't matter what the gear is. They don't put in updates that work with only their stuff and complicate that.

Interoperability will be a key requirement even in a multivendor environment, moving forward. There are technologies to make that happen. We are introducing those quite rapidly.

● (1650)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Obviously, you have to deal with procurement. How are we trying to make sure we get the market leaders in terms of building that new network infrastructure and minimize that risk? Are we asking industry how we can do this, or are we just doing the same old same old?

Mr. Paul Glover: There are three parts. First, we look to those who we think are world class and leading. I regularly have touch-points, as I call them, with industry leaders to obtain their advice on what they're doing and how they're doing.

Second, you referenced Gartner. They are a wonderful research firm. They put the players into quadrants. There are the well-established market leaders, but we also look at the new and up-and-coming companies, who may not be in what Gartner calls the golden quadrant, the perfect one, to see if there are new and emerging technologies that we should be aware of and experimenting with, because they will eventually be in that preferred quadrant, moving forward. We are taking those steps as it moves forward.

Finally, our approach to procurement is different. We are going out with, "This is the problem. Tell us what the best solution is." In the past, we would have gone out with, "Here's the problem. This is how we want it solved." That meant we were far less open to new technologies and new approaches. It gets back to creating more space for some of the Canadian small and medium-sized enterprises and new and developing start-ups to be able to interact with us.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Perhaps I could make one more recommendation. There's an issue with equivalency clauses in some of these RFPs. We're hearing lots about that. If we're trying to be open and transparent in procurement and trying to minimize that risk, I would say have a great look at the equivalency clause. I know it's causing a lot of issues within the industry.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

Ms. Vignola, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much.

The departmental plan indicates that you have many outdated systems. We've been talking about this for a while now.

Are any departments particularly bearing the brunt of these obsolete systems? If yes, which ones?

Are they open to replacing these systems or do you see any obstacles?

Mr. Marc Brouillard: Thank you for the question.

Indeed, some departments have technologies that are much more at risk. As you can imagine, they are the departments with the largest and oldest infrastructures, such as Employment and Social Development Canada and the Canada Revenue Agency. These are large-scale departments that have had huge operational systems in place for decades.

In recent budgets, funds have been allocated specifically to modernize these systems. We're working closely with the departments to support the transformation, which is very complex. It's not enough to just replace one part. It's always about making sure that the integration continues to work, among other things.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

We're setting up voice over Internet systems right now. At one of my former school boards, I saw how complex it can be to set up systems like that and standardize them across a network. So I know that it won't get done overnight.

Be that as it may, which companies specifically have you approached to set up these voice over Internet networks?

Mr. Marc Brouillard: I will ask Mr. Glover to answer that question. In particular, he will be able to tell you about the collaborative tools we have introduced, and how we've greatly accelerated their implementation over the past few months.

[English]

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

We will be happy to reply in writing with the fullest number of qualified vendors we are using. We take a number of approaches, from what we call "workload migration factories" to some procurement vehicles for new, off-the-shelf tools that departments can use to provide that.

Ultimately, when it comes to voice, as you were expounding, voice over Internet, VoIP, we are working with companies like Telus and Bell for the technologies that they have. We will provide you a full list in writing.

● (1655)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

With respect to the organizational tools for IT service management, exactly which ones are currently being used?

Which departments use them, in particular?

[English]

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

In response, we are in the process of rolling out a new ITSM tool that we hope will be the enterprise tool for service management, service desk. Again, there is a plethora of different systems in different departments. Rather than attempting to take time with the list of all the different systems in all the departments, we'll come back with the enterprise tool we are rolling out and the list by department.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Will we have one organizational tool for all departments or one tool per department, as is currently the case?

Will we have some consistency at some point in time?

Listening to you, I have the impression that the lack of consistency is making the modernization process more complex. Will these tools be more uniform?

Mr. Paul Glover: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for her question.

I will answer quickly. Yes, we have undertaken an approach. The goal is to create a standards-based approach.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: When setting up the tools, what are the two or three main obstacles you encounter?

Mr. Paul Glover: Perhaps Mr. Brouillard can complete my answer.

In my case, the first obstacle is culture.

[English]

It's that fear of change that I think we see. People like what they have and they prefer that we just continue to allow them to do that. I often speak in analogies. There's too much customization. Everybody gets a custom suit, rather than being willing to go in and buy one off the rack that mostly fits. They're attached to their custom suits. We have to break that culture down.

For us to work, we want to work at speed at scale. That requires standardization. That requires departments to let go a little bit. It also requires us to actually make it work. Our track record in the past hasn't been the best. We've had some significant challenges, but I think we've shown through the pandemic and others that by simplifying, by standardizing, we can move at speed at scale, and there are real benefits.

I do feel that we are breaking down the cultural resistance.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Glover.

Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

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

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

I'm hearing some conflicting lines of questioning that I would like to get clarity on.

Earlier, Mr. Lloyd suggested that there were sole-source procurements that were happening. You had asked for specificity, so I'll just put to you the question. How many sole-source contracts have you utilized for the transition to this modernization through your department, Mr. Glover?

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, the answer for modernization would be zero. We would—

Mr. Matthew Green: Broadly, because I don't want to get caught in the semantics, how often does your department use sole-source procurement?

Mr. Paul Glover: When it is an operational requirement because of urgency, a break fix, and we have to go in and replace like for like...and even then, oftentimes we will try to compete that amongst pre-qualified vendors.

We know that's happening because we have a history and so much gear. For example, I know everybody is talking about a particular network vendor, Cisco. We have a lot of their equipment. People would like us to open that up. Moving forward, we will. That's the member's question about equivalency and the problem there. When a piece of Cisco gear breaks and we aren't on one of the new, modern networks, we have to make sure that we can plug in something that works. We had a network outage for 35 minutes this week. A lot of people were very upset with that. We don't have time.

Mr. Matthew Green: That will suffice. I do appreciate it. I know the anecdotal stuff. It definitely bodes well, but I'm on a six-minute round.

I was really excited.... I will share with you that as a critic for national revenue I put to the minister responsible the dire need to automate tax returns. Much to my joy and pleasure, it's been taken up by this government. Of course, we heard the minister talk about this.

What's the timeline to allow folks who are on a fixed income, who have predictable tax returns, to have that system in place where they can access and not be interrupted in their other OAS/GIS supports?

• (1700)

Mr. Marc Brouillard: As you know, the planning for that has just begun. I think it's a little premature to provide any time estimates. But what I will say is that it's being actively looked at and that planning for where that can go is ongoing.

Mr. Matthew Green: So there's no end in sight. It's just an announcement. It's very early stages. There's no idea, based on other projects, what it might take to transfer that over.

Mr. Marc Brouillard: No. One of the things we want to make sure of is that we're using the opportunity to do research-based, user-centric design to fully understand what is required to meet the needs of those users. There was work that was done up to last March between the Canadian Digital Service and the CRA to start looking at how that can help support Canadians who need this service.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'll put to you that if you don't file your taxes, CRA knows or at least estimates to the cent, to the dollar amount, how much you owe. Maybe that's an oversimplification, but it seems there are avenues through which that can be expedited. I want to just go on the record to say that I hope that that's a priority within your department. If there need to be extra resources to do that, I think that particularly in these uncertain times, it would be key.

One of the other issues that I had is the issue of access to information. I myself have put in requests for documents, to be told, maybe anecdotally as well, that they could be in a dusty accountant's box in a basement somewhere in paper form.

I'm wondering, through you, Mr. Chair.... We heard about the forward-facing programs for modernization. How long will it take for us to get the past information digitized so that when people put information requests that are retroactive, they can get that in a timely manner?

Mr. Paul Glover: Maybe I'll start and then turn it over to Marc.

I would just like to say, as a deputy head for Shared Services, that we never stopped with ATIP. We understand the importance of it, the nature of our work and the procurement that we are doing, and that there would be interest. We never stopped with ATIP through the pandemic.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm just not sure if that's a place that's going to get a lot of attention. For those departments that might be in a position where they are under a little bit more scrutiny, it seems like their response to ATIPs is painfully slow, non-uniform and in some points, I would suggest, obstructive.

I'm wondering, when we're talking about service standards, how is it that the Minister of Digital Government and her staff, yourselves included, are going to ensure that there is a service standard-level approach to all ATIPs across all departments?

Mr. Marc Brouillard: There are service standards in expectations of responding to ATIPs. As was said earlier, during the pandemic there were challenges, especially as business continuity plans were invoked in departments and employees could no longer access the networks.

There are three primary issues related to that. The first is that ability to connect remotely from home. That has largely been addressed by Shared Services Canada. There still remain departments that rely heavily on paper-based records. Even if they are able to connect to the network from home, they can't access the paper-based.... As well, there is the sensitive and classified information that is on secure networks.

There are still capability requirements for being able to physically access buildings to be able to produce some of those ATIP re-

quests, causing natural challenges and concerns for health and safety.

As of October 26, of the 131 institutions that responded to our questionnaires, 30 institutions say that they're at full capacity to respond to requests, and 101 institutions are at reduced capacity. None are at zero capacity. All departments have reported that they are processing ATIP requests on a best-effort basis.

Mr. Matthew Green: Here's hoping I get mine at the end of the week.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Thank you, Mr. Brouillard.

We have a little bit of committee business that we have to do at the end of this meeting. We're going to reduce this next round to three minutes for the first two, one and a half minutes for the next two, and then three minutes for the final two.

We will go with three minutes for Mr. McCauley.

● (1705)

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, gentlemen.

How much IT equipment and software is purchased for the whole of government through Shared Services? I think it used to be all, but over the years I think there have been some adjustments to that. Would you be able to let me know?

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the member's question. The short answer is that we would have to follow up in writing.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Can you ballpark it?

Mr. Paul Glover: I would say it's the vast majority—maybe 80%. There is some software as a service—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: What I'm getting at is just the security. How do we ensure that the equipment coming in is secure?

I know it's in your departmental plan for collaborating with TBS, the Centre for Cyber Security and CSE to maximize security, but how are we ensuring the security for those 20% outside of purchasing through Shared Services?

Mr. Paul Glover: I apologize, Mr. Chair. I misinterpreted the member's question.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay.

Mr. Paul Glover: I interpreted systems to also include software. When it comes to hardware and any of the hardware that gets plugged into the data centre and into our network—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Software, as well, though, besides buying Windows 7 or something....

Mr. Paul Glover: No, Windows would not be allowed. Those are the kinds of things we do. We purchase any of the stuff that's critical to infrastructure. Then, we are able to monitor and see the software that runs on that. While we don't purchase it, we have to look at it to make sure it's properly configured and understand its load on the network and, therefore, we are able to assess its security.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks.

How do we ensure that's actually getting done? The reason I bring this up is that we were looking at the Nuctech issue where Global Affairs and PSPC both kind of shrugged and said that there isn't a box to tick that it could be a security issue and therefore it's not a security issue. No one checked with anyone because it didn't ask them to check a box on whether it was a security issue.

How are you preventing another department from not inquiring, or bringing something in because they don't know enough to ask, or if they're just ticking a box?

Mr. Paul Glover: I'll start, Mr. Chair. Marc, you could help.

The short answer is that within Shared Services it is a box to tick. Security is paramount to what we do. It's part of how we patch.

The second is the monitoring we do of any software. They're not allowed. They don't have what we would call "administrative rights" to install some of that critical stuff. The access to the data centres is physically limited. The short answer is that we have the keys and they don't.

On cloud, we are setting that up to set up parameters that will limit what they are able to do. They can transact what they need in order to do the development to build the applications without compromising the security posture.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Perhaps the best efforts of another department would be blocked by you.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Now we'll go to Mr. Kusmierczyk for three minutes.

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

I have a question for Mr. Glover.

I want to pick up on my colleague's line of questioning, which I found really interesting, about the threat of quantum computing.

In 2018, this government, our federal government, invested about \$15 million in the Institute for Quantum Computing in Waterloo. Last year, this government invested an additional \$41 million in the Quantum Valley Ideas Lab. This year it invested an additional \$7.2 million in numerous tech companies, including ISARA Corporation, which is a quantum-safe security company. The goal here it to help turn Waterloo into the world's quantum valley.

Can you comment on whether this is a smart strategy, to be basically partnering with and making investments in quantum research, Canadian quantum research institutes and Canadian quantum tech

companies? Is this a smart strategy to protect ourselves from quantum threats, or is this something that really is just a role for Shared Services to consider?

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the member's question, and I will also ask Marc to help me with the response.

I need to be briefer. I apologize to all the members for my rambling.

The short answer is, I believe it is. These are fast-paced technologies that are developing very rapidly. It would be arrogant for us to think that we have all the expertise in Shared Services to be able to do what we need to do.

Furthermore, as was pointed out, if you look at the global movement of large tech companies, if we do not invest in Canadian IP, that is a challenge for us. I want to be able to do business with Canadian companies, and that means we need to encourage them to play on a global field, to think big. We're a big client, so it only makes sense that we make ourselves available to them to tap into the IP that they are building and developing. If we don't, we won't have it, or it will just be bought up.

• (1710)

Mr. Marc Brouillard: I would just add that the quantum shift is a very complex and multi-faceted endeavour that requires many areas of research. Paul earlier mentioned Moore's Law. We anticipate that Moore's Law may reach physical barriers on our current technologies. Quantum will be the answer to be able to continue in our thirst for more powerful digital, so it absolutely behooves us to invest in it, both for the protections and for the advantages.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Gentlemen, I appreciate your answers to that question so much that I'm actually going to share my time, because I think we should just leave it at that.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

You have 11 seconds to share, so consider them shared.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's so generous.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go for a minute and a half to Ms. Vignola. I think, Ms. Vignola, you might get five extra seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Okay.

Earlier, you were talking about the fact that one of the big obstacles you face is fear of change.

Have you tapped into public servants' expertise to find solutions to this type of issue, that is, fear of change and others that come to mind?

If we want public servants to have the reflex to recognize an issue when they see one, rather than have them say, well, if I saw it then someone else will surely see it too, the best way is to include them in the solution and work openly with them.

Do you work openly with public servants to resolve the issues you encounter when rolling out new technologies?

[English]

Mr. Paul Glover: Just briefly in response to the member's question, the ITSN tool we're using is from BDM, which is one of the Gartner magic quadrant companies.

The short answer to the second question is that, yes, we are tapping into all sources. Again, my approach is that we don't have all the answers. We need to work with people who have done this, and we try to bring them in so they feel as though they are part of the solution. It is being done with them, not to them. We strike advisory committees, for example, on NextGen, with people who have done pay transformations in other large private sector companies. We work closely with the unions and with employee groups to help guide us so that we're learning from those who've done it, and we're learning from the people who have to do it and who are going to have to live with it, to make sure it's a user-centric but also an informed approach.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vignola. One minute and 35 seconds goes by very quickly in questions and answers.

Mr. Green, you have one minute and 35 seconds.

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

Breaking news on Reuters today is that Amazon's web services are seeing widespread outages. What is the contingency when our vendors, such as potentially Amazon, crash on a global scale?

Mr. Marc Brouillard: Do you want me to take a crack at that, Paul?

Mr. Paul Glover: Sure.

Mr. Marc Brouillard: I think part of our resiliency and our disaster recovery is not to be dependent on any single infrastructure or any single environment. The cloud offers an opportunity like never before, where it's very easy to stand up a parallel environment on the Amazon web services in one of our end-state data centres or in the Azure Cloud environment. Therefore, we would not be vulnerable to any one single point of failure. That's a critical aspect.

Mr. Matthew Green: Given the vulnerabilities, we've heard a lot about Huawei and 5G and a lot of real hysteria around that, rightly or wrongly.

My question to you is whether there are any perceived vulnerabilities we might have from, say, friendly eyes peeking into our vulnerable data, given the back doors that are also in some of the American companies you've already talked about.

Mr. Marc Brouillard: For all security matters, we have standards that define the requirements for different levels of protection of information. On the personal information and operational information it is Protected A, B and C, and on the national security side it's classified secret and top secret. For each one of those categorizations, we specify the minimum requirements.

Even for protected information, information about Canadians, we require encryption and different controls to make sure no one can access that data except the right people. Those controls are there for that reason, and I'm confident in them.

● (1715)

Mr. Matthew Green: I appreciate your answers, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green, and thank you for the answer.

We will now go to Mr. Paul-Hus.

You have three minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I think I'll take that tying on for Mr. Paul-Hus.

On the question on quantum computing, there is a significant number of risks we're seeing. As you said earlier, everything can be decrypted, and I do recognize that there are some leading companies in Canada that are working to address these challenges.

On another line of questioning, I was asking the minister about the threat to the supply chain when we start to distribute the COVID-19 vaccines. What efforts are being taken to protect the supply chain to ensure that organized crime or possibly even state actors are not using malware or ransomware to really seize up our system and basically hold us for ransom? I see a huge potential here. It's been raised to me by stakeholders.

Mr. Paul Glover: In response to the previous question, also part of the strategy is no single points of failure and redundancy.

With respect to this question, I was afraid you were going to ask that, and I don't want to jinx it. We are very good in this space. We block literally billions of attacks. We are one of the few governments that have not been subject to ransomware. We catch them in the firewall, and we have been able to stop them. I don't want to jinx it, and I don't want to say we are perfect, but we have some of the best security postures in terms of how we design the network and the protection on it. I think our track record speaks for itself.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I certainly hope so, but that leads me to ask questions related to the CERB hack that happened on the CRA website this summer. Why was it that the Government of Canada's systems weren't capable of preventing people from going into people's CRA accounts and applying for CERB, changing their banking info and basically stealing money from Canadians? Where was the failure there, and how are we working to address that?

Mr. Paul Glover: Do you want to do that one, Marc?

Mr. Marc Brouillard: One of the large challenges of the credential stuffing attacks is that they are reusing credentials taken elsewhere and impersonating a valid Canadian. From the system's perspective, they are going through the system in a normal way; they aren't going through a back door. There were no compromises. There was a slight exploitation on the CRA system in the early phase that was addressed, but since then, all of the patterns were people impersonating other Canadians.

We were able to see them because we looked for patterns at the back end of those behaviours. For example, large amounts of failed log-ins give us a hint that someone is trying to brute-force the system. We don't see that they've broken in, but we do see that there are signs that they are trying. That allows us to do the forensic research to determine if there were any fraudulent transactions on the system.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: That's great for—

The Chair: Mr. Lloyd, I'm sorry. That's three minutes.

Mr. MacKinnon, you have three minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I will go back to what I was saying at the beginning to Madam Minister.

Clearly, Shared Services Canada has come a long way in terms of network access, cloud computing, desktop software, data centre migration, and more.

Mr. Glover, you and your team have done an enormous amount of work compared to how things were several years ago. In two minutes, tell us where you are headed now. What are the organization's key priorities as you look to the future, especially post-COVID-19?

Mr. Paul Glover: Thank you for the question and for your kind words.

I am grateful to you for that.

[*English*]

For us, moving forward, we have a document. It's available publicly. It's called SSC 3.0. It aligns with the minister's digital vision. It clearly lays out what we believe were the priorities before COVID, and it was reaffirmed during COVID. These continue to be our priorities moving forward.

First, it's what you've talked about and asked me about today. It is the network. In order to be digital, in order to be connected and in order to do what we're doing today, we need a good network, and not a good network but a great network, a commercial great network that functions like a utility.

In order to be digital, public servants and Canadians need to be able to access this. It's all about the connectivity in the network, and we need to make sure that we have one of the best, because it is being stressed each and every day. We have to deal with the legacy stuff we inherited, fix it, replace it, modernize it and move to simplified, standardized, software-defined zero trust networks moving forward. That's job one.

Job two is the collaboration tools and things like Microsoft Teams, Office 365 and Zoom to make sure that public servants have the tools they need. When we were created eight years ago, it was about email. It's not about email anymore. It's about Dropbox. It's about OneDrive. It's about cloud. People interact differently.

If you talk to the younger generation, you'll know that they don't send emails. They wouldn't know what emails are. We need to

make sure that we give them the tools they need to be able to do their job. That includes voice-over-Internet. That includes video.

These things are collapsing, and we need to give them the tools they need. The inspectors who are out walking the field need connectivity. They need access on mobile devices so they can do their jobs. We need to equip the public service with the tools they need to serve Canadians.

Finally, with respect, it was said that SSC was all about closing data centres. No, it's not. We are going to close data centres. We did a record number last year, and I will keep closing them, but as Marc said earlier, it's about the health of the applications in there. I don't want to close a data centre and move crappy applications. We want to move good applications. It doesn't make any sense to take an old, outdated application and move it into the cloud. It's still an old, outdated application.

We will close data centres. We want to move them to end state, because that responds to MP Green's question on no single points of failure and redundancy. Those data centres have redundancy built into them. If one goes down, it goes to the other. We have to focus on what the departments do, and that's the health of their applications moving forward.

Those are the three areas. They served us very well through COVID. They accelerated what we were doing. We continue to believe that those are the right things, and we want to do those, as the minister said, in utilizing an enterprise approach.

No more negotiating with 42 departments. We work with the OCIO to set standards. We ask for their guidance and direction and then we do it, and we do it in a way that works. We create a process for exemptions when the enterprise approach doesn't work; I don't want to leave anybody with the impression that it's a one-size-fits-all all the time. As was said, we don't want to be reliant on one vendor for everything, and we know that one solution will not always work for all departments. We need to start with the common and then move to exceptions.

● (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Glover. I appreciate that.

That ends our rounds of questioning.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for showing up and appearing today and answering. We appreciate your coming on. You're welcome to sign off at this point in time. Thank you all for returning.

We have a little bit of committee business here to attend to before we adjourn, so I just ask the committee to bear with us for a little bit.

Committee, please bear in mind that we are still sitting in a public meeting while we're doing this business today, just so that you're aware of that and remember that as we discuss things.

There are two things that I'd like to cover. One is the vote on the main estimates, and two is the revised work plan on the COVID-19 pandemic.

The order of reference for the committee to study the main estimates expires on Friday, November 27, 2020. If the committee feels it has completed its consideration of the main estimates, then we can proceed to taking a decision on the votes that were referred to the committee.

In all, 23 votes in the main estimates for 2020-21 were referred to the committee. Unless anyone objects, I will seek the unanimous consent of the committee to group the votes together for a decision.

Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this manner?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall all votes referred to the committee in the main estimates 2020-21 carry?

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Vote 1—Payments to the Corporation for special purposes.....\$22,210,000

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CANADA SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$64,350,979

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$5,531,372

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN TRANSPORTATION ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION AND SAFETY BOARD

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$30,034,773

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$2,316,072,146

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$1,587,143,543

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

Vote 1—Payments to the Commission for operating expenditures.....\$66,609,096

Vote 5—Payments to the Commission for capital expenditures.....\$23,749,549

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR GENERAL'S SECRETARY

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$20,021,968

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$6,520,482

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$5,045,978

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$148,367,516

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$78,358,024

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

SENATE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$79,715,174

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

SHARED SERVICES CANADA

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$1,674,997,553

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$286,370,379

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

TREASURY BOARD SECRETARIAT

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$254,165,851

Vote 5—Government contingencies.....\$750,000,000

Vote 10—Government-wide Initiatives.....\$31,030,279

Vote 20—Public Service Insurance.....\$2,171,215,724

Vote 25—Operating Budget Carry Forward.....\$1,600,000,000

Vote 30—Paylist Requirements.....\$600,000,000

Vote 35—Capital Budget Carry Forward.....\$600,000,000

(Votes 1, 5, 10, 20, 25, 30 and 35 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the votes back to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to the work plan for the committee's study. On Monday we had a meeting and you wanted to make some changes on the work plan for the committee's study of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysts made those changes and a revised version was distributed to the committee members yesterday.

Does the committee wish to adopt the revised work plan?

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I would like to speak, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Paul-Hus, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I thank Ms. Deraspe for her work.

I'd like to adjust the meeting blocks to make sure everything is in order.

First, currently a two-hour meeting is scheduled with the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Auditor General. We would like to have two separate meetings.

We would like a separate meeting with the minister, followed by three meetings with public servants and the directors responsible for three things: vaccine distribution, personal protective equipment and the national stockpile. So we should have four meetings.

With respect to meetings with public servants on cybersecurity, we agree.

The sixth meeting is about health. Depending on our meeting with Public Services and Procurement Canada, we will determine whether to recall the public servants responsible for vaccine distribution and personal protective equipment.

For the other meetings, we can wait until later to see where we are at.

[*English*]

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

I'm not seeing any hands up. Mr. Clerk, is there anyone who also would like to intervene in the discussion?

Before I do that, I would ask the analyst, Raphaëlle, if she might want to comment on anything.

We'll wait for Raphaëlle for a bit if there's any other discussion.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Paul Cardegna): Nobody else in the room has indicated an interest in intervening, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Raphaëlle, do you have anything you might want to add to that?

Ms. Raphaëlle Deraspe (Committee Researcher): Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The only question I have is whether the committee wants to have a revised work plan based on Mr. Paul-Hus's suggestions. We can prepare that and circulate it this week.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Raphaëlle. I know that a number of members in the past have said they'd like to see a paper document in front of them. My belief is that people would like to see another revised version of this before we say yes or no to it. Is that what I'm seeing? Is everyone okay with that?

Thank you very much, Raphaëlle.

The Clerk: I think Mr. Kusmierczyk would like to intervene, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I'm sorry about that, Mr. Chair.

I'm interested here in the 12th meeting. It was scratched out in Raphaëlle's new version. This is the one where we're hearing from a number of businesses on e-commerce, software and digital media. Knowing how incredibly important that's going to be to the way we conduct our business in government—how we communicate, how we conduct meetings and whatnot—I'm just wondering if the committee would be interested in including that as a conversation and actually listening to private sector companies. Maybe this would give us a sense of where things may be going and where we might be able to improve some of the services we offer.

I'm wondering if that might not be something that would be a valuable discussion. I'm just putting that out there and floating that idea there. It just seems like a really good opportunity for us to get a sense of what may be coming down the pike from some of these companies and some of the experts in that field.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk. Is there any discussion on that?

The Clerk: Mr. Paul-Hus would like to intervene, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Monsieur Paul-Hus, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

As I said earlier, the first big block of work has been established. I'm not against the idea of doing other things.

On the other hand, this motion currently seeks to assess government procurement in the event of a pandemic. So the idea of starting to look at other business opportunities is not directly related to the motion, if I understand my colleague's objective.

[*English*]

The Clerk: Ms. Vignola would like to intervene, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: In the work plan Ms. Deraspe sent us, the fifth meeting is about cybersecurity. Is it necessary? Since we have just had one, we would essentially be asking the same questions after all. We've been focusing a lot on that.

However, the twelfth meeting with e-commerce, software and digital media experts has been scratched out. It could be very worthwhile, however, especially in relation to the questions Mr. Lloyd asked about Canadian companies and their presence in our government markets.

To sum up, we could scratch out the fifth meeting and keep the twelfth. Would you agree?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, it looks like you have somebody who wants to ask a question.

The Clerk: Mr. McCauley and Mr. Drouin, in that order, have indicated an interest in speaking, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm going to half-agree with Ms. Vignola. Let's get rid of the fifth meeting, and then for the 12th meeting, Mr. Kusmierczyk has good points. It looks interesting, but I think it's probably better for INDU to look at it, rather than us, especially if we're looking at government procurement around COVID and such things.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, I'll have to disagree with my colleagues on the 12th one. I think it was just labelled wrong.

We are studying procurement, and I think there are valid questions our committee can ask on how they modernized their procurement practices and reached out to potential consumers in a COVID-19 world, so I'll stand firm. I want to see those witnesses appear before our committee. It does relate to procurement of Canada if there are lessons learned from them that we can apply to our procurement practices within PSPC or with SSC, whichever one you choose.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Matthew Green: Perhaps, Mr. Chair, Mr. Lloyd's small businesses can come and provide testimony on the electronic procurement issues that were raised there.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Chair, my colleague Mrs. Vignola, of the Bloc Québécois, brought up the cybersecurity issue. We spoke a bit about it with the minister earlier, but it wasn't as part of a study specifically on the response to COVID-19.

Cybersecurity is not just about computer systems. It's about taking a broader look at what happened in Canada during the pandemic in terms of cybersecurity with experts in the field whom we should invite to answer our questions. The minister will not be able to answer our questions on this, based on what we saw earlier.

Regarding the last point, again, it would be worthwhile to have companies come and explain their best practices, but what we want to know right now is what the government did not do well in managing pandemic. If we want to improve things, we can consult these individuals later, but I don't think we're looking for best practices right now. Instead, we're trying to find out what was done wrong and what needs to be improved, obviously.

• (1735)

Mr. Francis Drouin: If that's what you want to focus on, Mr. Paul-Hus, I remind you that the pandemic is not yet over. So could you wait until it is over before we look at what was done wrong?

We have come down a peg or two, and we ask that you do the same with respect to these witnesses.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Okay, if you want to start getting offended, we can do that. I'm good at that.

However, we are trying to keep calm and come up with a game plan so that Ms. Deraspe can finish her work. We can leave your part in, I have no problem with that. We will see what we can do in three or four months when we get there.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Weiler.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to suggest one more witness for the eighth meeting, and that's a company called AbCellera. It just had a COVID-19 therapy that was approved by PHAC and there's been an order of 26,000 of their therapies. I think that would be a really interesting addition to have in that eighth meeting.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm sorry, I couldn't help but blurt out and laugh at your comment, Mr. Drouin. It seems the exact opposite of what your health minister and everyone else is saying, that now is not the time to review things. If we want to leave that in and keep it open to the idea of adjusting it as we get further.... Meeting 12 could very well be in February or March because another round of the estimates will be coming out. Are you open to maybe keeping it open to adjusting it as we go?

Are you fair with that, Mr. Drouin?

The Chair: Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: If you look at the list of witnesses, we can all go back and redo the list and work on a pro-rated system such as we usually work on.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm just saying that it's the 12th meeting and it's so far down the road. It seems to be the only real contentious meeting. Do you want to take a look at it a bit further down if it's still relevant?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Are you open to change or adjusting, adding witnesses or deleting, further down?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Sure, we can do that, but I'm not naive enough not to know that in terms of what happens in three months you guys might have something else to talk about.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We could be in a spring election as well.

Mr. Francis Drouin: That's entirely up to you, Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I think it's up to someone with a beard on your side.

Mr. Francis Drouin: If we're going to be getting into arguments like this then—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm just saying that otherwise we could be sitting here all day going back and forth, and I don't know if that's a valuable use of all of our time, especially when that could be, again, three or four months down the road.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Right. If we're going to get into the arguments, I'm saying that we'll throw all of these witnesses out and start over again and then work our way through, as we did the last time, and make sure you guys get an equal number of witnesses based on a pro-rated system like the one we work with in other committees. I don't want to go down that road, but you guys are resisting that 12th meeting and most of those are our witnesses. We'll have to go back and check.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's just a coincidence.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Yes, I'm sure it is.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going back and forth, and that could go on all night.

I appreciate your comments.

Raphaëlle, did you have a comment?

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, if I may, Madame Vignola had indicated an interest in speaking as well. Thank you.

The Chair: I'm sorry.

Madame Vignola, would you go first, and then we'll have Raphaëlle after that?

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

In raising the issue of the twelfth meeting, I feel like I've opened a Pandora's box full of discussions.

Having said that, I like to play devil's advocate. We could plan the next four meetings with witnesses, which would take us to January 4 or 5, it doesn't matter. In January, for the rest of the study, we could wait and see what we come across further down the line.

As Mr. Drouin said, and as we all know, anything can happen at our table at any moment. I think it would be a good idea to meet halfway, that is, plan the next four or five meetings on this topic and then keep the other meetings open. That way, everyone would get along and work in harmony.

• (1740)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Vignola. That sounds like a great idea, and I think it's one that hopefully the committee will consider as we go forward.

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, I just want to go on the record right now as a point of privilege to state how proud I am that our friend from the Bloc is working so hard and so diligently to bring our federation together across all party lines. I hope that goes into Hansard. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You crack me up, Matthew.

The Chair: Raphaëlle, go ahead.

Ms. Raphaëlle Deraspe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have two things. Can Mr. Weiler just repeat the name of the company he would like added to meeting number eight? I did not catch it, unfortunately.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: The company is called AbCellera.

Ms. Raphaëlle Deraspe: Thank you.

The second point I have, Mr. Chair, is that I suggest putting back meeting 12 as tentative, based on Madame Vignola's comment, and then the committee can reassess that later on this winter.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Raphaëlle.

I personally like Madame Vignola's idea, but it's your decision as to whether we go that route. I think planning four to six and then adjusting as time goes by...as Raphaëlle said, adding number 12 back to the end of the list, which could be set up and then submitted to everybody in a very timely manner.

Do I see consensus on that?

The Clerk: I think Mr. Drouin would like to intervene, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, I'll just make one point. As long as the witnesses and the panels reflect what we as parties have suggested.... Again, I want to make sure that the CPC witnesses are represented, but also ours, the Bloc's and the NDP's. I think it's a matter of fairness for everybody on this committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

I believe that the analysts and the clerk have recognized that fact and will continue to recognize that aspect as they design the study as we go forward. Thank you for those comments.

Is there any further discussion?

Seeing none, I—

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, I don't mean to delay this any longer. I just want to make sure that the analysts and I are clear on the next steps. There had been discussion of approving the first four to five meetings, but then also discussion of creating a new work plan.

Perhaps this is just me. I want to understand what exactly the committee wants the analysts to produce.

The Chair: I believe what they're looking for is the four to six meetings that we've already talked about, that Raphaëlle has put forward, with the adjustments from Mr. Paul-Hus. It would be to start moving forward on those and then adjusting as we go after that point.

With that said, I believe the analysts would put that together on paper, which we would also give to the committee members so that they could have a quick look to make certain they're comfortable with it along those lines.

The Clerk: Okay. The analysts will produce a third version of the work plan, but we can start moving forward on the first four or five meetings that are planned on it.

The Chair: That is what I've been led to believe, but to make certain, is that everything that the committee is comfortable with?

Do we have a thumbs-up?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Chair, I would like to speak.

[*English*]

The Clerk: Mr. Paul-Hus would like to intervene.

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

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

With respect to the adjustments to the plan that I proposed, we had a consensus. We said it wasn't necessary to redo the document in hopes of getting final approval. We have already approved what I proposed, with a consensus. So, based on that discussion, we can establish the final work plan.

The Clerk: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, is everyone comfortable with that? I see thumbs-up. With that, I will call the meeting adjourned and I will drop my hockey puck.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>